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The Portrait of a Lady's Rediscovery: A Literary Depiction of Contemporary Marital Quagmire in Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Henry James's The Portrait of a Lady, has spoken to women's issues regardless of caste, colors, faith, culture, and nationality across time in numerous corners of the world. The novel was a catharsis against late 19th-century Victorian—personal, social, sexual, economic and in particular marital—constraints on American women. Although the text had poor critical reception in its own time, it was reaccredited in the 1950s. Since then, it has kept on enlightening its readers through its powerful female characters and feminine themes. After exploring its historical threads, this study revisits how the text reflected women's individualism; how readers responded to it; and how it has contributed a change to women's position since then. First the analogy tries to authentically picture the contemporary position of women in Pakistan. Second it signifies the degree in which the study could encourage the emerging women's voice in Pakistan against—personal, social, sexual, economic, and predominantly in particular marital—injustices that are done to women under the umbrella of cultural shackles, religious romanticizing, and androcentric institution of marriage.

Keywords: *The portrait of lady,* women's issues, late 19th-century, patriarchy, constraints, USA, Pakistan

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Trajectory of the Novel

It is a historical reality that the American antebellum and post-bellum worlds differed radically –especially for women. In the post-bellum era fertility rates plummeted. The availability of commercial products fundamentally changed domestic life. Food items became much more [1]readily available. Electric appliances reduced the time necessary to perform basic domestic chores. In the light of these transformations, women more and more publicly struggled for equality (Evans 1989, P. 138). Women's movements wanted to increase the role of women in government as much as possible. As Frances Harper claimed in an address to the World's Congress of Representative Women at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, "Today we stand on the threshold of woman's era. In her hands are possibilities whose use or abuse must tell upon the political life of the nation, and send their influence for good or evil across the track of urban ages" (Evans 1989, p. 154). This statement is a kind of testimony against the antebellum era, announcing the transformed position women held, or could hold, in postbellum American Society. There remained, however, many obstacles on the road to actual equality (Evans 1989, p. 145). This complex situation affected not only the social and political landscape, but also the literary sphere. Writers like Henry James took on contemporary issues like the question of women's equality in their works.

Kenneth Graham (1995) explores how the social issues of the post-bellum period influenced James, then at the pinnacle of his writing career:

> The Civil War marked dramatically the end of one phase of American history and the beginning of another. The old America in which James was brought up, an America of solemn New England idealism, leisured (though conscientious) contemplation, and Anglo-Saxon liberal thought, was gone, overwhelmed by a frenetic expansion of the nation's frontiers, its rapid (even rabid) industrialization and commercialization and by a massive tide of immigration from Ireland, Germany, Russia, Poland, and Italy. (p.1)

Born at a high-water mark in American history, Henry James Jr.'s (1843-1916) life affords a glimpse not only into the 19th-century literary circles, but also their relation to the massive social, economic, and political changes introduced by industrialization (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 3). As Lyall H. Powers (1991) aptly puts it:

> The world into which Henry James was born *was* in the grip of the industrial revolution. Science had discovered and embraced the experimental method–a system of seeing for oneself instead of following obediently the established beliefs of one's predecessors.... The new Science led men like Charles Darwin to those discoveries he published in *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Such works called into question the reliability of the biblical account of creation and therefore shook the very foundation of religious faith. With that the whole question of the importance of 'authority' cried out for reexamination and redefinition. (p. 3)

James's writing coincides with a particularly remarkable moment in U.S. history: "it begins with one period of vivid historic transition, and ends in another" (Graham 1995, p. 2). Writing for more than half a century, James's "writings include novels, novellas, tales, plays, autobiographies, criticism, travel pieces, letters, reviews, biographies"–almost a hundred books in total (Baym 2007, p. 388; Vol. C). In short, three of the major determinants in James's literary life are travel between America and Europe, the meeting of personal and literary friends in these diverse scenes, and engagement with the social issues of those scenes in his literature. Not the least of these, as we shall see, is the question of gender equality.

James' iconic status in both British and American literature has made him the subject of many biographies, but the most influential has been Leon Edel's five-volume work published between 1953 and 1972. Unlike Louisa May Alcott, Henry James Jr. was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Like Alcott, his parents enormously influenced his life. The inherited fortune gave his Henry James Sr. an economic prosperity that directly influenced the lives and careers of his sons, William and Henry. On the other hand, the younger James sons, Garth Wilkinson (Wilky) and Robertson (Bob), could not find success after fighting in the Civil War and died in late middle age. The sole sister (one of the inspirations behind the

creation of Isabel Archer's character), Alice, was a courageous soul, who fought against "the constrained gender roles of conventional Victorian womanhood, in some ways like Isabel Archer; [she] died of cancer in 1890, handing over the copies of her fascinating diary to her brothers upon her death" (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 4).

James's autobiography, *A Small Boy and Others* (1913), details his travels with his parents throughout Western Europe from his early life. This to and fro between Europe and America would continue until his death. His childhood was a happy one. In 1860 the family returned to Newport, a move that would prove a turning point in James's life. Here, an important experience was the arrival of six cousins on his father's side whose parents had died. Among these was Mary (Minny) Temple. James would be highly inspired by Minny, who embodied his idea of an ideal and free woman. Minny loved to read Mathew Arnold and Robert Browning (Hutchison 2013, p. 36). Only two years his junior, she travelled with James to Europe in 1869, cementing her lasting influence on him before she died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-five. Her individualist resistance to repressive social forces gave James a new idea of a heroine for his primarily Eurocentric fiction. Minny and, to some extent, his sister Alice, along with a handful of other inspiring women, would give birth to many of his fictional heroines, like Isabella Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* and Milly Theale in *The Wings of the Dove* (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 5). As James (1987) describes Minny in the guise of Isabel Archer,

> [she] was a young person of many theories; her imagination was remarkably active. It had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast; to have a large perception of surrounding facts and to care for knowledge that was tinged with the unfamiliar. It is true that among her contemporaries she passed for a young women woman of profundity. (p. 45)

Despite James's admiration for Minny' he ensured that Isabel would be seen as her own character. When friends asked him whether Minny was the prototype of Isabel, he answered with ambivalent "yes and no" (Powers, 1991, p. 6).

Relatedly, masculinity occupies a pivotal role in James's life and works. His brother William called him a "sissy" for his passive nature. The contemporary novelist George Moore called him a "eunuch, who wrote

like a man," and Alfred Habegger claimed that he was "a boy, who could not become a man" (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 414). More problematically still, Ernest Hemingway assumed that the fire incident[2] at Newport resulted in James's castration (Hutchison 2012, p. 26). Instead of joining The Civil War like his younger brothers, he steeped himself in art–specifically, in novel writing, which, at that time, was a frequently feminized activity, though he differentiated himself from women writers with more vigorous and less sentimental style. On the other hand, his works often challenge the conventional standard of masculinity, women's freedom and individuality. Conventionally, masculine characters like Osmond and Basil Ransom tend to be critiqued harshly in his novels. As H.G. Dwight remarks, "James was thought of as a woman 's writer; no man was able to read him" (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 414).

After establishing himself as an emerging literary writer, a series of novels pricking the American and European conscience, began to appear: *The American* (1877)*, Daisy Miller* (1878)*, The Europeans* (1878), and *The Portrait of a Lady (*1881) (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 7-8). These works are considered to have been influenced by realism, a literary movement in American and European literature that was at its height from 1830 to 1900. As a literary style, realism in America responded to large changes in society such as the Civil War, the Industrial Revolution, and the Great Migration; its primary values were truth, reality, and accuracy, and a general approach to life as it is rather than as it ought to be. This 'reality," however, was often limited to a white middle-class male perspective, ignoring groups marginalized in terms of economy, race, class, and gender (Baym, *Revision and Thematic Change* 1992, p. 6-7).

In his essay, "The Art of Fiction," James argues that "novelists observe not only environment but more importantly its meaning. The very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet" (Baym 2007, p. 918; Vol. C). In his view, the greatness of a work hinges on the quality of the producer's mind. Leaving almost everything to readers to interpret, though, could lead some readers to feel that nothing happens in novels like *The Portrait of a Lady*. James matches the desire to reflect the incomplete realities of characters–who never seem to "know" until it is

[2] In *Little Henry, Happy at Last: The Peculiar Radiance of James's Late Memoire,* Adam Gopnik explains" In a fighting accident in 1861[James] seems to be saying that his balls were crushed while he was turning the water crank of a fire engine. Some other men were also crushed and killed" (January 10, 2016).

too late. Inspired by the realist insight of Honoré de Balzac, the French realist (Power 1991, p. 8), works like *The Portrait of a Lady* reflect the core realities of life and read as though they are social and historical documentaries of their time (Baym 2007, p. 918; Vol. C).

During the composition of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), which oscillates between doctrines of determinism and free will, James was traveling between England and Italy, mostly working on it in Florence and Venice. He felt in his bones, "It would not be a 'big' novel but a 'great' novel would demand of him plenty of time to be handled properly. He was confident that it would differ from his earlier work not just in degree but in kind" (Powers 1991, p. 17). In *The Portrait of a Lady,* James comes up with a new experiment: he starts the novel with Victorian realist values that inspired him through George Eliot, but ends it with a modern touch, inventing himself as a socio-realist novelist (Kirby 1991, p. 26). He focuses on the character's conscience in their relation with other characters who are equally affected by the realist tides of the time.

The novel's milieu is a moment when "the 'new woman' was beginning to assert herself as a personage to be reckoned with" and its rebellious heroine reflects this social change (Powers 1991, p. 8). Far from being a work of pro-suffragist propaganda, however, the novel presents a far more nuanced portrait of the social options available for modern women. Isabel Archer still remains a dilemma for readers, who must decide whether she is ultimately a winner or loser in the novel. *The Portrait of a Lady* "demands readers' trust and patience; it is a novel about 'seeing' and 'knowing'" (Crowley 1998, p. 10). Placing Isabel–who has "the audacity of Daisy Miller, the charisma of Christina Light and the moral intensity of Madame de Mauves" (Hutchison 2012, p. 57)–in Europe, James gives the novel an internationalist perspective that becomes crucial to understanding its content. Cornelius Crowley (1998), in a representative assessment, proclaims *Portrait of a Lady* to be

> A celebration of American liberty against European restrictions.... American identity is the object of James's focus and celebration, and that Europe is the *ficelle,* its function that of the laboratory in which the revelatory experiment is carried out. (p. 35-37)

It further "helps us to understand the context in which the novel was conceived and developed and gives us a good grasp of what materials were available to James in his creation of the story" (Crowley 1998, p. 11).

It is difficult to say, finally, whether the novel is about Isabel or the Victorian society, but it is certain that the novel critiques the Victorian patriarchy (Crowley 1998, p. 11).

Isabel's independent, free-thinking spirit, and her approach to marital compromise, make her a lifelike character, who has spoken not only for her own generation's women, but for generations of women after her. She may be, in some sense, weaker than some of her readers, but, at the same time, she strikes us with a certain indefinable charisma. Realizing the importance of her character, James further polished her psychological portrait in the revised edition of 1908, making her dialogue more effective and self expressive. As Crowley notes, "What happens in *The Portrait of a Lady* is the 'ado' taking place within the consciousness of the heroine, Isabel Archer" (Crowley 1998, p. 17). Likewise, Hutchison (2012) argues that "it is the portrait of Isabel's expanding consciousness that is James's subject, and his carefully paced handling of this makes the novel the masterpiece it is" (p. 57).

Part of the novel's reputation rests on its ambiguity: rather than supplying a clear-cut conclusion, when Isabel's portrait is finished, James leaves readers with a question: "what is she finally, and what has she become?" Is she a failure for having surrendered her individuality to Osmond or has she reached the peak of her maturity in a psychological independence from all men, including Caspar Goodwood[3]? James thus depicts her character aimed at unfolding an evolutionary process of growth to maturity. Furthermore, he tries to show readers how they, in turn, might go through such a process–how it looks, feels, and sounds in the real world. Considering her own faults, she comes to realize that, in her undereducated position, she wrongly brushed aside the opinions of those with more real-world experience, like Mrs. Touchett, Ralph, and Henrietta; and that this led to her falling prey to Madame Merle and Osmond. This itself is the supreme education for a heroine, according to James. After her realization, Isabel becomes psychologically free entirely. She defies Osmond and travels to London to see her dying cousin, Ralph. At the same time, she liberates herself from the clutches of an oppressive

[3] Being the son of a prominent Boston-mill-owner, he is Isabel's most dedicated suitor in America.

romance and returns to Rome, leaving Caspar Goodwood behind for the last time. With this newly attained psychological independence, she is able to protect herself and Pansy (Powers 1991, p. 14-16). As Anne Margolis argues,

> How the ending successfully avoids the conventional conclusions of popular fiction: Isabel Osmond's . . . return to Rome . . . can be attributed to James's determination to escape the twin literary tyrannies of contemporaneous English and French fiction, the happy and the indecent ending. (Powers 1991, p. 27-8)

By ending the novel in this way, James suggests that "perfection in life is a choice that is not available to us"—neither to characters nor to the readers invested in them (Crowley 1991, p. 9).

Statement of Problem

The Portrait of a Lady portrays the 19th-century American personal, social, economic and specifically marital women's issues through its powerful feminine characters and themes—in particular the protagonist, Isabel Archer. Fancying an independent life, Isabel keeps on repelling her suitors. But all of a sudden, she falls into the shackles of marriage with Mr. Osmond, who is contrastingly a super conventional widower. Her marriage results in the usurpation of her personal, social, economic and mainly marital independence. At the end of the novel, she walks into a novel marital independence. Instead of breaking off the marriage with Osmond, she stays and fights off the odds of this hazardous marriage to refashion masculine—her husband's—mindset about women's standing. The novel and its tested criticism tailors a clear-precise message to such marital arrangements in Pakistan to reform as well as advance the respective societal androcentric thinking about women's equal standing in marital ties and society instead.

Scope

The study picks the thread of American women's rights struggle through literature that how the late 19th-century American milieu affected James to write *The Portrait of a Lady*, how the readers responded, and how the

entire process contributed a change to women's position. The study revisits the same trilateral process to strengthen the emerging women's voice in Pakistan in terms of personal, social, economic and marital provinces. The said issues are universal in nature and exist across time, cultures, geographies, nationalities, etc. Taking its lifeline from ethnic and cultural flavors, the contemporary women's position in Pakistan is strikingly diverse ranging from the most independent to the most dependent in nearly all walks of life. But the study only picks on the majority in terms of personal, social, economic, and marital spheres, which fall within *The Portrait of a Lady's* domain. Being almost unexplored, the specified gap will significantly impact its audience through its novel content and themes.

Methodology

For the major direction of the project, the study hinges upon Transformative Learning (TL) theory, which precisely fits to the project's broader theoretical objectives (Hooks 1994; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1997). TL defined as "question[ing] all taken-for-granted values, ideas, norms, and beliefs of experiences that comprise their dominant social paradigm" (Sagris, 2008, p. 1), is a useful theoretical foundation for the study of women's involvement in gender justice and violence prevention work. Derived from liberatory or critical pedagogy, TL centers on the promotion of critical thinking and critical action towards addressing injustice and oppression (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 1989; Shor, 1992). TL includes "deep reflection on positionality, oppression, and related social conditions, with personal transformation as a cornerstone of learning, reflection, and action" (Lorenzetti & Walsh, 2014, p. 55).

For the text's literary interpretation, the study applies a trilateral theoretical research design of New Historicism, Reader Response and American Feminism theories to explore the reasons behind the novel's composition, the depiction of actual contemporary milieu, the readers response, and contribution to women's status. For unearthing the historical impact on the novel, the study relies on New Historicism through Stephen Greenblatt's text, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (2004). Through Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), which is one of the primary texts of Reader Response Theory, the study explores and gauges the readers' contemporary response to the text. Finally, for the depiction of actual

women's issues and contribution to women's position in the society, the study relies on Judith Fetterly's *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1977).

Being a qualitative-interpretive research, the study interprets and codifies the target data through close reading in order to meticulously direct the study to reliable and valid analysis and findings. The study draws upon late 19th-century American literary criticism, historical accounts, and the text itself. For authentic depiction of contemporary position of Pakistani women, the study hinges upon articles, books, surveys, and interviews. For the successful conduction of interviews, the study uses Critical Narrative Inquiry (CNI) to explore the unexplored aspects of women's life in Pakistan which are not documented yet. CNI is a means of exploring lived experience (Josselson & Lieblich 1993; Lieblich et al., 1998), making sense (Bruner, 1990), communication (Fisher, 1984), and the interplay of individual and social, cultural and discoursal factors (Frank, 2010; Plummer, 1995).

Critical Reception

James's works failed to receive their due place of honor in the American and British literary scenes during his lifetime. However, his literary contribution has come to be avidly admired since his death. At the time of its publication, *The Portrait of a Lady* was not warmly received in England. Many British reviewers criticized the ending of the novel, calling it "immoral," although some critics praised the book as a great literary achievement (Powers 1991, p. 18-19). Late in James's life, a younger generation of writers, like Ford Maddox Hueffer in *Henry James: A Critical Study* (1913) and Rebecca West in *Henry James* (1916), helped to establish his reputation as a challenging and important writer. The Hogarth Press, run by Leonard and Virginia Woolf, commended James in a volume of criticism entitled *Henry James at Work* (1924) (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 377).

The story of *The Portrait of a Lady*'s critical reception was different in America: there was mild criticism, but overall the novel was positively received. In July 1884, Edgar Fawcett in the *Princeton Review* gave *The Portrait of a Lady* the most favorable review the novel ever received, calling the work one of the greatest of all time (Clarke 1991, p. 138). W. C. Brownwell's review in *The Nation* also praised the novel for its realistic characters and claims it to be the most influential of James's writings:

"*The Portrait of a Lady* is the most eminent example we have thus far had of realistic art in fiction" (Hayes 1996, p. 145). Though a bit harsh on the novel's vague ending, the *Athenaeum*'s reviewer commends the novel for Isabel's individuality and proclaims that Osmond hates Isabel for her independent thinking. The reviewer also praises Henrietta for her individuality (Hayes 1996, p. 121). Likewise, a critic in *The Californian* discusses the ways in which conventions (Osmond) enslave individuality (Isabel) and claims that the novel oscillates between free will and determinism, quoting Ralph's remark that "You [Isabel] wanted to look at life for yourself, but you were not allowed; you were punished for your wish. You were ground in the very mill of the conventional" (Hayes 1996, p. 138). In January 1882, a reviewer in the *British Quarterly Review* also outlines the role of determinism in the novel, claiming that the novel provides a stage where American values overwhelm European ones through Isabel: "She fascinates at first sight a young aristocrat, Lord Warburton, who at once casts a coronet on her" (Hayes 1996, p. 137). The same opinion is voiced by an anonymous review in *Blackwood's Magazine* in March 1882, which considers that the novel "is to record and set fully before us the predominance of the great American race" (Clarke 1991, p. 135).

It cannot be denied that in the late 19th-century the position of women in America was rapidly transforming, as women were challenging patriarchal domination in every walk of life. Thus the historical and autobiographical perspective of *The Portrait of a Lady* was picked up by many early reviewers. A critic in *The Atlantic* reviews the novel's historical and social role and claims that it represents the 19th century's women in terms of their conscience, patience, compromise, and individuality (Clarke 1991, p. 122). *The Literary World*'s review highlights essentially the same theme (Hayes 1996, p. 132). Likewise, John Hay's review in the *New York Tribune* in December 1881 voices appreciation for the realistic, psychological, and imaginative properties of the book, which work to represent the contemporary struggles of women (Powers 1991, p. 18-19). More pointedly still, the author of a review in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* calls James a painter of womanhood. Isabel, who goes through every gradation of sweetness and bitterness in her life, depicts the struggle of the 'New Woman' in the late 19th century (Clarke 1991, p. 126). A review appearing in the *New York Times* on November 27, 1881,

names James a true follower of naturalism[4] and proclaims that the novel depicts the actual lives of men and women alike in late 19th-century Europe and America (Clarke 1991, p. 125).

As mentioned earlier, some reviewers were not happy with some aspects of the novel. A reviewer in the *Academy* criticizes its enormous length, overwrought craftsmanship, and loose narrative technique, asserting that it is an injustice to both its readers and James himself, who believes in its artistic perfection:

> A novelist has to tell a story, though he has also to do other things, which may be intrinsically better worth doing; and a story is told when, as in *The Portrait of a Lady,* the last page of the third volume leaves all the threads of narrative hanging loose without even an attempt to unite them. Mr. James not only disappoints his readers, but does injustice to himself when he implicitly assumes that the interest aroused by the lady whose portrait he draws will be so lukewarm to inspire no curiosity concerning the outcome of a great crisis in her history. (Clarke 1991, p. 113)

Another critic pointed to the same problem: "It is doubtless true that Mr. James, Jr. has not exhibited the mastery of the emotions displayed by the greatest novelists" (Hayes 1996, p. 122). A critic in the *Pall Mall Gazette* complains about both the novel's length and its stylistic Americanisms (Hayes 1996, p. 128). Similarly, *The London Times* censures the length of the novel and claims that the character of Isabel is derivative.

In short, the character of Isabel is equally praised and criticized. A reviewer in *The New York Herald* calls Isabel a mediocre and plain protagonist, who is neither hot nor cold, understood not to have strong ambitions that culminate in anything solid (Hayes 1996, p. 130). Another critic in *The Spectator* objects that Isabel's character is less developed and designed than Mrs. Touchett and Henrietta's. These characters are clear; they are in control of their lives and are able to play their roles as they are required to do (Clarke 1991, p. 109). A critic in *The Dial* jumps to the conclusion that Isabel's character contains a fundamental fault—how could a level-headed and independent young woman be attracted to

[4] Though James is categorized as a realist novelist, his literary modes of thinking also reflect naturalism, which is considered an extension of realism..

someone like Osmond, especially when she has opportunities for a better life in the shape of Caspar Goodwood? Dorothea Krook presents a similar opinion (Clarke 1991, p. 124). Likewise, a review in *Lippincott's Magazine* claims that the novel provides a limited version of individuality. Both Henrietta and Isabel marry in defiance of the model of the unmarried, independent 'new woman'; according to this review, the characters shared position as married women make the question of who is happy and who is not besides the point.

Like the reviewers, academic literary critics express a variety of views on *The Portrait of a Lady* and its many aspects. It is clear that *Portrait of a Lady* deals with the question of marriage and individuality, and so it is unsurprising that it has attracted much critical attention in these areas. Annette Niemtzow (1992) states that the novel oscillates between championing marriage and individuality. Niemtzow (1992) argues that the laws of marriage, which put women in strident clutches of patriarchy, are just like other human laws, which are the products of social imagination (p. 104). Beth Sharon Ash comes to the same conclusion in "Frail Vessels and Vast Designs: A Psychoanalytic Portrait of Isabel Archer." She calls the novel a portrait of female psychology depicting the ways in which women respond under the discriminatory laws of patriarchy (123). Maria Irne Ramalho de Sousa Santos (1987) contrarily reads the novel as a story of Isabel's freedom, hinging on the power of exploration of her conscience (p.117).

The theme of individuality is as important as the theme of marriage in *Portrait of a Lady*; as a result, it has been discussed in many critical essays, many of which link the book to James's cousin, Minny. Alfred Habegger (1990) argues the importance of James's personal life, and, in particular, Minny, as inspiration for the ways in which the novel addresses the philosophy of marriage:

> But *The Portrait of a Lady* emerged from James's critical response to an Anglo-American tradition of women's fiction. James created his novel by fusing his reading with elements of his personal life–his close friendship with his remarkable cousin, Minny Temple, his tremendous respect for his father and his philosophy of marriage, and his own curious feelings of impotence. (p. 61)

Like Habeggar, Lotus Snow (1970) directly relates the novel's individualistic theme to Minny Temple, who shared Isabel's attitudes

towards life and Victorian values (p. 8). Anderson Quentin (1970) explores the idea that *Portrait of a Lady* is a picture of women's individuality within a European setting (67). Leon Edel (1970) calls the novel a "grappling struggle between individualism and the unseen forces of determinism that shape lives. *The Portrait of a Lady* enables us to see each other in the light of such explanations that are the common traits of our society" (p. 94). Elizabeth Allen (1987) explains the problem with great clarity: Isabel's inheritance aims to cement her independence, but it ends up ensuring the opposite, making her a slave to conventions (p. 87). Vida Scudder (1970) makes the same point, arguing that the novel navigates the tensions between free will and determinism, thus picturing the lives of countless real individuals (p. 9). Similarly, Dorothy Van Ghent (1970) compares the story to Thomas Hardy's contemporary novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* in terms of unseen forces that determine our lives (p. 28). William Brownell (1970) offers a unique take: the novel is a realistic form of fiction that could be called the romantic sociology of American patriotism. He further explains that the incidents that make up the plot were, in fact, common occurrences at the time the book was written. The book therefore realistically portrays American and European society (p. 13). Philip Rahv (1970) pushes the argument to a more refined conclusion when he claims that the novel tries to bridge the gap between European and American cultures with the sacrifice of Isabel Archer (p. 19).

Isabel Archer occupies a pivotal role in *Portrait of a Lady,* particularly in her psychological insights into the issues and people she encounters. Tony Tanner (1970) explains this phenomenon in his essay, "The Fearful Self: Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*." Isabel, fearful of everything around her, remains vigilant at every turn. Her character is developed through this process, which leads to psychological independence in the end: "If nothing else *The Portrait of a Lady* shows us the birth of a conscience out of the spoiling of a life" (p. 122).

The Portrait of a Lady is no doubt remarkable for its extraordinary style, a fact which is underscored by the differences between the serialized text and later revised editions, in which James's revisions worked progressively to add nuance to Isabel's character. Nina Baym (1992) shows that in the earlier version Isabel's psychology is a secondary element, whereas in the later version it becomes the centerpiece of the novel ("Revision and Thematic Change", p.119). Donatella Izzo (1990) explores the novel in terms of social reality and the transition from unconscious innocence to awareness. According to her, the novel's

narrative technique is a self-referential one that explains both the plot and character in the course of the narration (p. 33). Arnold Kettle (1970) concurs about the novel's artistic beauty and narrative complexity, claiming that the characters are described through self-referential techniques (p. 46). John Hay (1970) praises the entire stylistic scheme of the novel. In his view, the book embodies James's stylistic mastery. The book is almost perfect in terms of its content, style, character, and narrative technique:

> There is nothing exceptional about the book but the genius of the author, which is now, more than ever before, beyond question. The simple story is told with very simple imaginable accessory of wit, observation, description of nature and of life. But the reader must take his pleasure as he goes along. (p. 7)

Richard Chase's "The Lesson of the Master" outdoes virtually everyone in its praise for the novel. For Chase, *The Portrait of a Lady* is the first American novel that truly fulfills the form's criteria:

> Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* was the novel by an American that made, within the limits of its subject, full use of the novel form. By comparison, no previous American novel, even those of James, can claim to be fully 'done.' . . . To read the first page of *The Portrait of a Lady* is to step into a world unfrequented by the early American novelists. (1968, p. 15)

Notwithstanding all this critical praise, many scholars raise objections about the novel. Marion Montgomery (1968) argues that the novel is not sufficient to justify a claim to aesthetic perfection (p. 60). Dorothea Krook (1968), for her part, ups the ante, focusing not on one flaw, as Montgomery would have it, but rather on "Two Problems in *The Portrait of a Lady*." Isabel's return to Osmond is the first of these problems, which Krook believes spoils the ending. Any free and self-determined decision on Isabel's part would be fine–any, that is, except shackling herself to Osmond again. Second, James's treatment of sexuality in the last pages sucks any beauty out of the novel: "To speak of James's 'treatment' of the sexual theme in *The Portrait of a Lady* would be virtually meaningless, but for the striking episode between Isabel and Caspar Goodwood in the last pages of the book"(p. 101). In *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (1925), Van

Wyck argues that James's writings do not reflect his home country or the actual life in it. On the other hand, some approve this strategy "for getting close to essential social psychological concerns" that transcend national and cultural boundaries (McQuade 1987, p. 489).

As a seasoned literary writer, James was conscious enough of the novel's focus on psychology, relatively action-poor plot, and ambiguous ending, and he explained the difficulties to his readers and critics thus:

> The obvious criticism of course will be that it is not finished–that I have not seen the heroine to the end of her situation–that I have left her in the air suspended–That is both true and false. The *whole* of anything is never told; you can only take what groups together. What I have done has that unity–it groups together. It is complete in itself–and the rest may be taken or not, later. (Powers 1991, p. 18)

It would not be amiss to add that James's style remains difficult to comprehend as long as we don't come to terms with his worldview and the insights and formal demands it entails. As a result, readers who do not properly grasp James's philosophy of writing are likely to fail equally in grasping the true message of *The Portrait of a Lady*. The novel serves as a socio-historical documentary of its time. It spotlights women's social, individual economic and educational constraints. Critiquing many contemporary feminine issues, the novel particularly probes the late 19th-century's institution of marriage and its hazards for women. The chapter also documents the trajectory of its critical reception.

Discussion

This part includes a textual reflection of social equality, the brunt of customs and traditions, individuality, and the institution of marriage, education and economic equality.

Social Equality

The concept of the 'New Woman,' along with determined opposition to hidebound Victorian values, emerged in earnest in the 1880s, when James was already a successful writer. Nonetheless, like many contemporary writers, he reflected this theme in many of his novels:

> Changes in women's rights were manifold from improvements in education, employment, and marital legislation to the emergence of the suffrage campaign . . . many of his novels and stories take as their subjects the plight of women constrained or confined by both legislation and social expectation. (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 461)

There are many reasons for James's interest in women's issues. Besides his deep affection for (and indeed fascination with) Minny and Alice, James had friendships with many strong later-19th-century women, such as Edith Wharton, who endowed him with a detailed knowledge and awareness of contemporary women's issues. Moreover, his travels exposed him to women's issues both in America and Europe, where the question of gender equality was a hotly contested issue.

The Brunt of Customs and Traditions

The 19th-century America and England had very narrowly-defined domestic roles for women. James protested against such restrictive social conventions in his fiction through characters like *The Portrait of a Lady*'s Isabel Archer, who marries Gilbert Osmond, a man who himself declares, "No, I am not conventional: I am Convention itself" (James 1987, p. 302). True to his words, after the marriage, he proves to be an oppressive force for the maintenance of convention, reducing Isabel to the role of sacrificial victim:

> Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should! "You dress very well," Madame Merle lightly interposed" "Possibly; but I do not care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dress maker, but they do not express me. To begin it's not by my own choice that I wear them, they are imposed upon me by society." "Should you prefer go without them?" Madame Merle enquired in a tone which virtually terminated the discussion. (James, 1987, p. 194)

Isabel is further described by her cousin, Ralph, who claims that she wears a kind of social mask that obstructs their friendship:

> If she wore a mask it completely covered her face... it was a representation, it was even an advertisement.. . . She appeared to be leading the life of the world... . The free keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something....she represented Gilbert Osmond. "Good heavens what a function," he then woefully explained. He was lost in wonder at the mystery of things. (James, 1987, p. 382-383)

Indeed, her last meeting with Ralph in Rome shows how much social constraints imposed by Osmond have atrophied her individuality. Although she wants to go with her cousin, she is prevented from doing so by the unseen laws of convention:

> "Fancy my being a cause of disagreement between a lady and her husband, that's why I do not go."... " I am afraid," said Isabel . . . "I am afraid". Ralph". . . " Afraid of your husband?" "Afraid of myself!" she said getting up. . . "If I were afraid of my husband that would be simply my duty. That's what women are expected to be.".. . "You have been my best friend," she said. "It was for you that I wanted to live. But I am of no use to you now." Then it came over more poignantly that . . . she could not part with him that way. "If you should send for me, I'd come," she said at last. "Your husband won't consent to that " "Oh, I can arrange it." "I shall keep that for my last pleasure," said Ralph. In answer to which she simply kissed him. (James, 1987, p. 489, 490).

When Mrs. Touchett lets Isabel know that Ralph is dying and that if she wants to see him it must be soon, she is shocked and plans to visit him as soon as possible. However, when she mentions this trip to England to her husband, he opposes it with a vehemence that dismays her and leads her to reconsider her position as a caged animal subdued by 'Osmondian' customs:

> [H]e was "her appointed and inscribed master". . .the decencies and sanctities of marriage. The idea of violating filled her with shame as well as with dread for in giving herself away she had lost sight of this contingency in the perfect belief that her

> husband's intentions were as generous as her own. She seemed to see, none the less, the rapid approach of the day when she would have to take back something she had solemnly best own. (James, 1987, p. 449)

Individuality

As noted earlier, James's female characters were generally inspired by his half cousin Minny, with whom he is often assumed to have been in love; by his sister Alice, who did not benefit from an extensive education and had no regard for Victorian values of womanhood**;** and by powerful women literary authors and characters like Edith Wharton, Jane Austen's Emma, Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, and others. James found Minny, in particular, endlessly inspiring, and he echoes her independent female voice through characters like Isabel Archer, Daisy Miller, and Milly Theale (Powers 7, p. 1987). She supplemented James's literary vision with a unique insight about women, as he explained to his brother William:

> Her image will preside in my intellect... . The more I think of her the more perfectly satisfied I am to have her translated from this changing realm of fact to steady realm of thought. There she may bloom into a beauty more radiant than our dull eyes will avail to contemplate.. . . She lives as a steady unfaltering luminary in the mind rather than as flickering wasting earth-shifted lamp. (Graham 1995, p. 16)

In this way, James transforms the real-life Minny into an imaginative image at once— aesthetic and immortal. Indeed, to James, Minny was perhaps not of this earthly realm. As he put it to William, "She was a breathing protest against European grossness, English compromises and conventions–a plant of pure American growth" (Powers, 1991, p. 7). James (1987) links Minny's purity and inspiration to Newport, Rhode Island, his favorite spot in America; the place where he met her for the first time; where he received the notorious "obscure hurt" which some critics suspect resulted from his back injury in a fire-fighting accident damaging his sexual ability; and the place where he was first published. He wrote to his mother:"I think of Newport as with its air vocal with her accents, alive with her movements, and to William: "The whole past–all times and places–seem full of her. Newport, especially to my mind, seems

the very genius of the place." More broadly, he felt that "Newport is America, all right, but America with a difference perhaps more rounded, finished, and complete" (Powers 1991, p. 7).

The question of Isabel's individuality is thoroughly explored in *Portrait of a Lady*. From the outset of the novel, she appears a strong woman marked by an independent lifestyle and way of thinking:

> "Dear Me who is that strange woman?" Mr. Touchet asked. "Perhaps it is Mrs. Touchet niece–the independent young lady," Lord Warburton suggested. "I think she must be from the way she handles the dog." (James, 1987, p. 19)

On another occasion when Isabel seeks Mrs. Touchett's guidance, Mrs. Touchett remarks: "You don't look like a person of that sort. You're fond of your own way; but it is not for me to blame you" (James 1987, p. 24). Ralph describes her more precisely still, when Mrs. Touchett inquires about the possibility of the two marrying: "Marrying her? I should be sorry to play her such a trick! But apart from that, she's perfectly able to marry herself. She has every facility" (James 1987, p. 40).

After her marriage with Osmond, Isabel gradually realizes that she has lost her individuality and self-determination. Discussing the moment when Isabel reaches the peak of disappointment at Osmond's attempt to annex her mind to his own, Graham argues that "The real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his–attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park" (Graham 1995, p. 61). Isabel comes to awareness of her enslaved status when she longs to see her dying cousin but is not allowed to make the trip by her husband–or rather, her master. Nonetheless, she gathers her courage and tells Osmond: "You've no reason for such a wish and I have every reason for going" (James 1987, p. 521). During the physical journey to London, she embarks on an inner journey exploring her conscience, which is where the real drama of the novel takes place. Toward the end of the novel, her individuality takes a new shape—one with which readers do not readily sympathize—when she defies Osmond and saves Pansy's life. Next, she comes to England despite Osmond's bitter opposition. Filled with regret, she questions herself again and again, an act of self-reflection that will prepare her for further challenges of life:

> On her long journey from Rome her mind had been given up to vagueness; she was unable to question the future. She performed this journey with sightless eyes and took little pleasure in the countries she traveled, decked out though they were in the richest freshness of spring. Her thoughts followed their course through other countries–strange-looking, dimly-lighted, pathless lands in which there was no change of seasons, but only, as it seemed, a personal dreariness of winter. . . . All purpose, all intention, was suspended: all desire save the single desire to reach her much embarrassing refuge. (James 1987, p. 545-46)

Knowing the true picture of her marital life, Ralph senses the obstacles to Isabel's visit, and asks her how she has managed to come to England. She replies:

> "Oh, yes, I have been punished," Isabel sobbed. He listened to her a little and then continued: "Was he very bad about your coming?" "He made it very hard for me. But I don't care." "It is all over then between you." ”Oh no, I don't think anything over." (James 1987, p. 562)

Lyall H. Powers (1991) explains that "Isabel has committed herself to action, to direct and specific defiance of Osmond. Her journey to England is both a flight to Ralph and an escape from Osmond" (p. 61). Hence, her return to Rome signifies an achievement of psychological independence and maturity through which she is able to fight off Osmond and the oppressive conventions associated with marital customs. Paradoxically, she both goes back to Osmond and emerges a different Isabel, who leaves her fears in England and overcomes the complex struggle with dependence on men–including Caspar Goodwood. In other words, after recognizing the evil, she manages to reach a position stable enough to fight off the Victorian chains that encircle womanhood. She does not need to run away from Osmond, but rather to change and bring him around to accepting it (Powers 1991, p. 61-65). As Alastair Fowler puts it,

> Isabel's return to her marriage to Osmond thus reflects her acceptance of what she believes the condition of life to be. She believes that a permanent retreat or escape from Osmond

> would constitute a desire to escape from the realities of life itself. (Powers 1991, p. 101)

David Kirby explains it in more or less the same way, arguing: "In the process of stepping from partner to partner, Isabel moves to a final stage of moral, aesthetic and psychological superiority, having acquired through experience, knowledge, and through knowledge, virtue" (Kirby 1991, p. 34).

The Institution of Marriage

The constraints of Victorian womanhood demanded that respectable ladies marry in order to secure their lives. Most of James's novels unearth the marital problems that lead to women's confinement in an unseen prison. James, who did not marry himself, does not favor marriage for women with independent minds. His works often criticize marriage severely for its social restraints. For instance, Prince Amerigo in *The Golden Bowl* (1904) calls marriage "monster."[5] Countess Gemini in *Portrait of a Lady* says: "I never congratulate any girl on marriage; I think they ought to make it somehow not quite so awful a steel trap" (James 1987, p. 300). *What Maisie Knew* (1897) explores another side of marriage, in which a young girl is used as an alibi by her divorced parents and their lovers. This novel is an intense critique of the Victorian familial obsession with ranks and social norms. In all three of these works, James exposes marriage as a tool of exploitation in capitalism and patriarchal chains.

Similarly, *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Bostonians* feature independent women (Isabella and Verena, respectively) who become trapped in marriages that destroy their intellectual and emotional independence, worth, talent and individuality, virtually enslaving them to their husbands, who consider them mere property (Gilbert Osmond and Basil Ransom, respectively). James thus takes Victorian marriage to be a steel trap that catches even the unwilling. For instance, Isabella tells Ralph: "I do not want to begin life by marriage, there are other things a woman can do" (James 1987, p. 143). Her rejection of Lord Warburton is her step toward an "indecent" life:

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[5] James, Henry. *The Golden Bowl. The Cambridge History of the American Novel.* 2011. Web. November 28, 2017.

> I am not, I am really and truly not able to regard you in the light of companion for life; or to think of your home–your various homes–as the settled seats of my existence. These things cannot be reasoned about and I very earnestly entreat you not to return to the subject we discussed so exhaustively. (James 1987, p. 112)

Lord Warburton's rejection is soon followed by Caspar Goodwood's:

> But I really do not want to marry, or to talk about it at all now. I shall probably never do it–no, never, I've a perfect right to feel that way, and it's no kindness to a woman to press her so hard, to urge her against her will. If I give you pain I can only say I am sorry. It's not my fault. (James 1987, p. 149-150)

An unpredictable side of her personality first emerges when she accepts Osmond's proposal, causing those around her to reconsider their views of her. More than anyone, Caspar Goodwood is flabbergasted, testily remarking that "You said you'd probably never marry, and you said it with such a manner that I pretty well believed it. You told me if I heard you were engaged, I was not to believe it" (James 1987, p. 321). Even Mrs. Touchett advises her frankly to "Give [money] to [Osmond] but marry someone else" (James 1987, p. 324). Likewise, the farsighted Ralph warns her about her doomed future: "You are going to be put into a cage. You must have changed immensely. . . . A year ago you valued your liberty beyond everything. You wanted only to see life" (James 1987, p. 331). Nonetheless, Isabel ends up marrying Osmond, who reduces her to the status of an advertisement. She is stripped of her opinions, the right of meeting people and even of dressing herself. Haralson and Johnson remark that

> *The Portrait of a Lady* details the fate of Isabel Archer, a young American, who, after inheriting a fortune, marries the cold elitist and manipulative American art collector, Gilbert Osmond. The novel explores the theme of feminine desire for freedom, the apparent granting of that freedom (through inheritance), and the painful protracted loss of it (as Isabel enables and then becomes a part of Osmond's collection). (James 1987, p. 462)

Kirby brings to light another aspect of Isabel's personality and explores Isabel's own blind romanticizing idealism of the institution of marriage:

> Isabel's image of an ideal husband is very restrictive. She wants someone to free her from her false social role her wealth has forced on her, which means he must be poor, and she needs someone who will encounter her own growth, which means he must be refined; that is to say, she needs someone wholly unconventional. So when she hears of Osmond she gets infatuated with his image before even meeting him. . . . Osmond turns out to be vain and vicious. . . . She victimizes herself through her own pride. (James 1987, p. 58)

Isabel's story could be called "the tragedy of the Victorian dream of freedom–the human dream of freedom–struggling under the pressures of society and marriage" (Graham 1995, p. 60). Marriage affects Isabel so profoundly that Ralph fails to recognize her when he sees her: "The free keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady to represent something" (James 1995, p. 383). She was repenting: "Nothing was pleasure to her now; how could anything be pleasure to a woman who knew that she had thrown away her life?" (James 1995, p. 421).

James has Isabel questioned her views about her marriage in such a way as to underscore the fact that conventional marriages tend towards the destruction of individual autonomy for women:

> She asked herself if she had married on a factious theory. . . . She was to think of him . . . at the first gentleman in Europe . . . and that indeed was the reason she married him. But when she began to see what it implied, there was more in the bond than she had meant to put her name to. . . . They were strangely married at all events, and it was a horrible marriage. (James 1987, p. 416, 417-18, 421)

Victorian marriage held women in a stranglehold of social norms and customs. Even once divorce became legally possible, it entailed serious consequences that would affect a woman throughout her life. In such a situation, Isabel is unable to simply leave Osmond. When Henrietta Stackpole asks her why she does not do so, she replies:

> "I can't change the way," Isabel said. "Why not I should like to know?" "You won't confess that you have made a mistake. You are too proud" . . . "One must accept one's deeds. I married him before all the world. . . . One can't change the way," Isabel repeated. (James 1995, p. 475)

The Wings of the Dove and *The Golden Bowl* portray another side of Victorian marriage. Here the lovers sacrifice their love for social and economic gains and are unable to marry those whom they truly love. In *The Wings of the Dove,* Kate Croy can't marry her lover Merton Densher, a poor journalist, and instead plans to make him rich by immoral means before marrying him. James thus forces his readers to confront the hard truth about 19th-century marriage: "the ideals of romantic love and individual freedom are available only to those who can afford them" (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 413).

Education

Cornelius Crowley (1998) categorizes *The Portrait of a Lady* as a novel of education, which was a major area of concern in the late 19th century. Women tended not to have the benefits of education for two main reasons: either their families did not appreciate the idea, or they were unable to afford it. James's novels throw light on different aspects of education as it concerned women in the 19th century by way of his complex depiction of character (p. 29). Isabel Archer's lack of formal education certainly plays a role in her susceptibility to Osmond: [6]

> The little girl had been offered the opportunity of laying a foundation of knowledge in this establishment; but having spent a single day in it, she had protested against its laws and had been allowed to stay at home. . . . The foundation of her knowledge was really laid in the idleness of her grandmother's house, where, as most of the other inmates were not reading people, she had uncontrolled use of a library full of books with

[6] Like Isabel, James' own sister, Alice, was affected by this prejudice against female education, receiving less instruction than her brothers. Moreover, later in life Alice was diagnosed with female hysteria, to which James alludes in "The Turn of the Screw" (1898)(Haralson and Johnson 461).

> frontispieces, which she used to climb upon a chair to take down. (James 1987, p. 20)

Isabel is unable to listen to Ralph, Henrietta, or her aunt until she undergoes a much more dire practical education by becoming trapped and losing everything she has (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 462).

Later on, once she is married, Isabel tells Henrietta, who had asked about her marital life, "Yes, I am wretched" (James 1987, p. 475). Powers (1991) notes, "She admits her own errors in forming her relationship with Osmond and attempts to measure the extent of her own guilt–not always successfully. She acknowledges some deception of Osmond on her own part" (p. 47). Similarly, David Kirby (1991) states, "She misreads Osmond as she reveals during her meditation when she says she took only a partial view of him for the whole when she agreed to marry" (p. 40). Indeed "Isabel was impressed by Osmond's artistic, the plastic view" (James 1987, p. 443) towards the end, she realizes her blindness. In contrast, Isabel's well-educated friend, Henrietta Stackpole, walks into a successful marriage. With this implicit distinction, James indirectly stresses the need for women's education to avoid tragedies like this.

Economic Equality

Although in *Portrait of a Lady* the question of women's economic equality is not addressed directly, economics nonetheless plays a vital role. Ralph is of the belief that economic independence will help Isabel to lead a free and self-determined life:

> I should like to do something for her. . . . I should like to put a little wind in her sails. . . . I should like to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants. She wants to see the world, for instance. I should like to put money in her purse. . . . If she has an easy income she'll never have to marry for a support. . . . She wishes to be free and your bequest will make her free. . . . She ought to get a great many opportunities for sixty thousand pounds. (James 1987, p. 175-6, 178)

The inheritance that Isabel receives from Ralph ultimately backfires, preparing the ground for tragedy. Rather than establishing her independence, the fortune works to remove it by attracting the fortune

hunter—Osmond, thereby revealing the extent to which women were exploited in 19th-century Europe and America. James's *The Spoils of Poynton* (1897) likewise questions women's economic equality, and in a more direct fashion. It highlights the problems of women concerning inheritance: only men could legally inherit, a situation that James calls "the ugly English system" (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 463). Here, James is following critiques made earlier in British novels like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. In the U. S., the issue of women's property was presented in the Vermont Senate by Clara Howard Nicholas in 1852, initiating major discussion among activists for women's rights. James communicated a likeminded message through his writings, directing his readers' attention to the cause (Haralson and Johnson 2009, p. 463).

As with economic issues, James does not address women's political rights overtly in *Portrait of a Lady*, but a glimpse of the issue is visible in the character of Henrietta, whose position as a newspaper reporter grants her economic independence, even as it keeps her in a lower social class than Isabel and her family. In *The Bostonians* (1886), on the other hand, James confronts the question of women's political rights head-on. In this period, the women's suffrage movement was at its peak, and was being led by revolutionary figures like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton under the aegis of the NAWA. In *The Bostonians*, Olive Chancellor and Verena Terrant are women's suffrage activists, who also develop lesbian ties. Like Isabel, Verena finds herself in an unproductive marriage that puts an end to her political career.

Contemporary Women's Status in Pakistan

In Pakistan, in spite of constitutional guarantees, political declarations, and efforts of national and international communities, there is a continuing pattern of high levels of discrimination and GBV against women. In a recent World Report, "Standing of for Human Rights: : What is happening to human rights in the world" (2018), violence against Pakistani women and girls—including rape, murder through so-called honor killings, acid attacks, domestic violence, and forced marriage—remained steady. There are a number of socio-economic , cultural and political determinants —like culture, society, family, age, level of schooling, husband, children , economic dependency, households, hijab (veil) observance—that barricade women's access to empowerment (Sheikh, et al., 2015-2016). Women toil while men decide in majority of

Pakistani families (Ali and Shah, 2019). If women have a stronger say in family planning, economic decision making, it will unswervingly impact the strength of women's empowerment (Khan and Awan, 2011). Having low enrollment in conventional education, even lower in higher education leads to their unawareness and disempowerment. Greater enrollment in higher education will entitle them to a more stable empowerment (Malik and Courtney, 2010). Economic dependency makes them surrender their other forms of rights to their family members (Ali and Shah, 2019). So their overall empowerment can be helpful both for uplifting the standards of society and development of the country (Chaudry, et al., 2012). Like many other societal functions, Pakistani women lag behind in the arena of national, provincial, and local politics. In most cases, political participation in Pakistan is a masculine department as cooking is a feminine one (Suvorova, 2019).

The birth of a Baby Boy and Girl

UN Women: Pakistan (2017) states, "Pakistan's ranking for gender equality remains one of the lowest in the world" (Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2017: Pakistan"). Noor Sanauddin (2015) depicts the milieu in his PhD dissertation, "A home that does not have a male child should be demolished"; or "A girl's father is never at rest"; or "Keep women under your hand . . ."; or "Ruined is the man who listens to the advice of women"; or "A women goes seven foot ahead of the devil" (p. 308, 309.). The issue commences with the birth of a child: Unlike the birth of a baby boy, the birth of a baby girl is taken ominous. Two different sets of languages, customs, laws and roles exist (Siddiqui, *Language, Gender, and Power*). Unlike girls, boys are indoctrinated with a sense of superiority complex (Yousafzai, 2013) A huge number of participants attest that —with some softening in recent years—boys are generally favored over girls in nearly all walks of life (QAU Participants).

Freedom of Movement

Freedom of movement has utterly two different connotations for males and females in Pakistan. Females are explicitly associated with kitchen department and domestic provinces while males are authorized with freedom of movement. Mostly females' movement takes place with males' surveillance. In the last five years, a huge number of females have

met dreadful consequences of sexual harassments, rapes, abductions, deaths, etc., which has exacerbated the situation even more for women's independent movement. Keeping in view this scenario and the cultural weight of social codes, parents have gown ultra conscious about their daughters' freedom of movement (*Gulf News Asia* and *Al Jazeera News*) . Including Human Rights Watch and Malala Yousafzai's affirmation, round about 80 percent participants attest that freedom of movement is very limited for women in Pakistan, and is growing from bad to worse with the passage of time (Human Rights Watch and QAU Participants).

Education

The insecurity of environment, radical religious interpretations, and cultural shackles supply a formidable ground for girls' exclusion from education (Naheed, 2016). A huge number of girls (up to 60 %) are deprived of registering at schools. With the passage of time and education levels, the number of registered female students keeps on falling and touches the bottom rock in higher education (PPAF, 2017)

Lack of Awareness

Lack of awareness is not a cause in itself but a direct effect of illiteracy behind women's exploitation in Pakistan. Being indoctrinated with androcentric forms of teachings, females are made to believe that awareness does not belong to their kind. Even behind this phenomenon, religious romanticizing and misogynist cultural norms are instrumental. In sum, the entrenched system restrains women while allows men with extreme freedom (Jafree,2017).

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a common phenomenon in Pakistan. Though it is quite astonishing, majority of women justifies violence against themselves on the bases of established cultural norms. This very misogynistic mood of thinking lays a ground of force against women making the phenomenon as an integral and rightful part of the society (Jafree, 2017). Apart from hushed cases, round about 70 percent of cases reported at the police stations are related to domestic violence triggered by honor issues (PPAF 2017, p. 24). Up to 90 percent participants attest

the fact that patriarchal shackles are very hard on women's personal lives in Pakistan (Participants from QAU).

Marriage and Divorce

The story of injustices chases a Pakistani woman on every stage of her life, even in the most important decision of her life—marriage. Women in Pakistan are not allowed to marry or divorce according to their own will. In terms of marital consent, girls are mostly informed while boys are asked. Up to 82 percent marriages are arranged on the basis of economic or clannish or familial ties. With a negligible change, this is an entirely a patriarchal domain to decide the matter. Marriage is a social contract for a woman that mingles her position with her husband's property. After marriage, a woman's personal life ceases, and she tries to behave within the cultural codes for the rest of her life (Jafree, 2017).

Divorce is another dilemma in Pakistan which has many taboos associated it. Unfortunately when a marriage fails on some grounds, the couple dooms. Neither can they divorce nor live with each other. Along with the partners, divorce leaves deep scars on both families' social status and honor. The reason being, a divorce has evolved into an unusual phenomenon that only takes place in some unbearable situations. Still it has different consequences for a man and a woman (Hussain,2017). Unlike a man, in most cases, the debris of a divorce falls on a woman's character and gets ostracized for the rest of her life (Participants from QAU, 2017).

Honor Killing

Losing the right both to her body and will, women's position vacillates between a sub-human and an object of sex. In such personal issues, women are meant to be subservient. If a woman dares to raise her voice against these masculine norms, she is taken for an infidel, which licentiates her male family members to punish her according their own whims (Jafri, 2014). The society remains silent and justifies the act as part of the societal order (Participants from QAU 2014). Unlike for male, an extra-marital affair for a married as well as for an unmarried woman invites justified honor killing. Pakistan has the highest number of honor killings in the contemporary world (Jafri, 2014). According to Human

Rights Watch about 1000 women are killed on the name of honor each year in Pakistan (Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2017: Pakistan".).

Economic Dependency

Facing injustices in job market and property inheritance, economic dependency makes women sacrifice their individuality. Having limited job opportunities in open market and factories, women are mostly found in public sector jobs, i.e. education, nursing, police, offices, etc. Recently some women have started stepping into private sectors but they stand high risks of harassment (Jafree,2017). Being taken weak and vulnerable, women are not appointed on key positions. In addition, without challenging their shares in courts, they are mostly excluded from the family's possessions. Inheriting their property with the help of law, squashes women into a family clash, which mostly gets them ostracized to discourage the trend (Participants from QAU, 2017).

Emerging Voices

In addition to the govt.'s initiatives, a number of activists—*Sharmeen* Obaid-Chinoy, Reham Khan, Malala Yousafzai, etc.—and NGOs (like The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), and UN Women, etc) are emerging across the country to improve women's situation but the speed is comparatively slow. Local writers— Ishrat Afreen (1956-), Tehmina Durrani (1953-), Kishwar Naheed (1940-), Fahmida Riaz (1946-?), and Hajra Masroor (1930-2012)—have also started picking on the "woman question" from nuanced angles to spread awareness about gender injustices.

Conclusion

The overall historical, literary and critical reflection endorses *The Portrait of a Lady* as a true classic that has stood the test of time. Being the product of its time, the novel categorically reflects women's issues that are universal in nature. The best part of the story is, with almost one and a half century gap, the novel still speaks to women's issues across nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, disciplines, etc. Like many other countries, the novel is beginning to reinvigorate its influence in Pakistan. With support of literary communes and criticism, the novel is gaining

unprecedented attraction for its feminine themes and powerful female characters—especially Isabel archer. Instead of running away, she chooses to fight off the hazards of a bad marriage to reform the androcentric thinking about woman's—personal, social, economic, and principally marital—standing in society. The very approach could save million of marriages in Pakistan where women are facing injustices in their personal, social, economic and particularly marital provinces. In all these areas, the grasp of cultural restraints and religious fanaticism is extremely tight on the lives of women. Majority of women groan under psychological and physical suppressions. Neither they have a right to their ways of life nor individualism nor body. For breaking a change for them, it is obligatory to break the shackles of religious romanticizing and cultural constraints to liberate women in true senses. This priced liberation is only possible with both men and women's universal awareness that directly comes from formal and informal education. So the libration of a Pakistani woman from patriarchic shackles is as imperative as the libration of a Pakistani man from ignorance. Isabel's choice seems a durable solution to such issues because it focuses on uprooting the problems instead. So, the novel appears to be an excellent fit/guide for the contemporary Pakistani society which is groaning under the weight of cultural shackles, religious romanticizing, and andocentric institution of marriage.

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