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EXAMINING WOMANHOOD: NARRATIVES OF WOMEN'S SUBJUGATION AND NON-SURVIVAL IN FIVE SHORT STORIES FROM ASIA

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Abstract

This paper explored the discourse on womanhood in the Asian context by delving into the narratives of women characters in five short stories by three Asian writers. Specifically, it attempted to determine the images associated with Asian women based on the portrayal of the main protagonists in the selected short stories. It then analysed how these images construct womanhood and perpetuate such ideal in the Asian mindset. Viewed from both feminist and constructionist lenses, findings show that the women protagonists are relegated to their three-pronged traditional roles/images: daughter, wife, and mother. These images, in turn, shape how these characters behave and are seen by other characters - submissive, self-sacrificing and subjugated. However, despite an unrelentingly difficult life, all the five women still struggle to survive. Such act seems inconsistent with the above stereotypical construct of womanhood, though a closer look actually shows a different side to the said construct: strong, steadfast and resilient/survivalist. Not all of the protagonists overcome their tragic lives. Nonetheless, all five women manage to convey that the concept of womanhood is more complex than how it had been perceived in the past. This complexity is clearly illustrated in the lived realities of many Asian women today.

Keywords: women subjugation, womanhood, Asian women narratives

Introduction

Despite women's advancement into the public sphere, there are still many who are marginalized in today's world brought about by the fact that societal expectations of their responsibilities as women have remained essentially the same throughout the ages (Rosaldo, 1974). This grim reality is affirmed by recent studies done on women's subjugation in specific Asian countries.

Gnanaprakasam (2018) examined the dismal condition and representation of women in Indian society as well as their "crumbled voices" as portrayed in the narrative *Giribala* by looking into the women characters' endurance and resistance as they face daily oppression but still struggle hard to survive in their lived realities. Gnanaprakasam observed that the Indian society is generally complicit in the marginalization of its women, more so in the case of the poor, those who

belong to minority groups, and those who are regarded as outcast or rebellious women, for all are not allowed any respectable position and identity within its realm. Moreover, the long-ignored women's egregious conditions are not considered as an injustice by the Indian society; instead these are just part and parcel of their everyday domestic realities except for those who belong to the upper class of society. According to Gnanaprakasam (2018),

the experiences of [marginalized] women are destructive and have multiple shades of evolution and understanding. These women are those living in the tangential line of living in terms of their gender discrimination, class difference, and [caste] position, especially as a home-grown woman. These types of women are normally unnoticed in civil society. Their pains have long been ignored and are not considered as sinful but the usual occurrences of day-to-day life (p.322).

Another short narrative by Mahasweta Devi entitled *Duoloti the Bountiful* was analyzed by Sung-Hee Yook (2018). Yook examined how the tribal women's bodies become sexualized and commodified within a horrific bonded labor system in India. In particular, her paper illustrated how socio-economic changes and movements affect the lives of those who are in the lowest bracket of the economic system especially the women. The tribals had a distinctive culture and a self-sufficient economic system until they were displaced from and disposed of their forest/lands/homes resulting in the appalling exploitation and subjugation of their women as exemplified by Duoloti who is prostituted as a young girl until her body is ravaged by tuberculosis and venereal disease and dies at the age of twenty-seven.

On another front, the bivariate analysis of Soy and Sahoo (2016) revealed that two-thirds of the women in India meet their husbands only on their wedding day or on the day of Gauna while their multivariate analysis indicated that women marrying outside their caste and blood relations are influenced by socio-economic factors. Both findings reflect the plight of many Indian girls whose future depends on the decision of the parents or the elder in charge.

The Asia Foundation (2016) in its report on the violence perpetrated against women and children in Timor-Leste observed that the issue of women unemployment in this young nation could be factored in as contributory to the women's physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse by their intimate partners. Many women whose households depend on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood are not paid for their agricultural work extending "the notion of unpaid work for women beyond the domestic duties of housework and child rearing." Such a situation "has important consequences for women's independence and financial autonomy, particularly in the context of deciding whether or not to leave abusive relationships" (p. 23).

Belarmino and Roberts (2019) presented the voices of women experiencing violence and inequality in Japan, which are largely unreported. For instance, despite modern-day advancements in all aspects of life, Japanese women are still expected to have children after getting married and to quit work after giving birth. They are also treated differently from men under the law to their enormous disadvantage. Furthermore, Japanese women are expected to follow the tradition

of keeping quiet and submitting to the wishes of their partner without questions to preserve togetherness or to protect the man's pride, which obviously make them vulnerable to subjugation and domestic or other forms of violence.

The women's vulnerability to domestic violence is exacerbated by the fact that it is often normalized and, even, rationalized by the community. A fact sheet on domestic and sexual violence in Filipino communities (Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-based Violence, 2018) revealed that Filipino women respondents in Hawaii considered men's partner abuse as an expression of the men's "anger, stress, and drunken behavior, rather than as 'abuse' towards their spouse." Moreover, most of the respondents considered "physical violence to be unacceptable, particularly when injuries resulted. However, they do believe that many times when women are harmed, it was 'inevitable' because the women 'likely misbehaved' – i.e. lied or were unfaithful" (p. 2).

The above cited studies presented different ways of women oppression and victimization in their own society caused by traditional gender role expectations. These studies however did not describe how the women dealt with their daily oppressions, thus, this paper attempted to fill such gap by examining how the women characters tried hard to survive and, in the process, let their voices be heard despite their unrelentingly harsh everyday realities.

Method

Employing textual analysis primarily through feminist and constructionist lenses, this paper explored the discourse on womanhood in the Asian context, particularly Chinese, Indian, and Filipino, by delving into the narratives of the women characters in Genoveva Edroza-Matute's "Ang Kwento ni Mabuti", Lu Hsueh's "The Widow" and Mahasweta Devi's "Giribala", "Breast Giver", and "Draupadi". Specifically, the paper attempted to determine the images associated with these Asian women based on the portrayal of the main protagonist in each of the five selected short stories/narratives and informed mainly by de Beauvoir's answers to the question "What is a woman?" which she posed in her monumental book, *The Second Sex* (2011). She posited that the female function – "she is a womb" - is not enough to define woman. Instead, "she is determined and differentiated in relation to a man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (p. 26). Moreover, de Beauvoir rejected the "eternal feminine" as a woman archetype or a 'changeless essence whatsoever' because

[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. Only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as an Other. (p. 330)

In other words, de Beauvoir's answer to the 'woman question' is someone who is mediated or socialized to become the 'second sex' and an Other - not an autonomous being but rather "the relative being."

The paper then analyzed how these images construct womanhood and perpetuate such ideal in the Asian mindset as depicted in the stories guided by

Berger and Luckmann's sociological account of constructed meaning as expressed in *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966):

Every individual is born into an objective social structure within which he encounters the significant others who are in charge of his socialization. These significant others are imposed on him. Their definitions of his situation are posited for him as objective reality. He is thus born into not only an objective social structure but also an objective social world. The significant others who mediate this world to him modify it in the course of mediating it. They select aspects of it in accordance with their own location in the social structure, and also by virtue of their individual biographically rooted idiosyncrasies (p. 151).

De Beauvoir's feminist concepts and Berger and Luckmann's constructionist theory underpinned the analysis of the selected short stories to identify women's images that construct the womanhood ideal persisting in the Indian, Chinese, and Filipino mindsets.

Findings and Discussion

Images of Asian Women as Embodied in their Multifaceted Roles

In the Asian context, a woman's marketability is still often associated with what she can do or what her husband or her father has. And though she is pronounced as man's partner, she is generally undervalued within the partnership, which is attributable to her still being principally the nurturer and domestic workhorse in the family despite the fact that for decades now, she has also been a fulltime member of the workforce, even actually becoming the main breadwinner. Nnaemeka (1997) negates this undervaluing by stating that a woman is someone regardless [of you] thinking otherwise. Textual analysis of the five selected short stories reveal that 'woman as someone' can be classified in most, if not all, of these categories: 1) daughter/daughter-in-law; 2) wife; 3) mother; 4) mistress; and 5) rebel indicating the multifaceted and overlapping roles she performs in her daily life and, at the same time, shaping how she and the community perceive her as a woman.

Being a Daughter/Daughter-in-law

When a girl is born, the first image that would shape her is her being a daughter of her parents, which is a role that has its concomitant duties attached. In Mahasweta Devi's *Giribala*, the title refers to the main character, known to family and friends as Giri, who portrays three roles in the story - daughter, wife, and mother – aside from being a family provider. While still young, Giri's marriage was a prime concern of her father like "most of the middle class in modern India who feel that a marriage is to be arranged, heterosexual, and lifelong. It is simply too important to be left to chance" (Khandpur, 2017). As a daughter, Giri is expected to fulfil her dharma to become a wife as willed by her father so she would be blessed in the afterlife. Based on Indian tradition, "before a marriage can be officially declared, a multitude of factors are investigated by the parents and trusted parties to ensure compatibility, future prosperity (both in the marriage and in the derivative households), and divine satisfaction. The concept of sanjog is

often supplicated in the context of divine satisfaction. It serves a dual purpose: promotion of predestined marriage and softening of the rejection of an unsuitable partner" (Khandpur, 2017, p.5). In the case of Giri, when her parents discerned the sinister character of their chosen future son-in-law, they were prepared to stop him from bringing her home but, he sweet-talked them into agreeing to bring Giri home with him. Thus, Giri submissively followed her parents' wishes like any dutiful daughter whose status as a girl/woman in India practically has no autonomy and decision-making power over any aspect of her life (Bloom, Wypij, & Das Gupta, 2001; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001; Mason & Smith, 2000; Desai, 1994 as cited in Soy & Sahoo, 2017).

The experience of servitude and submission as expected of a daughter or a daughter-in-law is shared by Hsiang Ling, the main character in the Chinese short story, *The Widow*, written by Lu Hsun and translated to English by Wang Chichen. At the start of the story, Hsiang Ling, a 26-year-old widow, was shown looking for a job. She was given a trial period by a family, during which she served them diligently, quietly and even performing a man's job with ease. She was then hired as their servant, and, at the end of the year of her servitude, she was doing all the cleaning, cooking, and slaughtering of livestock. She seemed content with her life despite her hard work, her face showing traces of a smile every now and then. But, one day, she was found out to have left her mother-in-law's house without permission.

The mother-in-law came to forcibly take her back to Weichiashan where she would be married off to a Huo Lao-liu of Huochiatsun for the benefit of her dead husband's family. Hsiang Ling fought desperately to escape the second marriage but her in-laws physically abused her into submission, with witnesses not daring to intervene claiming the horrendous situation is purely a domestic issue. Hsiang Ling's subjugation is seemingly rationalized by her violation of filial piety, a central tenet of Confucianism, but is negated by Dalton, Goldstein-Gidoni, Lebra, Koyama and Takahashi's (in Belarmino & Roberts, 2019) notion that the more modern portrayal of women as homemakers, who raise children and care for their in-laws, is their having the option of seeking outside work to contribute to the country's economy and structure. In Hsiang Ling's case, she was forced to stop working to be married off instead for the economic gains of her greedy mother-in-law.

Being a Wife

A woman in most societies, if not all, is expected to get married and raise a family of her own as soon as she is deemed capable of doing so. In most Asian countries, parents are motivated by different factors such as economic stability, continuation of lineage, and political gains to encourage, even push, their daughters to married life. After being a daughter, a woman is thus expected to leave her parents' home and be with her husband to take on another image, that of being a wife, which almost always relegates her to becoming the inessential Other (de Beauvoir, 2011).

At a young age, Giri knew that the valuation of a girl is determined by the bride price given by the groom-to-be to her family, and that as a girl, she could only silently submit to her commodification having no autonomy over her body. Likewise, becoming a wife was Giri's exhibition of filial piety ascertaining that

her father was not made a laughing stock in their place and that he would have a good reward after death because his daughter fulfilled her dharma: "the responsibility that parents felt, to avoid any chance of pre-marital sex, and to avoid the criticism of their community about having an unmarried daughter" (Rathor, 2011). The pressure to be married at a young age is caused by the fact that in India, it would be harder to find a suitable older man and the dowry to be paid would be higher if the girl being married off is older.

Jashoda, in the short story "Breast Giver" by Mahasweta Devi was also married off at a young age. She was still young and healthy and a new mother when her husband met an accident thus she was forced to become the family provider. Though tired from her job, she was still expected to perform her wifely duties such as doing the household chores as well as the bidding of her husband when she came home. It was only when the master's wife talked to her husband that he attempted to help her accomplish some chores.

Like Giri and Jashoda, Hsiang Ling became a wife as well. When she became a widow, her mother-in-law arranged for her second wedding to gain profit to finance Hsiang Ling's younger brother-in-law's wedding and the old woman's personal needs.

As illustrated in the experiences of Giribala, Jashoda, and Hsiang Ling, becoming a wife is not a choice for an Asian woman to make. She is compelled to become one by her parents or elders at a very young age which makes her miss out on the fun of being young. Instead, becoming a wife continues her journey into life-long servitude, submission and self-sacrifice that began when she became a daughter to her parents.

Being a Mother

After being a daughter and wife, a woman is then expected to become a mother to fulfil her function as "a womb". Society dictates this order when one is born a girl. In the case of the main women characters in the selected Asian stories, three of the five had their lives progress in this prescribed order: Giri in "Giribala", Jashoda in "Breast Giver", and Hsiang Ling in "The Widow". Mabuti in "Kwento ni Mabuti" became a mother but not a wife.

Giri mothered four girls, with her two elder daughters being sold by their father in the guise of marriage. She did not talk about the incident or the anger and the betrayal she felt towards her husband after her eldest daughter was sold refusing to talk to him at all. But when their second daughter was sold, she finally succumbed to her mother hen instinct and made a decision that shocked the whole community – she left her husband.

In the case of Jashoda, she biologically mothered 20 children and wet nursed more than 50 children from the household of her mistress who treated her well and provided food for her family in return. Wet nursing a succession of babies in the Haldar's household became Jashoda's main source of income for quite some time as this suited the needs of the mistress's sons and her daughters-in-law, with the latter perceiving that not breastfeeding their babies would prevent their body disfigurement.

Mabuti, on the other hand, was a single parent to a 6-year-old daughter so she did not technically become a wife, only a lover to a man who is already married to someone else, an act for which she paid a heavy price to her community. Working

as a teacher, she kept much of her private life except for the stories she shared about her little girl revealing her dedication and deep love for her daughter.

Among the four characters, Hsiang Ling had the vaguest memory of being a mother and was made fun of by people for it. She had a son with her second husband, but the toddler vanished completely having been eaten by a wolf. This terrifying occurrence finally broke Hsiang Ling's weakened grasp on reality returning to work as a servant with faltering hands and with a faraway look in her eyes no longer wanting to talk. Sadly, no one wanted to listen anyway.

Becoming a mother continues the self-sacrifice and subjugation of a woman as illustrated by the circumstances of the women characters. Giri's daughters being married off by her husband caused her a lot of pain but she could not hit back at her husband and Jashoda had to be perpetually bearing children in order to earn a living wet nursing babies in her employer's household. Mabuti braved the scornful eyes of her community to raise her child from an illicit relationship and Hsiang Ling was perceived by her community as an unworthy mother for not being able to save her son from a wolf and so scorned for it.

Being a Mistress

Aside from the common images of being a daughter, wife and mother that are embodied by the women protagonists in the analysed stories, a fourth image – that of being a mistress - was shown in the story of Mabuti. Typically, the word mistress is associated with a kept woman, much like a whore who has no means of supporting herself. As postulated by Elson and Pearson (in Carby, 2018), if a woman loses her job in a world market factory after she has reshaped her life based on a wage income, the only way she may have of surviving is by commodifying her body. Mabuti's life however has not gone such route because she could very well support herself by being a teacher. She just decided to have the baby from her affair with the married doctor making her an atypical mistress.

Being a Rebel

A fifth image of a woman is presented in Draupadi's story, which is that of being a rebel. There is a general perception that women of color had been molded by western traditions to be docile, submissive, and patient. Consequently, even today, many find it unpleasant when a woman goes against expectations and proves to be steadfast, unafraid, and independent. In the case of Draupadi, in the short story with the same title, she was perceived as a threat to peace, a cancer to the society for being a rebel fighting for the rights of her own people. Despite being viewed as a threat to the order the militia has created, Draupadi was still considered weak for being a woman until she was able to display her extraordinary resilience and courage as a fully committed rebel.

As seen in the five selected stories, the common roles played by Asian (Chinese, Indian, and Filipino) women in the society are as daughters, wives and mothers. In addition, some become mistresses and even rebels juggling their various roles as if these were a natural extension of a woman's self. In reality, these roles or images of themselves are constructions that have been imposed on girls by their community (Berger & Luckman, 1966). While growing up, girls are socialized to believe that their roles in life begins with being a daughter and

progresses to being a wife and then a mother. If a woman breaches such order, then she is frowned upon by society such as in the case of Mabuti and Draupadi.

Asian Women's Role Expectations and Consequences

The labels attached to girls as they grow older - daughter, wife and mother - come with attached expectations. As discussed in the preceding chapter the most common expectations for a woman in whatever role she is performing is for her to be submissive and self-sacrificing to keep her family and community happy, which effectively puts her in servitude and subjugation with often dire and tragic consequences. In the Asian community, for instance, the existence of domestic abuse receives little or no public acknowledgment. Some people would comment on it, some would even rant about it on social media but when exposed in real-time events, oftentimes people shrug their shoulders dismissing it as domestic and personal concerns. Under the veil of traditional practices and values as well as apathy, violence in the family and in the community continues to grow, and the women continue to suffer generally in silence. These experiences are mirrored in the different situations the women characters were exposed to as detailed below.

Giribala, an only daughter, was married off at a young age to a lazy, deceitful, and irresponsible man. Although the man's sinister character was exposed to Giri's parents when he came bearing different gifts, they still decided to let him marry their daughter. Even the maid of Babu, the man's employer, was certain of the bleak future Giri was facing as a newly arrived bride:

what kind of heartless parents would give a young girl to a no- good ganja addict? How can he feed you? He has nothing. Gets a pittance taking care of the babu's cattle and doing odd jobs. Who knows how he manages to feed himself, doing whatever else he does! If you've been brought up on rice (on which Giri was), my dear, you'd be wise enough to go home tomorrow to leave behind the bits of silver that you have on you (Devi, p. 4)

The 14-year old Giri was advised to go home, but she resolved not to do so to keep her own silvers, instead, busying herself with creating mud paste to make do with what her current situation had to offer.

Through the years of her marriage, Giri lived in dismal poverty giving birth to four children in their hovel in close succession. She got herself employed in the babu household with meals as her wage and her children followed in her footsteps as soon as they were capable of working, also being paid with meals instead of money.

After the birth of her fourth child, Giri took it upon herself to get sterilized and was beaten for her action but stoically endured her punishment to stop the tragedy that happened to her elder daughters. Despite being taciturn, she knew what she wanted and acted on it despite the odds. In this sense, her stubbornness makes her resilient and a survivor.

Seeing her sagging roof, which is an apt metaphor of her life, Giri decided to go ask her father's help in fixing it leaving behind her marriageable eldest daughter. Upon her return, she learned that her husband already married off her eldest daughter without telling her as "nobody ever imagined that she could think on her own, let alone act on her thought." Giri and her father tried to get the girl

back but the child could not be found. In the end, the missing girl was philosophically explained away by her father saying "it's as if the girl has sacrificed her life to provide her father with money for a house." Although totally devastated, Giri kept her peace and grieved silently on her own.

Despite the time that passed, Giri still thought of her missing daughter and even attempted to write her a letter with the help of Babu although it was never sent. This attempt however shows Giri's sensitivity and how she thinks outside of the box negating the notion of those around her that she cannot think for herself; that she is a typical village girl. In fact, her silence is a witness to her agonies and her hard work is to silence her longing for her daughter. Giri did everything she could to protect her second daughter but this would be futile as she ended with the same fate as that of her first born.

Silently working to feed and clothe her children as well as quietly bearing all the physical pains as well as psychological upheavals brought by her marriage, Giri portrays the plight of many women in Asia even to this day.

Another character reflective of the current plight of women in the marginalized sector is Jashoda in Devi's "Breast-Giver". The title of the story is quite suggestive aside from the fact that the image it creates is very strong. A woman is often described based on the size of her breast that even the prestigious Ms. Universe beauty contest has created an imagined contour of a woman who is considered appealing and attractive. Teenagers, even some mature women, are bothered by the issue of breast size to the point of going through some surgical procedures to enhance their beauty, but not a single thought or study in this sense is completely dedicated to the life-giving power of the breast - perhaps since it seems a natural and totally domestic affair (Nowshin, 2014).

Jashoda was a young wife and a very healthy breast-feeding mother whose struggles begun dramatically when her husband lost his legs. To feed and clothe her family, she worked as a wet nurse in the house of Mrs. Halder for many years.

The description of Jashoda's wet nursing in the house of Mr. Halder demonstrates the commodification of her body – particularly her womb and her breasts - so she could feed her husband and children. In this sense, these parts of a woman's body are also viewed paradoxically: they are sexualized to objectify and commodify her but, at the same time, honoured for being life vessels. Both ways nonetheless expose a woman to abuse particularly those who have no means of fighting back.

When the mistress died and Jashoda no longer served as the Halder household's wet nurse, she was faced with what most people fear - uselessness. Her feeling of uselessness was intensified by the fact that she was later on diagnosed with cancer but neither her husband nor her children, nor her milkchildren were willing to look after her. Jashoda's situation reflects the state of women who are revered when still capable of providing for others, but are disposed of when already deemed useless.

Fighting one's own battle is a shared experience among the women characters in this study, but none as defiant as Draupadi, whose real name is Dopdi Meyhenfaces, 27 years old and married. She left her family and had long ago gone underground to fight for her people's rights. She is an unusual everyday Indian woman in her empowered state openly going against societal expectations on women of her class: subservient and unthinking. Draupadi thus exemplify real

empowered persons who can make choices even if they were denied this ability (Kabeer, 2005).

To break her indomitable spirit, Draupadi was caught, gang-raped, and made to appear before the military head to be sentenced. Shaming through rape, based on the premise that a woman's honor is closely associated with her chastity, is perceived to destroy a woman's self-image and integrity (Simon-Kerr, 2008). This practice of questioning a woman's integrity is cultural and has been used by the Asian justice system to impeach a woman witness based on her sexual history. For most Asians, a woman's honor and credibility are associated with her sexual virtue (female uprightness being equated to her reputation for sexual purity or chastity) and not her character for truth-telling as truth itself is prescribed differently for women and men (Simon-Kerr, 2018). Thus, the easiest way of destroying Draupadi's influence on her community is to destroy her sexually, all the more painfully through gang rape, especially because she is already a married woman.

Mabuti, the fifth of the women characters in this study, seemingly lives up to being a *mistress* as the term can mean 'a teacher' as well as 'a whore' or 'a concubine' (Erickson, 2008). Mabuti, a teacher, is expected to behave formally and with integrity but she has a secret that if revealed, the community would certainly use to define her as a person; she happens to have a love child with a married man. Thus, Mabuti embodies both the respectable and the derogatory connotations of being a mistress. Interestingly, having an affair outside of marriage has gender ascription: married men who have kept women are viewed mainly positively (being macho and normal) while women who are tagged as mistress are seen purely in a negative light without regard for the circumstances surrounding their being one such as in the case of Mabuti.

Hsiang Ling, the woman who was widowed twice and whose son was eaten by a wolf was left to suffer alone in the end. After she lost husband, she was sold by her mother-in-law and after she lost her second husband, she was driven away by her brother-in-law from her husband's house. Psychologically affected by her experiences, Hsiang Ling was no longer able to perform well as a servant so her employers thought of disposing of her and her services. Her case demonstrates how society values those who are perceived to be useful and how it quickly discards those who no longer have marketability and usefulness as experienced by Jashoda in "Breast Giver." As a last indignity to her tragic life, Hsiang Ling was perceived as selfish for dying on New Year's Eve.

The depiction of the women characters in their respective Asian societies illuminate the various horrific consequences attached to expectations of their embodied gender roles. Although some proved more empowered to choose their roles such as Draupadi being a rebel and Mabuti being a single parent to a love child, in the end, all the women were made to pay heavily for the gendered choices that were mostly forced upon them but were socialized to internalize that it is an essential part of their being a woman.

Asian Women's Attempts at Resilience in their Gendered World

The concept of resilience has been used to describe and understand the different experiences of persons when dealing with risks and survival especially among the marginalized sectors of society such as the women. Van Breda (2018)

pointed out various ways in which the concept has been perceived: "resilience as something intrinsic to the individual, while others refer to it in a more holistic sense. Some refer to resilience as the competencies or capacities of people, while others refer to it as positive functioning in the face of adversity." The theory on resilience evolved from adversity and how hostile life experiences influence people detrimentally. Resilience is defined as "an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences" (Rutter in Shean, 2015, p.5). In other words, resilience is shown when "some individuals have a relatively good outcome despite having experienced serious stresses or adversities" (Rutter, 2013 via Shean 2015, p.5). Rutter further theorized that individuals possessing protective factors of mental features/operations such as planning, self-control, self-reflection, sense of agency, self-confidence, and determination have more control and success in changing situations in their lives.

A woman subjected to the power of men and society, therefore, can still have the will to create a life that is suitable and bearable for her. The five women, Giribala, Draupadi, Jashoda, Mabuti, and Hsiang Ling went through different life situations and events that led them to making bold and critical decisions. Unfortunately for these women, their social relationships that are a primal need for protection from emotional and behavioral disturbances, according to Rutter, were non-existent. Therefore, Giri was forced to keep silent about her worries and grief given her community's gendered beliefs and apathy towards her concern over her daughters; Jashoda was disposed of by those expected to protect her as she was no longer useful and marketable for them; Hsiang Ling suffered a similar fate to Jashoda, also being discarded by her employers for no longer proving useful in their household; Draupadi, for her part, was cheated and betrayed by a member of the community she thought was protecting her; and Mabuti was effectively isolated for going against the norms of her society. Though these women were disadvantaged and silenced by the rigid norms and mores of their society, they were all able to experience a turning point which allowed them to disengage from their past and provided them instead with an opportunity for [constructive] change. In the end, Giri finally had the strength to leave her husband bringing along her children. Her determination and seriousness of purpose was shown in how she "walked down the big road and caught the early morning bus to the town." That morning was not foreseen even in the wildest imagination of anyone in her village. Giri's final act was a way of redeeming herself and also of removing her children away from her husband's abuse and from those who view women and children as economic commodities meant to provide for their pecuniary needs.

Draupadi, a woman, who joined the rebels' cause against the tyranny of the oppressors, has long understood her disadvantaged position and powerlessness in the society as well as how her kind is silenced by power and fear. She joined the leftist group after her tribe was denied access to drinking water and the tribe retaliated by killing Surja Sahu, the local kingpin, and his sons. Draupadi's resilience in spite of her misfortunes culminated in her refusal to submit to honor shaming. By doing so, she was able to display her "ability to adapt and restore equilibrium in her life through her determined engagement with the negative life circumstance" (Werner-Wilson, Zimmerman, & Whalen in Hyland, 2014, p.12).

She refused to howl or act as a helpless victim; instead, she walked unashamed and confident in the strong morning sun towards Senanayak in her nakedness and her two mangled breasts. The army was baffled, terrified, and mortified as she confronted them with the truth in a voice that is chilling, sky splitting, and piercing. Draupadi, as argued by Sinha and Vishwavidyalaya (2016), is a "very successful portrayal of what happens to women when they are seen as objects. By presenting her mutilated body as "the object of your search" (p.492) she stressed the materiality of what women are for men; literally a 'target' on which they can exercise their power. In the end, she was able to show her power through her unbreakable spirit as she kept her dignity and refused to be frightened.

Women are always subjected to defining their vulnerable position no matter whether they are mothers, daughters, or wives. Jashoda 's value was high when she was at her most fertile stage. In her dying breath, she was able to ask and question the choices she made. Death might have stopped her from bouncing off her lowly state, but as she had recognized even during her pain the callousness of people, her acceptance and regret coupled with her death are as maintained by Masten (in Jefferis & Theron, 2018) "a resilience [that] denotes recovery from trauma without subsequent growth."

Mabuti's resilience is seen in how lovingly she describes and talks about her six-year-old daughter despite the reality that she is forced to limit her social relationships to keep secret her "transgression against Philippine society". Both her profession and her society dictate that she keeps the identity of her child's father or she loses her job (this story was written before Republic Act 7836 known as the Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994). At the start, Mabuti's empowerment and resilience were revealed when she still chose to have her child despite being aware that it was cultural taboo to get involved in an illicit relationship. Furthermore, she committed to being a support to students who are quietly suffering. This involvement indicates that she had grown better than her old self. Jordan (cited in Jefferies & Theron, 2018) posited that the "gender-stereotypical behaviors of women, such as maintaining relationships as nurturers and carers, enable women and girls culturally-aligned positive connections; being mutually-supportive of each other are the keys to their resilience." He further explained "that women and girls draw strength in positive connections to others and this fosters courage and self-esteem" (p.2).

The widow, Hsiang Ling, is another marginalized woman who tried her best to be resilient but was not given a second chance both by her society and fate as she died abandoned in the end. Hsiang Ling had experienced a lot of painful and traumatic challenges in her life but she still attempted to bounce back. She was empowered enough to run away from her in-law's household after her first husband died to escape their abuse and worked hard to feed herself until her mother-in-law forcibly brought her back to their village. She bore the pain of losing her second husband and son quietly as well as the rebuke and the insults of the people around her. Her silent endurance and resilience prove how she values herself and her freedom affirming the claim of Walsh (1996) that "resilience is residing within the individual, [with the family often dismissed as dysfunctional]."

Although Hsiang Ling had demonstrated her resilience amidst all her trials, Kabeer (2005) suggested that there must be alternatives - the ability to have chosen differently - to give disadvantaged people like her a better fighting chance

to survive. With the closest people turning away from her, it seems that death is thus her last hope of liberation as in the end she could no longer provide for her own needs with her deteriorating physical and mental health. After all, “[p]overty and disempowerment generally go hand in hand, because an inability to meet one's basic needs - and the resulting dependence on powerful others to do so - rules out the capacity for meaningful choice. This absence of choice is likely to affect ... intensifying the effects of poverty (Kabeer, 2015, p. 14).”

The main characters in the selected stories - Giribala, Jashoda, Draupadi, Mabuti, and Hsiang Ling - are all Asian who were deprived of their voices because of their being women by their respective societies validating Simone de Beauvoir's (in Devika, 2016) claim "that the history of humanity is a history of systematic attempts to silence the female" (p.37). Moreover, the "men had subjugated the women to their will, used them as a means of selfish gratification, to minister to their sexual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting their comfort; but never desired to elevate the women to the ranks they were created to fill" (Grimke in Devika 2016). Indeed, the women characters were pressured and forced to succumb to the demands of the society and their men, but in the end, they proved resilient and displayed varying degrees of empowerment enduring all the physical, mental, and spiritual pains caused by their subjugation although some of them had to die to be completely liberated from their oppression.

Asian Women being Othered for their Gendered Roles

A woman in her role as a mother, daughter, or wife is viewed as a help whose usefulness and value are assessed through the services she can render given that she is not considered an autonomous being (de Beauvoir, 2011). Nowshin (2014) observed that "their sufferings have long been avoided and were not even considered as 'wrong' but the usual consequences of everyday life. Every woman does not belong to the upper class or face the fate of misery, or not every woman has the same tragedy to endure but many of them have similarities. They have similar stories of indifferent pronouncement and different situations."

When Giri decided to take total control of her life, the "people were so amazed, even stunned ... they were left speechless, perplexed by her guts to leave a husband." The villagers' reaction echoes people's essentializing of the prevailing gender inequities in society today as they benefit from [these] existing gender norms, and/or see these inequalities as natural and not open to change (UKAid, 2015). This gender inequity that clearly disadvantages women reinforces the notion that it is inherently divine for a woman to do what she does without questioning the one in authority (Kyomuhendo Bantebya et al., as cited in Marcus & Harper, 2014, p. 56).

Draupadi, the rebel woman, was feared by the army men who are abusing the marginalized group. She was considered very dangerous and must, therefore, be taken into custody, without discounting the possibility that she could be 'countered', which means she could still be killed even if she had surrendered. Her fearsome reputation grew as she rose to power with accounts of how firm and brave she is during encounters with her nemesis. Indeed, society can find it troubling and terrifying when a person, especially a woman going against the norm, has learned to stand her ground and to face adversities with dignity as exemplified by Draupadi.

Jashoda past her prime was totally othered by those she previously served well. She was cast aside by her own family and the Hadar children whom she wet nursed while they were babies. As pointed out by Kaur (2018), she “has been heartlessly misused by a wide range of people - her husband, her kids, her milk-children as well as by her master. There is nothing wonderful about her motherly figure and it is just a successful ploy to misuse her.” Susan Wadley (in Sharma, Pandit, Pathak, & Sharma, 2013) contextualizes Jashoda’s plight by observing that “the Indian woman is constantly made to adopt contradictory roles – the nurturing roles as daughters, mothers, wives, and as daughters-in-law, and the stereotyped role of a weak and helpless woman. The latter is fostered to ensure complete dependence on the male sex. Consequently, the constant movement from strength to passivity leads to enormous stress placing the woman's mental health under constant threat.” Jashoda was not able to overcome her deteriorating physical health despite her resilience and her desire to be saved from the excruciating pain brought by breast cancer. Sadly, there was also no one who offered her even just emotional support while she was in pain.

In the case of Mabuti, her othering is in the form of her apparent voluntary isolation from society constantly conscious of the fact that she if her secret is revealed, she would be shunned by people around her or worse, she would certainly lose her job given that her “sin” – to have an affair with a married man – is one of the biggest taboos in Philippine society.

Finally, Hsiang Ling as a broken woman is now othered by her Chinese community, viewing her as a nuisance. When she was in her prime and was deemed very useful, she was deeply valued by her employer and praised by people around her for her diligence but when she started having mental lapses, her employer also started treating her as if she were a useless invalid. People consciously made fun of her but she remained stoic through it all, choosing to just “stare vacantly and say nothing.”

Ungar posited in Verma (2015) that ‘where there is potential for exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that build and sustain their wellbeing, and their individual and collective capacity to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaning ways. These dual processes of navigation and negotiation are important. They emphasize that individuals engage in processes that demonstrate resilience when they take advantage of the opportunities they have and do better when they exercise influence over what those opportunities are and how they are provided.’ The five women have experienced significant adversities and all of them have tried to bounce back and establish a meaningful life, but their imagined communities are not supportive and sympathetic seeing them as nothing but another body to provide the whims of those in power, hence, they are forcibly silenced by society’s apathy and inability to lend support.

Giribala, Draupadi, and Mabuti continued to be resilient despite the odds. They have learned to take their space in the universe and have fought for it the best way they could. While Jashoda and Hsiang Ling both fought to the last of their breath, they found their peace by revealing the monstrosities of the communities that ought to have supported them. Indeed, the five women's values reflect the premise of Morton in Roddannavar (2016) that “labor is a sexual

partition between productive labor (masculine) and reproductive labor (feminine) based on the essential notion of sexual difference. This sexual variance of labor has orthodoxly devalued and ignored the material specificity of women's domestic work, including childbirth and mothering because these forms of work do not directly produce exchange value or money." Thus, the sacrifices the women have committed are devalued.

Conclusion

Asian womanhood as could be gleaned from the analyzed narratives and stories is a gendered state embodied in the common roles assigned to women anywhere in Asia: daughter, mother, and wife. In this context, the oppression of women is often brought about by the expectations of their naturalized self-extension - a quiet and submissive daughter, wife or mother whose life revolves around her family and so receives very little to no attention from her community. Such oppression is often dismissed as a purely domestic and personal affair so there is no need for community intervention despite obvious signs that women in the community are being subjected to various forms of abuse by their family. Thus, a woman who decides to take matters in her own hands by leaving her home, rebelling, questioning her circumstances is generally frowned upon by the Asian society. As seen in the representative works, not all of the protagonists overcome their tragic lives in the end; nonetheless, all five women manage to convey that the concept of womanhood still prevailing in Asia, particularly in China, India, and the Philippines, today is actually the cause of many women's continuing oppression and difficult life.

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