



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Silence Oppression and Women: A Feminist Reading of Lorca's Selected Plays**

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**ABSTRACT**

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This article investigates silence, oppression, and women: a feminist reading of Lorca's rural trilogy. Spanish society shapes the destiny of women and allocates different roles and assignments who are bound and have to perform certain traditional works such as household assignments and abide by the norms of society. Resultantly, Spanish women become alienated and isolated. They have to endure the norms and conditions of society. Lorca talks about the rights of women and discusses marriage issues, love, the fulfilment of sexual desires, freedom, and getting rid of the so-called norms of society. The purpose of the study is to engrave the factors that cause violence against women in Spanish society. For this purpose, Sylvia Walby's insight of violence has been taken as a theoretical framework to analyze the text in detail. Through this theoretical lens, the study unveils the theme of violence against women in the selected text. In this regard, the researcher explored the injustice, inequality, and violence against women through the relationship between husband-wife and male-female characters. Female characters have been facing problems at the domestic, social, and political levels. Along with this, this study also reveals that males' ferocious attitude is the cause of violence and disturbance in Spanish patriarchal society.

**Introduction**

Saint, mother, virgin, self-sacrificing, and courageous: these are traits whom they belong to the female entity. They suggest impressions of chastity, extreme virtue, well nourishment, and a good attitude for a female character. All of these characteristics are praiseworthy, and this is the well-defined and pre-structure stature of a traditional woman in a patriarchal society. Due to the presence of all these traits how one can have the potential to provoke and use abusive language against an angel/woman. The first glance reveals how he portrays the image of women from Greek literature to up to now. Spanish literature imitates the model of women from

the Greeks and particularly, Lorca introduces the variety of virtuous women's characters into his so-called trilogy.

Many women in Spain in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are disguised in social problems become silent and alienated. They have no powers and thus cannot alter the way of their destinies. Spanish history is evident in the new constitutions that are implemented in true letter & spirit during the phase of Spain's Second Republic (1931-36). They admitted that these saintly traits for women are helpful in the maintenance of social order at a domestic level. To suppress justice and provide equal opportunities for women, the democratic Republic party brings into the system some important reforms, also diminish the class distinction and equal rights of life is the priority (Alted, 1985, p. 2). However, Spanish women praised these reforms to reduce the injustice and separation of women and men. Kaplan (1977) argues that the top hierarchy of Spanish society particularly men established these reforms. They are offspring of patriarchal culture as they are byproducts of Christianity. She adds that a few women are influenced by these reforms, claims that the majority are illiterate and have less opportunity to avail of the awareness of new reforms. They are engaged in domestic work so they have little time to visit outside and say something is problematic for them (pp. 402-404).

This article endeavours to establish the connection of Spanish society with the women of Lorca's world as he portrays silence, oppression and women in the folk trilogy: "Blood Wedding", "Yerma", and "The House of Bernarda Alba". This study starts a journey with the portrayal of bride and mother in "*Blood Wedding* (1933)", the first play in the trilogy by Spanish dramatist Federico Garcia Lorca. He takes insight to develop his writing from the themes and traditions of the Golden Age Dramatists. In this regard, he borrows the theme of honour from the dramatists of Renaissance Spain. The soul of Spain is displayed by the literary works of Lorca. particularly, Spanish culture and love for land are the prominent themes of his works. In general, sometimes, he took domestic issues of Spanish society and discusses them in detail in his works. Sometimes, one can find glimpses of women's rights and freedom from his works (Flores, 1962, p. 2)

El Sol, in his interview, unveils that he is a Spaniard, and for him to live outside geographical premises is impossible, and besides a Spanish culture wants to get skills in other cultures. He argues that he sacrifices his life for the sake of the issues of the Spanish people. Like Lope De verge, he was also a dramatist rather than a great poet. Lorca is the second dramatist after De Verge, who uses comedia form that is perfect for three-act structure, the combination of prose and poetry, and verse forms (Honig & Lorca, 1963, p. 18).

Lorca was a poet, a painter, a dramatist, and a musician. There is no exaggeration if one can say to him a scenic designer, a director, and an actor. Lorca gets a reputation as believing the function of a theatre is to question and challenge the societal norms, and staunch socialism. The artist, particularly the poet possesses the revolutionary thoughts and attentively hears the voice within himself: the voice of art, love, and death. He wrote the so-called rural trilogy "Blood Wedding", "Yerma", and "The House of Bernarda Alba" during the last decade of his life. He incorporates Spanish society, class status, and raises voices against the dictators. Being a socialist, Lorca was arrested and put behind the bar, where, he was later executed by the Nationalist Militia (Honig & Lorca, 1963, pp. 3-4). During his stay in America, he learns the way of dressing and dressing. He compares the freedom and morality of

American women with the traditional codes of life of Spanish women. After his return to Spain, his plays concerned themselves almost exclusively with a single theme, the suffering, and the frustration of the Spanish woman. Is it not possible, and indeed probable, that Lorca learned to understand the situation of the Spanish woman by thinking about her in New York and comparing her position with the situation and the possibilities, so completely different, of the North American girl? (Honig & Lorca, 1963, p. 4).

Lorca expresses conventional mores of Spanish society: silence, oppressed desire, lack of freedom, exploitation of women's rights, social restrictions, and arranged marriages in all three plays. "*Blood Wedding*" narrates the story of the frustration of the mother, elopement of a bride, death of bridegrooms, and helplessness of the mother in a brief way. Whereas, "*Yerma*" presents a silent voice of a woman who is issueless despite the fact she spends conjugal life and wants to bear a child but her husband does not do so. This dilemma not only produces frustration and anxiety for her but also fractures her spirit.

### Literature Review

Lorca (1930) handles the tragic theme of death or decline of the characters in the so-called rural trilogy, describes how the characters are pushed in such circumstances and how they become the victim of it. Like the Greek tragedies, Lorca brings into the element of fate in modern Spanish tragedies. One can assume the role of fate which is dominated throughout the so-called trilogy. Death hovers over the lives of the character; the death of bridegrooms in "*Blood Wedding*", the main protagonist in "*The House of Bernarda Alba*" and Yerma's decline shows how women are helpless and prostrate in the so-called folk trilogy (Lima, 1963, p. 188).

### Blood Wedding

"*Blood Wedding*" puts forth the theme of death, frustration, and oppressed love. Lorca produces frustration around the characters and they sigh under the heap of frustration and anxiety. Identity also questions in this play as the characters are not given names except Leonardo. Lorca identifies the dilemma, particularly in Spanish society. He tries to knit a real incident into a golden fabric of a bride who eloped with her lover at the time of her wedding, consequently, both (the bridegroom and her fiancé) died during the scuffle which has happened at night in the forest (AHMED al-kurwy, 2010, p. 7). Furthermore, the plot is woven into the systems of honour, sex, and passion in a single thread. The plot advances and determines the character of the mother as a central figure of the play, who loses everything except peace. Faith forces the characters and directs them in such a way that they easily accept their tragedies. Along with this, the norms and traditions of Spanish society draw bad omen for the lives of characters. Lorca incorporates the Spanish society in this play; and is based upon revenge, so-called honour, and freedom of women (Volk, 1968, p. 32).

### Yerma

"*Yerma*", like the other plays in the so-called trilogy, discusses the role of the female sex that leads to the tragedy. It is the obsession of women that directs them to meet the dire consequences. Yerma, to the contrary of the other plays "*Blood Wedding*", and "*The House of Bernarda Alba*", is the central character, all the events and incidents

of the play revolve around her. At the start of the story, Yerma is issueless and wants to bear a child with her but on the other hand, her husband does not fulfil her desire. She comprehends that there is a problem between her and Juan.

You were different when we were first married. Now you've got a face as white as though the sun had never shone on it. I'd like to see you go to the river and swim or climb up on the roof when the rain beats down on our house. Twenty-four months we've been married and you only get sadder, thinner, as if you were growing backwards. (García Lorca et al., 2016)

### **The House of Bernarda Alba**

Volk (1968) unveils that the story of "*The House of Bernarda Alba*", like the play "*Blood Wedding*" based on the real-life incident of a family from Lima's book. The plot describes a family comprised of Bernarda Alba and her five daughters who are in mourning for the last eight years. The play takes the conservative traditions from classical Spanish society. Nobody is allowed to interfere with the matters of Bernarda's family. They spend their lives under the black shadow and do not know about the house. "*The House of Bernarda Alba*" displays the spirit of the classical pattern of life and the true spirit of Spanish society. Daughters have no right to freedom, marriage, and passions (pp. 63-64).

AHMED al-kurwy (2010) argues that the tragedy starts with the jealousy of the younger daughters as the elder sister Angustias has inherited large property as compared to the youngsters. In her twentieth, she engaged with Romano who also enjoys the company of the youngest sister Adela. Finally, Romano gets married to Angustias for her wealth. When she fails to win the desire of Romano, commits suicide and after it, Bernarda has gunned down Romano. Bernarda counts her self-conceit and arrogance instead of her daughter's happiness. This event indicates how much Bernarda is doctorial and self-desirous. This action leads her family to its destruction as the characters of the play are clinging to the codes of honour and sex (2010, p. 7).

The previous studies lack in exploring silence, oppression, and women: A Feminist Study of Lorca's Selected plays. It fills the gap by investigating the female characters in the plays, how they face frustration, become mute, bears oppression, deprive them of their rights, and reduced their participation in any activity. In the background of the review of the literature, this current project tries to fill the gap by providing a sound voice to voiceless female characters in the so-called trilogy.

### **Material and Methods**

This portion of the study deals with research design and an appropriate theoretical framework regarding the research project. The design of the study is qualitative, content-based analysis, and explorative. The researcher has analyzed the sample of text via an in-depth study of the selected play. In this way, this study can limelight the hidden meanings of the text.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The two waves of feminism take into account several issues related to women, for example, domestic, physical and sexual violence, sexual harassment, and the right to own property. Women face troubles and hurdles in the domestic, social and

political spheres. In this regard, women rebel against the patriarchal system because they want to be equal to men. Furthermore, feminism has been classified into three waves. For instance, for women's equality, feminists' limelight women's issues and problems in a patriarchal society. The first wave of feminism lasted from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, problems of women were highlighted as women were not allowed to own property, cast a vote, get an education, and job. To provide equal rights, feminists first highlighted women's issues and problems, and later, proclaimed that women should be given equal rights as men enjoyed in the same society (Selden, 2005). Flouli (2017) points out the key concerns of this wave such as women's right to cast vote, right to marriage and property laws, right to education and better working conditions (p. 6).

Although, there were different writers or essayists Virginia Woolf and Simon de Beauvoir were famous for their works in contributing to the first wave of feminism. Through their writings, both of them pointed out the problems faced by the women living in a patriarchal society. Woolf wrote two significant essays which were considered an important contribution to feminism. The central theme of the *Three Guineas* is women's rights and education. She suggested that women should be independent economically. In *A Room of One's Own*, she proposed that women should write about women's experiences and traumas to highlight the issues neglected by the authorities or countrymen of their society. She advised that women should not compare men to women in their works or writings. Their writings should portray the experience of women in their way. Woolf stated that gender identity could be challenged and reformed because it was socially constructed. She pointed out that women have been facing domestic, economic and social hurdles such as gender inequality, to achieve their literary ambitions. For example, Woolf was not being taught Greek-like her brothers because she is a woman. She has not enjoyed the same opportunities as her brother enjoyed under the same roof. Being a woman, she was not provided in the same environment as her brother (Selden, 2005).

Furthermore, it is a system linked with biology, economics, reproduction and psychology which strengthens the male identity. De Beauvoir further provided the solution to violence against women by saying that patriarchy could be demolished or shattered if women break out their objectification. Similarly, the second wave of feminism dealt with social inequalities and cultural disparities. Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* put feminism, for the first time, on the national forum- revealed the frustrations and anxieties of American women, and heterosexuality. In the same way, second-wave feminism continued to share the notions of the first wave of feminism for women's rights in all zones while its emphasis shifted from politics of reproduction to women's experience, sexual difference and sexuality (Selden, 2005 et. al. 120).

Furthermore, second-wave feminism emerged in the early 1960s, first, in the United States and later spreads all over the world. The crucial issues of second-wave feminism were cultural inequalities of women and unfairness at the workplace, for example, low salary, gender-based violence, domestic or physical violence and marital rape. First, feminists highlighted women's issues and difficulties and later, they made women aware of gender inequality, the sexual liberation of women and raise consciousness about patriarchy and sexism as these are the root cause of women's dependency on men and that dependency lead women to violence (Flouli, 2017, p. 8). In addition, women were provided equal rights, education, and job opportunities and

also allowed to cast vote. In the same way, women were not happy having the facilities they wanted. Women still needed change, though material changes happened the mindset was not changed. It seemed the cause of women's issues and gender inequality. Gender inequality was a hurdle created by society as women were considered weak, fragile, less intellectual and emotional being. Moreover, gender roles or sex roles determined the behaviour and attitude that were generally acceptable and was generally consisted of femininity and masculinity in which men, in the patriarchal society, were considered powerful, superior and authoritative while women were considered feeble, inferior and powerless (Selden, 2005).

In *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Sylvia Walby defines "patriarchy as a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990, p. 20). Walby further categorizes patriarchy into six structures: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, patriarchal relations in sexualities, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. More recently, concerning each of the structures, it is possible to identify sets of patriarchal practices in a male-dominated or patriarchal society (1990, p. 20).

In the same way, the first structure, patriarchal production deals with women's household duties and labour. In exchange for labour, women may receive maintenance as they are not tied up in waged labour. Housewives are producing class, while husbands are expropriating class. Further, the second structure of patriarchy deals with the economic level that shows the patriarchal relation within paid work. It shows that women are disrespected by men as they are given inferior jobs or jobs that are for the less skilled people. Similarly, the third one is related to the state as the state is male-dominated as well as capitalist and racist. The state has partial biases towards patriarchal comforts in its actions and policies against women.

Male violence is the fourth structure given by Walby, which deals with the routine violence faced by women in a patriarchal society. Male violence against women, either practice of rape, physical torture, wife-beating or sexual harassment, is accepted by the state by denying to interfere it except the exceptional cases. The fifth structure is about sexuality. However, the two key forms of this structure are a sexual double standard and compulsory heterosexuality. The sixth and final structure of patriarchy is cultural institutions, which represents women according to the patriarchal gaze in a variety of areas, such as media, education, and religion (Walby, 1990, p. 21). Similarly, Walby in the fourth structure of *Theorizing patriarchy* describes men violence against women such as physical, sexual harassment at the workplace, rape, child sexual abuse and sexual assault specifically under patriarchy or patriarchal society. Male violence is a worldwide phenomenon as it prevails in every country i.e. America, Britain, and Afghanistan (1990, p. 129). Walby further states that violence against women can be identified by analyzing the three perspectives of male violence. For instance, she further categorizes male violence into three groups i.e. liberalism, radical feminism, and class analysis. The first one explains the psychological disturbance while the second one deals with the class or men's frustration in society. Similarly, the third one describes the power of males in a patriarchal society.

Liberalism sees male violence in terms of psychological disturbance or men that are considered abnormal. Specifically, it deals with the psychological procedure rather than the social environment. It is noted through the text that rape is an act of an individual man who has not developed or nurtured in a healthy environment. They claim that this is the outcome of bad childhood experiences and disrupted the family

background (West, 1978 et. al. 130). They research to analyze the reason behind the aggressive attitude of men towards wives and children either sexual abuse or physical violence. Twelve rapists are interviewed by the psychiatrist and they make a report that they have a problematic childhood. They are not given love, stability, and attention in their childhood.

In the same way, they further explore that due to the bad childhood they do not acquire normal customs of masculinity and are not prepared to deal with stresses of life and in perplexing conditions, they rape and beat women. However, men are unable to develop a normal relationship with women, lacking the confidence to deal with difficulties of the socio-sexual relationship. The final outburst takes place in the shape of a defective personality and a specific period of stress. A time of mounting frustration is seen to precede the rape. The men are discontented with their sexual outlets and sexual performance. Their frustration is considered to be a result of sensitization to stress as a result of difficulties in man's early upbringing, problems in engaging in a heterosexual relationship and the struggle to maintain his conception of masculinity (Walby, 1990, p. 130).

In-class analysis, there are multifarious examples in the society which draws more attention to class than any other group. She claims that violence against women in society is the outcome of anxiety and frustration generated by the environment. Generally, it is considered that women face violence in the working class. She further classifies class into two groups as the first one is a general model and the second is the subcultural model. Elizabeth Wilson suggests that male characters become aggressive due to economic pressure which is considered the cause of male violence against women. For instance, unemployment makes the male characters mentally disturbed and in this situation, they undergo serious pressure. Eventually, the outcome of this serious pressure is faced by women or wives in the form of violence. As, in anxieties, men often beat the nearest object to them which are wives or women (Walby, 1990, p. 132).

Similarly, Gelles and Straus support this view because, in the working-class society, the rate of violence against women is greater than in the elite class society. They further share their experience that, in 1967, research was conducted to know about the violence rate between white-collar and blue-collar. The rate of violence is higher in families which have \$6,000 income or below this income. Moreover, in the subcultural model, Amir follows the first model to find out the male violence in social society. He describes that men develop their values and rules which are dissimilar to the main culture. Similarly, in this context, men build their distinction to women i.e. physical supremacy. However, Amir claims that subculture produces the worst form of violence that is rape or sexual assault (Walby, 1990, pp. 132-133). Furthermore, radical feminists focus on both social and gendered characters. They observe the social values which form violence and its effects on female characters. Brown miller states male violence is the basis of men's control over women. Similarly, sexuality and violence are socially constructed in which men are considered macho and they can use force to settle the dispute. She further explains the famous movies and songs having a heroic act of violence in which man is considered a hero or macho. Even rape is considered a manly or masculine act in this context (1990, p. 134).

To sum up the above discussion, it is pertinent to mention that the study is going to limelight the theme of violence against women in the post-Spanish Civil War

in the selected trilogy. The selected texts unfold vivid glimpses of violence against women regarding socio-political and economic inequality.

## **Results and Discussion**

In all three plays, silence treats as discourse and have a symbolic interpretation of oppressed women in the context of Spanish society. Lorca presents mute women who can talk but their voices are voiceless. Though they are engaged in conversation with others the agency dismantles her voices. In this way, they cannot raise their voices against the patriarchal society and spend their lives under the rule of patriarchal consciousness. In Spanish society women are pushed back to their houses and the opportunities of their job, freedom is reduced. This article investigates "*Blood Wedding*", "*Yerma*", and "*The House of Bernarda Alba*" and draw out the oppressed figure of women, also unveils the patriarchal attitude towards the rights of women.

Lorca portrays the dull and shabby image of women in Spanish society. Along with this, it reveals how oppressed and deprived of their basic right of life, pack them into their houses. *Blood Wedding* presents some voiceless women who are confined in their houses. They have no right to choose their companion for marriage, go out alone in the street, and do not love somebody. They are suppressed at every level, i.e. socially, morally, emotionally, physically and psychologically. Does she become mute by choice or under some revolutionary stance is there? This article takes insight from Walby's patriarchal theory of oppression. Under the six layers of oppression, this study is going to conduct a discussion in the selected plays.

"*Blood Wedding*" as the title suggests that there will be a tragedy in the story. Society develops women's understanding of themselves, shapes attitudes regarding their rights and honour. The role of a maid and pure women go deep down into the roots of Spanish society and also shapes the psyche of Spanish women. As Mother argues, "yes but have some girls, I want to embroider and make lace and be at peace" (p. 46). Along with, Bride says, "Naked, looking out at the fields, Like a hound bitch" (Lorca & Edwards, 2020, p. 81). This indicates how Spanish society shapes the image of women and how to perceive their character. Naked, and hound bitch are taunting and slapping on Spanish society. On the other hand, one can comprehend Spanish society forms such an inferior character of women. Spanish society considers women inferior as she defies their identity and wants to transfer themselves into the opposite sex. This line explores the hidden desire of Spanish women who want to change their gender. The Bride says, "have not I done a man's work, I wish I were a man" (p. 42). Women are given secondary importance and have no value. Thus, they want to work in a society like men. Women face doubly oppression i.e. patriarchal and Spanish colonisation. Similarly, "*Yerma*" displays the same qualities as "*Blood Wedding*" has shown. The submissive and passive attitude of Yerma, the protagonist, is caused by destruction and catastrophe for herself. Lorca (2007) presents a traditional and submissive picture of women, "Yerma: my father gave me to him and I accepted. I accepted with pleasure. That's the reality (Lorca, 2007, p. 89). Spanish society is the evidence of women must have accepted the will of their parents. Yerma is married to Juan according to the sweet will of her father. There is no need for any love, attraction, liking or sex. On the other hand, wealth is given priority while discussing the matter of the marriage of a daughter. Juan is a rich farmer and an appropriate candidate for her daughter.



Maternity is the sole duty of women which can be performed after marriage. No value of love and sexual desires in traditional a patriarchal society as a patriarchal society rubbed away from the hands of women and compel her only be a mother as a social norm. Lorca presents a traditional work for women, saying, "The first day we got engaged, I started thinking about our common children who I will give birth to" (Lorca, 2006, p. 89). After marriage, it is the sole duty of women to give birth to a child for the common needs of society.

*The House of Bernarda Alba* is a portrait of imposed silence and female misogyny. After the death of her second husband, Bernarda is forced to live at home in mourning along with five daughters. "No breath of air is going to get into this house" (Lorca, 2019, p. 10). Nobody is allowed to interfere with her matters. Lorca's so-called trilogy portrays the image of oppression that Spanish society has imposed on it. One can find glimpses of Walby's patriarchal theory of oppression in Lorca's folk trilogy. Under these plays, Lorca has presented a traditional picture of women who take breath under a double oppression, i.e. Spanish and patriarchal.

### **Conclusion**

This article has exhibited a gallery of oppression which have been imposed on women in Spanish society in the twentieth century. Women have become muted and they cannot raise their voice and thus the victim of oppression and injustice, deprived of basic rights of life. Spanish society presents an appropriate example of a patriarchal society where women have to face problems at every stage of life. Lorca's folk trilogy highlights the problems and issues of women in Spanish society. Thus, this article unveils silence oppression and women under Walby's theory of oppression.

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