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The Kreutzer Sonata: The Portrait of Woman in the Chains of Sexuality and Inferior Stereotypes of 19th Century Russian Society

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Abstract--Women's inferiority persists, particularly in patriarchal societies. In Russia, women have always been treated as second-class citizens to men. As a result, because it is a system that already exists in society, women's inferiority is the fundamental problem of inequality for women in Russia. The novel *The Kreutzer Sonata* explores the inferiority of female characters in nineteenth-century Russia, where the church's influence is still strong. The aims of the research were to examine about women inferiority and struggle in patriarchal society as portrayed in the novel *The Kreutzer Sonata* by Leo Tolstoy. The data was collected using the following methods: 1) attentively reading the novel to determine which sections featured inferiority and struggle, and 2) collecting notes and marking the facts of inferiority in the marriage and society. 3) Categorizing; and 4) analyzing. Based on the research, it was discovered that there were two major forms of women's inferiority: 1) the feeling of powerlessness in decision of marriages. This powerlessness happens to both the mother and the daughters. 2) being subjected to discriminatory treatment, such as a lack of freedom and mobility based only on sexuality, as well as physical abuse and loss of inheritance.

Keywords--inferiority, marriages, Russian society, sexual, women.

Introduction

Sexuality is often associated with female figures, even sex and women become an inseparable whole. In fact, this concept has placed women in an inferior position because women only function sexually as satisfying men's desires (De Beauvoir, 2010; Miller, 1998). In the context of religion, women's sexuality is valued through marriage. With marriage, the seductive sexuality of women becomes a natural and moral element because it is carried out according to God's norms and rules. The Kreutzer Sonata highlights these three things holistically. Sexuality, women, and marriage are described as links that bind each other. This novel also describes how men view these three things in 19th century Russian society. Stereotypes of women as inferiors who only play a role in domestic and reproductive roles are the result of the highly subjective socio-cultural construction of 19th century Russian society that ultimately limits, complicates, harms, and impoverishes women. Even though it was written almost two centuries ago, the issue of stereotypes against women can still be found in the society around us in this modern era (Johnston, 2016; Doan, 2010; Sheehan & Vadjunec, 2016).

This stereotype is passed down from generation to generation and is unconsciously preserved in society. The way of thinking of some women and some men has been indoctrinated by a culture that places men in a superior position and women in an inferior position. The Kreutzer Sonata, a novella by the legendary Russian writer Leo Tolstoy provides an overview of the lives of women in a fanatical religious society (Wyman, 2015). How can an idea about marriage and sexuality be able to provide a comprehensive picture of a woman's figure and at the same time explore the polemic of women's characteristics so that they eventually become individuals who are positioned as second class. The Kreutzer sonata presents Tolstoy's controversial concept of marriage, religion, and Russian society's view of the relationship between men and women, which indirectly highlights the position of women in 19th century Russian society. This study will reveal in detail how the ideas of sexuality and marriage in 19th century Russian society and how this concept influenced the role and position of Russian women (Gbaguidi & Allagbe, 2018; Artawan, 2016).

Literature review

19th century Russian society

Russia is a country controlled by an Autocratic Monarchy. This regime was based entirely on an imperial state which had a military and administrative hierarchy that was centrally coordinated under the supervision of an absolute monarchy. This tradition of feudal autocracy made Russian society subservient and obedient to the empire and the church. Orthodox Christian beliefs are also increasingly limiting people's freedom because the influence of the church dominates state life and Russian society in general (Abous & Aziz, 2021; Salem et al., 2021). Orthodox Christian beliefs and State Law at that time also supported the concept of patriarchy as the highest authority. This has resulted in women not having the right to their wealth and unable to work outside the home. Land and property rights still belong to men and can only be passed on to sons, while daughters are

expected to marry and then follow the men's family. Marriage is therefore a very important thing for women. Without marriage, women will not have a position in society given that their ordained role is as administrator of household affairs. 19th century Russian society expressed this role not only in social life but also in the context of religious life (Leahy, 1986). In the 19th century Russian society was fanatical Christian; This understanding divide society into two groups, namely the clergy (church) and the religious community (general public). Clergy such as Pastors and Sisters are required to serve God and the Church as a whole. Therefore, they were forbidden to marry. Meanwhile, the general public is bound by a sacred marriage agreement that men and women must marry only once in their lifetime. This teaching also gives a bond to women and men that marriage lasts a lifetime and can only be separated by God through death. Thus, women in 19th century Russian society were shackled in religious rituals and in societal customs. Women are not allowed to work outside the home and are therefore bound by marriage which requires them to submit to the legality of marriage and live forever in the confines of tradition and religion (Saelens & Epstein, 1996; Burger, 2002).

The position of women in 19th century Russian society

The position of women in Russian society at this time still did not get a proper position and status. The entry of Orthodox Christianity in Russia in 1888 changed the way people view and think about women. The role of women in society is always associated with their dominance in the domestic sphere. Women are considered the most appropriate to work in household matters with their husbands as the backbone of the economy. Elfira says that Russian society still considers women as a second-class society. The position of women has always been marginalized and under the domination of men or patriarchal culture (Elfira, 2008). Factors of religion and customs also support the concept of patriarchy as the highest power. This resulted in the position of women is no longer equal to men. The injustices received make women still oppressed in domestic life, enslaved by domestic tasks, and have to bear the burden of fulfilling domestic material needs. Women are obliged to regulate the domestic area; take care of the house, raise children, and take care of the husband. Women are no longer allowed to work outside the home (Abramson, 1984; Deigh, 1996).

This view is further strengthened by the laws and religious rules adopted by most of the European-Russian society, namely Russian Orthodox. Women have been considered as tempters and sinners in this world (Vikash, 2021). This is based on the church's tradition which is scripture-oriented and which is theologically very patriarchal. One of the ideas is taken from the story of Adam-Eve which tells that when women are separated from men because of sin, women cannot manifest the image of God. Thus, what can then be done is to position the position of women under the leadership of men. This way of thinking then makes society indoctrinated by a culture that places men in a superior position and women in an inferior position (Kimura et al., 2001; Verbeek & Hayward, 2019).

Method

The researcher uses descriptive qualitative method to support. This strategy transforms the data into a descriptive form by interpreting and describing it. The object of the research is a novel written by Leo Tolstoy entitled *The Kreutzer Sonata*, the intrinsic elements of the novel are the main data in this research. The researcher examined and classified all dialogues, monologues, and other aspects that depict women's inferiority, marriages, and social status in the novel. There are two processes to gathering information and sources that will be used to support this research. The major source data for this study is Tolstoy's novel 'The Kreutzer Sonata', and the secondary source data are several steps to achieve the objective of this research (Tolstoy, 1889).

Discussion

Sex and sexuality are always associated with women. In patriarchal culture, women's bodies are consumed as sex objects, ideological objects, and objects of view. Women's bodies are given certain meanings which are culturally only sex, so that a woman's body which is full of beauty is a sex object that can be seen and enjoyed by men. Therefore, women are perceived as objects of sexuality to attract the opposite sex.

"Woman is brought up to attract men. It cannot be otherwise. But you will say, perhaps, that that applies only to young girls who are badly brought up, but that there is another education, an education that is serious, in the schools, an education in the dead languages, an education in the institutions of midwifery, an education in medical courses, and in other courses. It is false. "Every sort of feminine education has for its sole object the attraction of men. (*The Kreutzer Sonata*)

In the quote above it is stated that women are essentially figures who have sexual attraction for men. Thus, they are educated and raised to organize and express these sexual desires in order to attract men (Hovers & Vynkovicz-Mytel, 2020; Gede Budasi & Wayan Suryasa, 2021). "Woman is brought up to attract men. It cannot be otherwise feminine education has for its sole object the attraction of men". The teachings that have been taught to women are to serve and please their husbands, of course the initial stage is to attract the attention of men so that they can then marry and have social status in society. Johnson, et.al state that in the orthodox concept, women are seducers because of the sex elements they contain. Society is constructed to assume that women are men's sexual servants and that certain parts of women's bodies are men's sexual attractiveness. As human beings, women are not shown as subjects of consciousness but as objects which in a literal sense are recipients of action or treatment.

Here the woman is a slave, exhibited in the market. But as she cannot bend to her condition, or make advances herself, there begins that other and more abominable lie which is sometimes called GOING INTO SOCIETY, sometimes AMUSING ONE'S SELF, and which is really nothing but the hunt for a husband. (*The Kreutzer Sonata: 35*)

The woman is like a display, a display case on display "here the woman is a slave, exhibited in the market." Women are considered as slaves because they do not have rights in society. As explained by Gorsky that the existence of women in 19th century Russian society is a second class society (Gorsky, 1992). They have

neither property nor inheritance rights and furthermore they are not allowed to have a job other than as housewives. Their existence is only recognized in an inferior position and their success is to have a husband. This condition is a reflection of the absence of gender equality which requires women to depend on men in order to live and be accepted in social life.

“If it were only that! Take all the poetry, the painting, the sculpture, beginning with Pouschkine’s ‘Little Feet,’ with ‘Venus and Phryne,’ and you will see that woman is only a means of enjoyment (*The Kreutzer Sonata*: 54).

She is always the humiliated and corrupt serf, and man remains always the debauched Master. Yes, to abolish slavery, public opinion must admit that it is shameful to exploit one’s neighbor, and, to make woman free, public opinion must admit that it is shameful to consider woman as an instrument of pleasure (*The Kreutzer Sonata*: 56)

Often women are only seen because of the sexuality they have. As an individual their greatest value is their body. The female body is like a beautiful work of art to be admired and enjoyed. From this description we can see that there is gender inequality between women and men. Women are only considered as tools for sexual satisfaction, an object of display whose position is not far from the status of a slave. “Yes, to abolish slavery, public opinion must admit that it is shameful to exploit one’s neighbor, and, to make woman free” Although there has been awareness of this unfair situation, in practice gender inequality still persists in people’s lives. Russia because the patriarchal system is still too strong.

The highest ideal, the best situation of woman, to be pure, to be a vestal, a virgin, excites fear and laughter in our society. How many, how many young girls sacrifice their purity to this Moloch of opinion by marrying rascals that they may not remain virgins,—that is, superiors! Through fear of finding themselves in that ideal state, they ruin themselves (*The Kreutzer Sonata*: 46).

Given that sexuality is always associated with women and the domination of the church is mixed in the governance of Russian society, it is very natural that virginity becomes an important issue in the existence of women. A good woman should still be chaste and only give herself to the man who marries her in a once-in-a-lifetime sacred marriage. Once again, this condition gives us an idea that gender inequality is emerging from the side of women. Women are required to be virgins while men are not bound by rules to protect themselves or make sure they are still virgins.

“In truth, if boys and girls are born equal, the little girls find themselves in a better situation. In the first place, the young girl is not subjected to the perverting conditions to which we are subjected. She has neither cigarettes, nor wine, nor cards, nor comrades, nor public houses, nor public functions. And then the chief thing is that she is physically pure, and that is why, in marrying, she is superior to her husband. She is superior to man as a young girl, and when she becomes a wife in our society, where there is no need to work in order to live, she becomes superior, also, by the gravity of the acts of generation, birth, and nursing (*The Kreutzer Sonata*: 78).

In a larger context, women are considered superior because they do not do the things that men do such as smoking, drinking, or gambling. Women also do not have to be present in the public sphere, they do not need to work, have money, or wealth. “The young girl is not subjected to the perverting conditions to which we are subjected. She has neither cigarettes, nor wine, nor cards, nor comrades, nor

public houses, nor public functions does she become superior, also, by the gravity of the acts of generation, birth, and nursing". In men's point of view, women are not deprived of their rights or do not have the same position, but they are better than men because women do not do bad activities and devote themselves completely to their families (Safina, 2015; Ivankina et al., 2015).

Marriage in Russian society is a very important thing. Perkin says that the state is governed by the power of the Orthodox Church. Therefore, all state regulations are also based on church rules. One of the binding laws between men and women is the marriage relationship. In religion, men and women must marry to give birth to offspring. Therefore, the right relationship between a man and a woman must be through marriage.

People marry in the old fashion, without believing in what they do, and the result is falsehood, violence. When it is falsehood alone, it is easily endured. The husband and wife simply deceive the world by professing to live monogamically. If they really are polygamous and polyandrous, it is bad, but acceptable. But when, as often happens, the husband and the wife have taken upon themselves the obligation to live together all their lives (they themselves do not know why), and from the second month have already a desire to separate, but continue to live together just the same, then comes that infernal existence in which they resort to drink, in which they fire revolvers, in which they assassinate each other, in which they poison each other." (*The Kreutzer Sonata: 17*)

Marriage is something that must be carried out of necessity and obligation. Since marriage is something that should be done casually, it is often the case that men and women marry without knowing what they are getting married for (Cusack & Wolfe, 2007; Harris & Ono, 2005). They do marriage as an obligation that must be done the husband and the wife have taken upon themselves the obligation to live together all their lives (they themselves do not know why), thus in a plural marriage it occurs that women and men marry without love without attraction and a strong foundation as the basis of marriage. Women and men marry only out of necessity and obligation. Therefore, conflicts or domestic violence often occur. However, according to church law they cannot separate and must remain in the marriage bond until death do them part. This situation then makes women more vulnerable when compared to men. Thus, the inferior position of women is clearly visible in the marital relationship.

It is this. The young girls are seated, and the gentlemen walk up and down before them, as in a bazaar, and make their choice. The maidens wait and think, but do not dare to say: 'Take me, young man, me and not her. Look at these shoulders and the rest.' We males walk up and down, and estimate the merchandise, and then we discourse upon the rights of woman, upon the liberty that she acquires, I know not how, in the theatrical halls." (*The Kreutzer Sonata: 35*)

In the tradition of Russian society, women do not have the right to choose the man they want. Even in the more personal context of sexual desire women should only think about it in their mind and should not reveal it to others (Heijnen et al., 2007; Holmes et al., 2009). "The maidens wait and think, but don't dare to say 'Take me, young man, me and not her. Look at these shoulders and the rest". From this quote we can see that women have no right to express what they think and their job is just to wait until the men choose them. Women are likened to a

display; an inanimate object, and therefore only men have the right to voice, opinion, and choose a partner.

“The absence of the rights of woman does not consist in the fact that she has not the right to vote, or the right to sit on the bench, but in the fact that in her affectional relations she is not the equal of man, she has not the right to abstain, to choose instead of being chosen. (*The Kreutzer Sonata*: 37)

The ultimate goal of a woman is a marriage. Therefore, his journey is always associated with finding a man and getting married.

“Women did not know whether they would love or would be loved, and they were married to the first comer, and suffered all their lives. Then you think it was better so?” she continued, evidently addressing the lawyer and myself, and not at all the old man. And what then? You say that marriage is based upon love, and when I give voice to a doubt as to the existence of any other love than sensual love, you prove to me the existence of love by marriage. But in our day marriage is only a violence and falsehood”. “No, pardon me,” said the lawyer. “I say only that marriages have existed and do exist.” (*The Kreutzer Sonata*: 15)

From this quotation, we can see that marriage is very important for women. Therefore, women’s journey is always associated with finding a man and getting married. However, the main point in the practice of marriage is actually more to the existence of social status and not to the relationship between men and women who love each other (Tosi & Rosslyn, 2012; Oliver, 2008). Therefore, marriage that leads to lifelong unhappiness is a problem that is commonly found in the lives of married women. “Women did not know whether they would love or would be loved, and they were married to the first comer, and suffered all their lives. In this context one does not need to love each other to get married. When men want a woman, they marry and then often the couple is shackled in an endless bond and more ironically it is the women who feel the deepest pain.

“But how will you marry people who do not love each other? Only animals can be coupled at the will of a proprietor. But people have inclinations, attachments,” the lady hastened to say”.

“You are wrong to say that, madam,” said the old man. “The animals are beasts, but man has received the law”.

“But, nevertheless, how is one to live with a man when there is no love?” said the lady, evidently excited by the general sympathy and attention. (*The Kreutzer Sonata*: 8)

“Yes, gentlemen,” said the lawyer, “we are still a long way from the European ideas upon marriage. First, the rights of woman, then free marriage, then divorce, as a question not yet solved”.

“The main thing, and the thing which such people as he do not understand,” rejoined the lady, “is that only love consecrates marriage, and that the real marriage is that which is consecrated by love.” (*The Kreutzer Sonata*: 12).

Thus, the most important concept in marriage is actually the bond between a woman and a man based on love and trust. A long-term relationship that must be based on the rights of each individual and the love between them. A marriage without the foundation of love, law and rights is like a struggle for animals. “But how will you marry people who do not love each other? Only animals can be, “The animals are beasts, but man has received the law.” In the conversation it is clear that the woman underlined that marriage must be based on love between a man and a woman. If marriage is only oriented to sex, then the idealism of marriage

has not occurred, and the relationship is just like a struggle between animals (Roger, 2017; Sunarto, 2001).

Conclusion

The socio-cultural architecture of 19th century Russian society resulted in the stereotype of women as inferiors who solely fulfill domestic and reproductive responsibilities. This stereotype is unknowingly perpetuated in society and passed down from generation to generation. A culture that positions males in a superior position and women in a subordinate position has indoctrinated the minds of some women and men. The Kreutzer sonata presents Tolstoy's controversial concept of marriage, religion, and Russian society's view of the relationship between men and women, which indirectly highlights the position of women in 19th century Russian society. This research exposes women's inferiority, particularly when it comes to sexuality and marriage and discrimination against women's status in society. Women are connected with this lower order of social/cultural organization because they are associated with, and are more or less confined to, the home sphere. As a result, women are only seen as sexual objects, representing a lower social level than men, who symbolize a greater level. Men are thus connected not just with culture in the broad sense of all human innovation as opposed to nature, but also with culture in the narrow meaning of the finer and higher parts of human intellect – art, religion, law, and so on. As a result of this inequity, women are relegated to second-class status. Discrimination against women includes those differences of treatment that exist because of stereotypical expectations, attitudes and behaviors towards women.

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