

Unhealed Housewife's Syndrome and a Euphoric Phase of [Ab] Normativity "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin and Diksha Jyoti's short film *The Ideal Bride*.

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Abstract

Going against the climate of popular belief so-called chatty wives fail to talk and share their daily grind that might enable their mental healing. The inability to find someone during moments of crisis creates a feeling of solitariness. Sharing is restricted for the fear of rejection by others. Psychologists claim writing whether creative or not can help pour out the grief from the inside and has a curative effect on the mind. Societal and near and dear ones' apathetic attitude ruptures their mental state. She was forced to believe that she was mad and the problem was with her. Betty Friedan long before popularised it as a problem that has no name. My paper focuses on how society remains insouciant of housewives' mental state. For my study, I have selected "The Story of an Hour" by Kate Chopin and Diksha Jyoti's short film *The Ideal Bride*. The wives in the story were overjoyed with the death news of their husbands. What leads to their [ab]normality? My study will deal with the reasons behind their psychic nature. It deals with the reasons for the mental trauma of a married woman which lead to their [ab] normative behaviour. The hypothesis is tested based on a parallel study. This kind of study will help to point out the reasons behind marital complexities and their solutions.

Keywords: Housewives, mental healing, solitariness, psychic nature

Paper

*Amar Hath Bandhibi Paa Bandhibi Mon bandhibi kemone?
Amar chokh bandhibi mukh bandhibi Poran bandhibi kemone?
[Tie my hands, tie my legs How did you tie my mind?
Tie my eyes, tie my mouth How did you tie my heart?]
Amar iccha bandhibi sohag bandhibi Anuraag bandhibi kemone?
[Tie my desires, tie my love How did you tie my affection?]*

—Bajpaie, "Amar Haat"

As the line goes it is not possible to tie one's mind, heart, and affection. Since these are free, they fight silently against physical confinement. So, when one conforms to the societal pressures, rules, and regulations there is a clash between the outer and the inner, which leads one towards frustrations and emptiness. Whatever hard one may try, one cannot evade the clash. "Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution", says Simon de Beauvoir (451). To understand the housewife syndrome, one needs to understand her situation in the

light of psychological theories and delve deep into the feminine psyche, which itself is very mysterious. Even the father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud who conducted thirty years of research into the feminine soul fails to find what a woman wants. Women have always been mysterious creatures. William Shakespeare holds the view that women have two languages—one is verbal and the other we assume it to be non-verbal. This non-verbal language makes her mysterious. Actually, “The ‘atmosphere of moral discomfort’ and uncertainty, a ‘dissolution of faith’ in the acknowledged patterns of social relationships and a search for happiness have increased the phenomenon of inwardness” (Choudhary, Introduction 8). She speaks a lot with her silence which no one can hear but she wants others to understand her silence, and the inability on other’s part to understand her creates frustration. So, she needs to speak up. Women’s mysterious nature is the result of her suppressed desire resulting from the dominating authoritative society. Repressed desires are always in her subconscious mind and she lives another life that society wants her to live. So, John Stuart Mill is right to say: “What is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing—the result of forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulation in others” (“John Stuart Mill”). The mental (outer world) and emotional (inner world) of the mind take time to overlap each other. The conflict between the two worlds creates her chaotic married world. “The frustration caused by vain attempts to communicate between inner and outer often arouses anger and contempt on both sides” (Castillejo 24). Another problem for women is their shift from tradition to modernity. The ideals which their mother followed, are passed to the next generation as the feminine wealth. This modernity pulls her towards masculinization but her internalized femininity drives her back to tradition. Thus, a married woman’s drama “is summed up in a conflict between her ‘viriloid’ and her ‘feminine tendencies’” (Beauvoir 55). Karen Horney introduced the term ‘womb envy’. According to her, a woman is endowed by nature to take part actively in the process of creation. As men play a small part in the process of creation, they try to compensate for it with achievement. So, men compensate for the womb’s envy and women do not compensate for penis envy. However, ‘penis envy’ creates a desire in women for husbands and thereby for marriage. So, this may be an important reason for women’s craving for marriage and considering it as the most important part of their life from a psychological point of view. However, they do not know that marriage brings with it a train of unconscious desires. “The bitterness of the disappointment depends on the one hand on the degree of fixation, and the other, on the degree of discrepancy between the object found and the gratification achieved and the specific unconscious sexual desires” (Horney *Feminine* 85). So, the womb envy in menfolk forces them to find accomplishment in creative work and deny any other creative work except childbirth to women. They are forced to limit themselves to biological function rather than intellectual function. This limitation further aggravates the penis envy in the unconscious and hence “prevents women from finding the satisfaction of emotional and psycho-sexual needs in marriage” (Kakar and Kakar 90). It is also a known fact, that in married life, expectations lead to frustrations. Women want all their unconscious wishes to be fulfilled in marriage. Apart from that both men and women want contradictory characteristics in their partners. They want them to be strong and helpless, dominating and dominated. Moreover, “Each person’s inner desire clashed with their inner notions of goodness that they had internalized deeply as their moral compass whether as a good daughter, a good wife, a good mother, a good father, a good son or a good husband creates mental confusion, conflict and dilemma and thereby unhappiness, frustration, and hopelessness” (Narayan 250). It is not possible to preserve one’s identity by adjusting for any length of time to a frame of reference that is in itself destructive to it. “It is very hard

indeed for a human being to sustain such an ‘inner split’ conforming outwardly to one reality, while trying to maintain inwardly the values it denies” (Friedan 248). Now let us have a look at the psychological conditions of Mrs Mallard and Phuleri. In this paper, I will try to discuss how unhealed housewives’ syndrome can lead to [ab]normative behaviour. Housewives’ problems can be analysed through feminine and masculine psychology. Here, feminine and masculine psychology refers to the masculine and feminine side of both males and females. A married woman’s situation is analysed mainly through psychological theories propounded by Irene Claremont de Castillejo, Sigmund Freud, Karen Horney, and Robert A. Johnson, and also by the feminist psychological theories of Simon de Beauvoir.

“The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin opens with the death news of Mr Brently Mallard. Since Mrs Mallard has heart issues special care is taken to reveal the death news of her husband. Everyone expected a sudden breakdown and she conform to it with a sudden cry. Later, she is successful in masking her real feelings but soon enjoys it in the closed room. Her closed room represents her inner world where she is her true self. The space outside the locked rooms represents the society that socialized her to repress her freedom. Soon she wishes to live longer whereas earlier she wished her life to end soon. The drastic change symbolises the extent of mental trauma she had in her relationship. In the end, she found her husband alive. All thought her ecstasy killed her but she died of sadness at the loss of freedom.

Diksha Jyoti’s short film *The Ideal Bride* presents the story of Phuleri. Phuleri remained mute throughout the enactment and remained indifferent to negative comments against her. She keeps a sweet smiling face and continues her domestic work. She is just treated as a lifeless being without any emotions or feelings. She too closes her room and enjoys a dance of happiness in her closed room after the death of her husband. After ritual crying, she engages herself in [in]auspicious dance.

The psychological setup proved to be one of the major problems of housewives’ syndrome. The partners fail to communicate with each other. According to Irene de Castillejo, “Frequently husbands and wives have the closest physical intimacy for years and yet have no real meeting. Each is wrapped away in an isolation of his own” (12). Mrs Mallard and Phuleri don’t have a real meeting with their husband. Their momentary breakdown towards the end and their bursting into tears are “tears of anger, tears of unspoken words, and tears of words that refuse to leave the mouth” (Narayan 82). They are no tears of affection for their dead husbands. Moreover, Narayan also opines that the unexpressed emotions of women “derail the rational mind and logic” (82). Both the characters lack the sentiment of losing the demi-god (husband)-like figure in their lives. Just as “women’s love without any power becomes anaemic and men’s power without love becomes abusive” (Narayan 237). Lack of love towards their wife makes Mr Mallard and Phuleri’s husband abusive. Phuleri’s husband is Rana and he represents any husband with an abusive nature. As Robert Johnson puts it — “outer or inner, this is much of the drama of life” (27). Their melancholic depression syndrome is created by a tussle of inner and outer. She suppresses her happiness and is thus unhappy. “If a relationship becomes stable one, it often takes on a familiar conjugal character in the end; all vices of marriage—boredom, jealousy, prudence, deception—can be found in it. And the woman dreams of another man who will rescue her from this routine” (Beauvoir 610). However, in Mrs Mallard and Phuleri’s case we didn’t find any craving for other men may be because they consider all men to be the same and just need liberation. “The frustration not only of needs like sex but of individual abilities could result in neurosis” (Friedan 253). The women characters fail to create an identity of their own in society. Their

smashed identities drive them towards mental imbalance. Women's expectations were throttled since childhood but they were socialized that Prince Charming would fulfill all his expectations leading to more frustrations after marriage. Since most women were trained to be powerless and consider menfolk as messiahs to fulfill their expectations led to their disappointments. Thus, Horney was right to say, "We do not even have to become aware of the great number of our disappointments, just as we have not been aware of the extent of our secret expectations" (Horney 109).

Mrs Mallard and Phuleri feel most disconnected and their husbands remain indifferent rather than caring. Actually, "When we feel the most disconnected, we cry, and when someone reaches for us—or when we feel his or her presence in our despair—that connection, not our tears, helps restore faith, hope, and balance" (Nelson 116). The lack of care and love makes Mrs. Mallard and Phuleri abnormal in behaviour. Housewives' life is stifled since "she had no positive reason to silence her feelings of revolt and no effective way of expressing them" (Beauvoir 664). This kind of romantic notion of marriage when shattered often leads one to neurosis and psychosis making the person schizophrenic. Instead of fighting back against patriarchy, she cocoons herself in a secret world. "But if a man is unwilling to be met he feels a victim. So does a woman when she is urged to express what she cannot formulate, even if she would. Such attempts at forcible sharing effect no magic" and thus restrains her healing (Castillejo 14).

In Phuleri's case we find the husband saying that he brought a daughter-in-law for her mother rather than a wife for him and is ready to bring another if his mother wishes. He also tells his mother to train her to work like her. The problem is rightly analysed by Johnson, she writes: "A very contamination is the overlay of mother and wife. Such a man will expect his wife to mother him instead of being a companion for him. He will demand of his wife that she fulfil his mother-expectations for him" (Johnson *He* 51).

Our thoughts are dictated by a narrow daily Press, and our values are decided by advertisements and television. Our activities are curtailed by regulations and orders without numbers, and even our representatives in the government no longer speak from the depth of heart. So, restrictions, isolation, constant criticism, demeaning, accusing, and ordering disrupt housewives' mental make-up. The concept of normal or neurotic varies with culture, society, time, class, and gender. Karen Horney says, "the neurotic is invariably a suffering person" (Horney *The Neurotic* 26). "A neurosis is a psychic disturbance brought about by fears and defences against these fears, and by attempts to find compromise solutions for conflicting tendencies" (28-29). "A woman often lives some part of her life under the domination of a man in outer life, and if she is alert enough to avoid this she may then fall under the domination of her inner man, her animus" (Johnson 27). Phuleri and Mrs Mallard fall under the domination of their inner only after the death of their outer man.

Horney is thus right to say, "that women have adapted themselves to the wishes of men and felt as if their adaptation were their true nature. That is, they see or saw themselves in the way that their men's wishes demanded of them; unconsciously they yielded to the suggestion of masculine thought" (57). Later when they realize the adaption as contradictory they succumb to mental emptiness. Robert A. Johnson, referring to the mythological character Psyche, presents the problem of every married woman: "All husbands are death to their wives in that they destroy them as maidens and force them into an evolution towards mature womanhood" (16). Evolution towards maturity is painful as it demands the death of the old self as a maiden and the birth of a new self as wife and mother. The new married world with its housewifery for a conscious woman with active or inactive animus—the masculine side of woman as

described by Jung, is a Sisyphean task without any fruitfulness and gratefulness from the person to whom she sacrifices her desires and will. Therefore, she becomes happy with the death of their husbands which led to their death of emotions. Moreover, “The barrier is the failure of communication that we very often do not say what we really mean and those who are at the receiving end equally often fail to listen” (Castillejo 22). There is no proper communication between the partners and that is what led to the stretch in their relationship. Actually, “Marriage is not a sacrificial matter to a man, but there is much of that element in a woman’s experience. She may look at her husband in horror one day because she realises she is bound in her marriage as he is not. She is even more profoundly bound if there are children” (Johnson *She* 17). So, it is very obvious that women suffer from housewife syndrome rather than men suffering from husband syndrome.

Though “To follow the call of every voice in the inner world leads to disorientation” (Castillejo 26), to completely ignore it will result in mental disorder. When their husbands were alive Phuleri and Mrs Mallard completely ignored their inner world thus leading to their mental disorientation. “Nothing is so disheartening as being taken for granted that her man will provide the money or that she will cook the supper. Taking for granted is more likely to happen in marriage than in other relationships, but wherever it happens, it stultifies the imagination and turns the relationship into a suffocating prison” (Castillejo 108). This taken-for-granted attitude landed wives to the problem without a name often referred to as housewife’s syndrome by Betty Friedan. “Often his attitude toward marriage is that it should be there for him at home but it should not be an encumbrance. He wants to be free to forget about it when he wants to focus elsewhere” (Johnson *She* 20). In Phuleri’s case, it is so true. The husband never takes out on a ride and never talks to her directly but rather indirectly through his mother. This repressed forced life, shatters the confidence of wives “who shies away from demanding or accepting anything from her husband” (Horney *Feminine* 111). We didn’t find Mrs Mallard and Phuleri demanding anything from their husband vocally. “Inability to find words is one of the outstanding characteristics of the feminine. Some women have the greatest difficulty in expressing verbally their deepest thoughts and feelings. This may sound nonsense for women are proverbial talkers. But the loquacious woman, whether intellectual or not, is in reality as possessed by her masculine side as the moody man is by his feminine” (Castillejo 103).

Women “. . . can enter at will a deep place within where she gets her healing and her balance is restored” (Johnson *She* 48). Actually, she lacks “her own inner masculine clarity to convey the message, and leaves her actual man bewildered and in dark” (Castillejo 104). These what leads to the partner’s communication gap. There is a contradiction in her inner and outer world and these “. . . contradictions within us constitute a threat to our personalities or to our lives” (Horney *Feminine* 5). Mrs Mallard and Phuleri thus displayed an abnormative personality with their ecstasy.

However, silence is needed, “If you have been dazzled out of your wits, if you have been knocked totally out of orbit, it is best to keep very still” (Johnson *She* 48). They do keep still, but within the chaotic inner mind, they fail to channel their emotions in a balanced way and prefer to react with happiness which they were denied for so long. According to Freud, a marital relationship is just reliving the life lived by our parents. With passing generations there are changes but the basic pattern remains the same. They have to play the subordinate roles, specified-gendered roles of housewifery, whereas men belong to a privileged hegemony controlling the women. So, “deep inside we feel an ever-growing rage, directed against any man or power that threatens to block the fulfilment of vitally important strivings”

(Horney *Feminine* 123). Mrs Mallard and Phuleri have that suppressed anger against their husband—the man with power who controls them. Phuleri was selected after the rejection of three hundred girls she was not taken for a bike ride by her husband. He keeps flirting with unmarried village girls. Moreover, as Phuleri is achieved by him he has no attraction or interest for her. The fact is “The greater the obstacles to the realization of his love, the more he will desire and value her. In some cases, this is so essential condition, that a man will reject a woman unless she belongs to some other man. She must be unreachable and a predominant feeling must never be one of security. This is why a man's love dies out once all the obstacles are overcome” (Marković 382).

In the beginning, when Phuleri comes they discuss her flawless complexion and “how they rejected 300 girls before choosing her” (The Ideal Bride). As a new bride, she adores the paraphernalia of the kitchen as if she knew to be the queen of the kitchen where she could rule but the thought shatters with the realization that she is a slave rather than a queen. She even feeds the free birds from the window with bars. The window with bars reflects her confinement. Her life begins and ends in the kitchen and she nicely fulfilled the biological function by giving birth and that too a son it is needless to say that the birth of a girl is unwelcomed. She escapes the taunts and criticism by tuning Hindi romantic song ‘jhumka geera re’ on the radio. She tries to remain indifferent to reality and creates an imaginary world of her own. But that escape and momentary happiness are not allowed as her duty as a mother calls her. Her son too didn't belong to her as he rejected his mother's offer of laddoo on being called by his father. She is not part of any entertainment. She cried loudly on sudden abandonment by the power that imprisoned her liberty is not easily acceptable. She enjoys the liberty with dance breaks the anklets and washes away the sindoor with water, the symbols of her confinement.

Then in the story “Story of an Hour,” we come to know about Mrs Mallard's heart trouble. Her heart problem shows her tense troubled life. As common nature, women normally didn't believe in or accept the death news. Unlike them, Mrs Mallard cried wildly and went to a room alone. The open window symbolises her possibilities of freedom. Spring outside reflects the spring of freedom with a new lease of life. Patches of clouds signify problems and sadness. Freedom was approaching her and she tried to beat it back but useless. She with slight hesitation welcomes the freedom. Her happiness is because of her possibility to attain self-identity. She knew she would live for herself. She loved her husband at times but considered it a crime impose a private will upon each other. “She was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.” (Chopin 354) Such a change is surprising. She wished “life might be long” (Chopin 354) while yesterday she “thought with a shudder that life might be long” (Chopin 354).

“The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin and Diksha Jyoti's short film *The Ideal Bride* deals with the same theme of liberal feminism where the characters show negative emotions of euphoria on hearing about their husband's death. Mrs. Mallard and Phuleri were united in their [ab]normative behaviour and gender; crossing all barriers of time, space, and culture. Death replaces the feelings of disgust with that of sympathy and forgiveness. But here happens the opposite. Wives are living lives of zombies they are mentally dead and come to life from their living-in-death existence with the death of their husband who was responsible for their life. Both prefer the closed room to express their true emotions. It shows they are not strong enough to fight and are frustrated with pleasing society with masked faces. The closed room represents their inner world where they remain as per their wishes. As per the above discussion, the various reasons for [ab]normativity can be listed as follows:

1. Lack of sharing and caring between partners: “The Story of an Hour” presents Mrs Mallard’s perspective. However, Mr Mallard is assumed to be non-intimate, and hence her life becomes stifled. Phuleri’s case is the same. She is no better than a cook. Her husband even didn’t talk to her directly, love and care would be too much for him to show. Rana married to give a daughter-in-law for their mother rather than a wife for him.
2. Emotional detachment: Emotional bond would have created emptiness but they loved the emptiness. They are detached to the extent that the death news of their husband becomes a moment of elixir.
3. Give-and-take relationship: Phuleri and Mrs Mallard conform to the give-and-take relationship. Man earns and women serve.
4. Solitariness: Even though Mrs Mallard has her sister in touch, she fails to share the happenings of her inner world. she Phuleri is a lonely wife with in-laws and even a son.
5. Viriloid marriage: This system lands her in the world of strangers. She leaves behind her friends. They are scattered and they were unable to spare time to listen to each other’s feelings.
6. Fear of expressing truth: However, the sharing may lack truth as the truth is a social taboo and she may be considered outcast and doubly marginalised by the society. Even the child is not her own. They are known by their father’s name and fame.
7. Overburdened with housework: Housework prevents them from entertaining their creative faculties and talents.
8. Economic dependence: Marriage brings economic dependence for housewives even at the cost of their freedom. However, Mrs Mallard and Phuleri opt for freedom over economic dependence, and hence they care not for their widowhood.
9. Different psyche: Men and women have different psychic patterns. There is a failure in understanding each other’s psychology.
10. Identity crisis: Wasted talent in housewifery makes them question their identity.
11. Gender-biased role plays: Patriarchal mentality biased treatment where men become privileged and women subdued creates the gender gap ushering in injustice and inequality.

To prevent such (ab)normative situation, the following recommendations can be helpful:

- i. Gender sensitization.
- ii. Counselling men whose wives are undergoing housewife’s syndrome.
- iii. Counselling wives with housewife’s syndrome.
- iii. Socializing to treat women better.
- iii. Understanding the importance of happy family life.
- iv. Start campaign “Women's mental health matters”
- v. Educating men regarding female hormonal changes and mood swings and how she should be taken care of.

Women's life changed but the patriarchal mentality lingers to the extent that the person representing the patriarchy is abhorred. His living is as dangerous as his death. The abhorrence is to the extent that his death news can create a euphoric moment for the other. As an observation, it can be concluded that women are always at war with their outer and inner worlds. Women think more and act less. Isolation in women’s lives is psychological. “Women are trained not to trust, furthering their sense of isolation. Men are dangerous and women untrustworthy” (Narayan 166). This is what they are taught since childhood. “In actual

fact, a girl is exposed from birth onward to the suggestion—inevitable, whether conveyed brutally or delicately—of her inferiority, an experience that constantly stimulates her masculinity complex” (Horney *Feminine* 69). This abnormal gender discrimination since childhood aggravates [ab]normative behaviour. Gender discrimination is practiced based on birth sanctified by religion and reinforced by tradition. However, many are unaware of the fact that history and myth are redefined to suit various ends. These male-centric ideologies create imbalance and pave the way for [ab]normativity. Women stick more firmly to culture, tradition, and religion than men. Hence, they suffer more. When their inner and outer world clashes wives lose the balance of their minds. So, the women characters taken for study, show excessive happiness with the death of their husbands in their imbalance state. They fail to understand the pangs of widowhood. They value freedom over everything else just as they value everything else over freedom.

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