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The Male Gaze as an Agent of Patriarchy: A Comparative Analysis of “Apologies for Living On” and Andheri Local”

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Abstract

Aims: A critical examination of the intersection of Male Gaze and violence in Meena Kandasamy’s “Apologies for Living On” and Arundhati Subramaniam’s “Andheri Local” through a Gynocentric lens, can analyze how the poems portray the Male Gaze as a form of violence that perpetuates patriarchal power dynamics, objectifies women’s bodies, and reinforces oppressive social norms. This article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of power and oppression that shape women’s experiences. By examining the intersection of male gaze and violence in these poems.

Methodology and Approaches: To obtain the aims the methodology of Close reading of the texts; Imagery, Tone, Voice, Symbolism, and Metaphor analysis are done. The article also uses various approaches like Comparative analysis, Patriarchy theory, Feminist Literary Criticism, Intersectionality, and Critical Discourse analysis to validate the objective of the study.

Outcomes: A deeper understanding of the ways in which male gaze is portrayed in the contemporary Indian poetry.

Conclusion and Suggestions: The analysis highlights the importance of considering the intersectionality of patriarchy, caste, and class in understanding the operations of male gaze. Future research can explore the ways in which male gaze is resisted in other forms like films, novels, media, and short stories.

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The concept of the male gaze was notably articulated by the feminist theorist Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. The feminist theorist argues that through male gaze, how women are objectified in Literature, often female characters are prioritized for their physical appearance and sexuality which reduce them into mere object for men's pleasure rather than fully developed personas. The Male plays with the power dynamics, perpetuates traditional gender roles and marks the Gaze patriarchal dominance in social structure of the society. Similarly, the other feminist critics like Julia Kristeva who works on male gaze with expertise in psychoanalysis and feminist theory. She points out that 'Male Gaze' is a key mechanism through which women are objected and marginalized. "The gaze is not just a matter of seeing, but also of being seen, and thus, of being constructed as a subject." (*Powers of Horror*) "The male gaze is a mechanism of control, a way of imposing a patriarchal order on the world." (*Desire in Language*)

The poem "Apologies for Living On" starts with a sarcastic tone where the poet represents women as marginalized who needs to apologize for their physical existence in the society. Meena Kandasamy mentions the gender hierarchy in the society formed by the traditional social structure to maintain their patriarchal dominance. The social mobility of the female gender was restricted. she was locked in a social space where her individuality is denied. So she wants to return back to her mother's womb where she is free from molestation. She wants to liberate herself from unjust societal structure created by patriarchy. She proclaims that no prince of charm will come and save her from this misery as mentioned in tales.

The sarcastic comments painted by others on her body made her to cease her own dreams and desire. She was unable to find the light in the darkness of the world. The darkness of the night is engulfing her completely. She hides her from that wretched darkness which infested the crimes against the female gender. Kandasamy cited about the 'butt patting and breast pinching' in her lines which allude to molestation and how male fetishize about women's bodies. She refers to the moon also as a stalker who threatens her sense of freedom. Reading back from

the first line again helps one to emphasize the regret of being women in this criticizing society.

In “Andheri Local”, Arundhathi Subramaniam breaks away from the limitations and discloses the individualistic experience of every female in Andheri women’s compartment in Bombay. She addresses that each woman has same physical organs like ovaries, uterus and blood runs through their bodies which carries the same string of agony called patriarchy. The symbolic representation of the Goddess Khali, who was nude and wild but worshiped by people. Equally women who carry their dreams on the wheels need to respect rather than being objectified in the society. In the end, she brings out with a mild protest of choosing her own dreams rather than being his lover’s. “When I descend / I could choose / to dice carrots / or dice a lover.” (Subramaniam 14 - 18)

These two poems, “Apologies for Living On” and “Andheri Local”, touch upon the concept of how women set in voyage of chasing their dreams were denied of their autonomy and agency, due to objectification and sexualizing their body parts. The Personas description about the “terrified princess” and “helpless girl” represent the societal expectations and, which extend to a sense of powerlessness and self-doubt. It also shows the vulnerability in the face of trauma. The poetry is glutted with fear and anxiety from the harassment and sarcastic comments. Preferably the Personas is waiting for death rather being a victim of the unfair world. In spite of the pervasive male gaze, the persona finds moments of resistance and reclamation. The desire for the freedom and autonomy were seen from the act of running away from the “brutal world” and into the “caress of a million stars”. “I am locked away / a terrified princess waiting / for-death-and-not-any-brave-prince” (Kandasamy 7 - 9)

Subsequently, Kandasamy criticizes the reserved compartment for women, as in Andheri local women compartment, which carries physical and emotional journey like suffocation of women with real life disaster. Both the poems act as a rebellion creating the space for female mobility. They are directly calling out the agents of Male Gaze which emphasizes the unequal power dynamics at play. The Personas deny that women bodies are not meant for the consumption of men. The

ambition, desire and dreams were restricted on the threat of violence upon their bodies or belittled by the sarcastic comments on their character.

Women were constantly subjected to social control due to the historical perception of their bodies. The Ideal Femininity of the women was defined by their layer of covering up or being submissive to the state of control. Kandasamy wants to voice out the language of sub version through her poem; Subramaniam shows a hint of resistance by asserting her own identity, despite of being objectified by male gaze. Women seek out for emotional support in the self-serving world, where Kandasamy mourns that even the love once knew is not capable of bringing her back from the hurtful past experiences. The Moon is a striking symbol which is cited as the “immodest ogler” and “lecherous stalker”, to showcase the predatory nature of men. The moon gaze is active and voyeuristic which make the speaker feel vulnerable and exposed. In ‘Andheri local’ the poem describes the experience of being watched and objectified by the men in the train. The constant surveillance makes the women face the imbalance in public areas. The “Apologies for Living On” was more in personal tone and introspective. It conveys a sense of longing and desperation in resonating the pain. It also uses metaphors but the speaker seems more trapped and helpless in showing resistance instead she criticizes the power dynamics in sarcastic tone. In terms of “Andheri local”, the tone is very assertive with descriptive language which offers an explicit resistance to the male gaze. Both the poems, highlights the context of patriarchal agent with reference to culture, power and identity and their impacts on women’s life.

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