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Patriarchal Hegemony in the Novel *The Good Earth*

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Abstract

The present dissertation undertakes a study of patriarchal hegemony in the novel *The Good Earth*. The study tries to examine how women were depicted in pre-revolutionary Chinese society. Chinese village society seemed patriarchal, oppressive and stultifying to women. Although women's role varied, all were subservient. The importance of all female characters is based upon their contribution to the egos of the male protagonists and as being providers of support to both family and order in society. Pearl S. Buck, a proponent of civil rights for women as well as a humanitarian writer, concerns the society where females are considered the weaker sex and especially the neglected part of the society. The issues, problems, and status of Chinese women have successfully presented in *The Good Earth*.

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I. Life and Literary History of Pearl Buck

Pearl S. Buck (1892-1973) was one of the most popular American authors of her day. Born in Hillsboro, West Virginia in 1892 was taken to China by her missionary parents when she was three months old. She learned to speak Chinese before English. She was educated at home by her mother and a Chinese tutor. She listened eagerly the Buddhist and Taoist legend taught to by her tutor. She later called these legends as her first literary influence. Home schooled by her mother, Pearl was encouraged to write stories from an early age. Her first essay was published at the age of six in the *Christian Observer*, and she began to write regularly for children's section of the *Shanghai Mercury*.

As Buck was brought up in China, she was very sympathetic towards many aspects of Chinese culture. But her life in China was not always pleasant. When she was only a child, the family was forced to flee to the seacoast for protection during Boxer Rebellion. She was sent to the Jwell School for the daughters of missionaries in Shanghai at the age of fifteen. She spent most of her time reading books or volunteering in an institution to rehabilitate slave girls who had fled from the cruel treatment of their owners.

At the age of 17 in 1909, she came to the United States to join Randolph Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia, where she continued to write stories. Finding encouragement and academic stimulation at Randolph Macon, she adapted well to her college life, but continually felt like an outsider because she embraced a culture that the Americans found alien. Her simultaneous belonging to two worlds: an American missionary world and a Chinese world, explains her wish as a novelist to encourage intercultural understanding among different people. She earned her degree in 1914 and remained for a semester as an instructor in psychology.

At the end of 1914, she was called back to China when her mother became seriously ill. She returned to China as a teacher for the Presbyterian Board of missions. While caring her mother, Pearl studied written Chinese and took her mother's place as a counselor; listening to Chinese women's viewpoints and helping them solve their problems.

In May 1917, she married John Lossing Buck, an American agricultural missionary. The Bucks lived in the city of Nansuchou in North China. It is here that Pearl Buck became acquainted with the life of Chinese peasants. This knowledge and love of Chinese peasant appears later in *The Good Earth* and other of her literary works.

In 1921, the Bucks moved south to Nanking. In Nanking, modern ideas from the west had already begun to infiltrate the old traditional Chinese customs. The young Chinese were both trapped and confused by these opposing forces: this situation would become one of Buck's major themes in her early writings such as *The Good Earth*.

In 1922, she began to write essays on her impressions of a country in the throes of change. Her first published article was entitled *In China, Too* in the *Atlantic Monthly*. She also wrote articles for the *Forum* and *Nation*, and began to write short stories, and planned her first novel.

In 1925, John and Pearl Buck brought their first child to the United States for her medical treatment. While in United States, she earned her Master's of Arts degree in English literature from Cornell University. In late 1926, Pearl and John Buck returned to their Nanking home.

Buck began her writing career in 1930 with the publication of *East Wind: West Wind*, which was centered on the dilemmas of women who were raised in

traditional China but then had western educated husbands. Her first major novel *The Good Earth* was published in 1931: the story of farmer Wang Lung on the background of the twentieth century revolution in China. The main theme of the novel is: the earth is good. Pearl emphasizes how the earth can provide sustenance and wealth to any person. The story follows Wang Lung's climbing from poverty to riches, from toiling peasant to wealthy landowner. Pearl wants to deliver the message that all people need to respect and protect the good earth. The novel became extraordinary best seller book of 1931 which won the 1932 Pulitzer Prize and international recognition. The book was translated into more than thirty languages and was made into a play and a motion picture.

In the years from 1931-35, she publishes several other works including *Sons* (1932) and *A House Divided* (1935), which were published with *The Good Earth* as a trilogy in 1935. This trilogy entitled *House of Earth* was awarded the William Dean Howells medal by the American Academy of Arts and Letters as the finest work of fiction within the years 1930-35.

In 1934, Buck decided to settle permanently in the United States. In 1935 Pearl divorced John Lossing Buck and on June 11, she married Richard J. Walsh, the president of John Day Publishing Company.

Pearl S. Buck was the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize in literature in 1938, awarded for her biographies of her parents. *The Exile* and *The Fighting Angel*. After winning the Nobel Prize, Buck continued her writing including many genres until her death in 1973. Her non-fictional works include *Of Men and Women* (1941), a collection of essays on gender issue *Tell the People* (1945), dealing with mass education, *The Child Who Never Grew* (1950), dealing with a personal story of her own daughter whose mental development stopped at the age of four, *My*

Several Worlds (1954), an autobiography, *The Kennedy Women* (1970), telling the strength and suffering of women during the period of Kennedy presidency.

Contained within her vast writings are plays as *Fight into China* (1939), *The First Wife* (1945), probably the best collection of Buck's short stories, *This Proud Heart* (1938), a novel treating the suppression of women, reaching into other media, she co-authored a musical production, radio script during the World War II, and the movie script. She wrote more than sixty novels, several non-fictional essays and children's books and numerous short stories. Chinese, women's issues, regarding female empowerment, freedom self determination and racial tolerance are themes of her works. Her novel focuses on Asia, on women, on the lives of ordinary people and cross-cultural concerns.

Always a humanitarian, both in Asia and the United States, Buck devoted much of her time and money to the welfare of children. She founded Welcome House, the first international, and interracial adoption agency because existing adoption agencies considered Asian and mix-race children to be unadaptable. Pearl also established the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, which provided sponsorship funding for thousands of children in half a dozen Asian countries. Buck was also active throughout her adult life in American Civil Rights Movement. During her stay in America, Pearl Buck was one of the leading figures in the effort to promote cross-cultural understanding between Asia and the United States. She and her husband Richard founded the East and West Association, an effort to improve relations with America and Asia.

Despite being the victim of political hostility, attacked by the right for her active civil rights efforts, distrusted by the left because of her vocal anti-communism, suffered by her gender, Buck was a genius writer. She involved a continuous act of

negotiation between her life and the socio-political circumstances that surrounded her. Her life and writing helped to redefine the idea of women's place in modern society. In her novel *The Good Earth*, Buck has presented the story of a peasant family in China in times of famine and flood during the early 1900's. Peasant life is harsh, so are the traditions that mold marriage and family. Women are little more than chattel, necessary for procreation and to serve the household needs. *The Good Earth* gives much insight into the ways in which women are treated in Chinese society around the time in which the story takes place. During hard times, young girls were often sold into slavery. Chinese customs seemed to be designed to make women suffer. The practice of altering the feet of girls was to please men. The patriarchal social system depicts the status and treatment of women in Chinese society.

Background of the Study: *The Good Earth*

The Good Earth is a novel of Chinese peasant life as well as illustration of Chinese society and custom in great detail. The story revolves round the character Wang Lung, a poor farmer who lives with his father, respects the earth, and later turns himself to a wealthy landowner by his hard work. The novel begins with the Wang Lung's marriage day. Wang's wife O-Lan, a former slave of the great house of Whang, not so fair, gives a very faithful companionship to him in his every task. They live relatively better life than other village dwellers through their hard work. They have good harvest so they are able to hide silver in their bedroom. On the second day of the New Year, O-Lan and Wang dressed in new clothes visit the house of Whang with their first born baby. The great house is not as prosperous as before. O-Lan suspects that the great house is in financial difficulties. Wang Lung purchases their land with the silver coins from their previous harvest. Soon thereafter O-Lan is with another child, she gives birth to another male child. This time also Wang's harvest is

better than before and they again are able to hide silver in their house. In this novel, Buck shows the relationship of human beings with the earth. The earth gives sustenance and prosperity to the human beings.

O-Lan gives birth to her third child-a girl. On the same day, Wang is compelled to give silver to his uncle, as a dowry for his daughter because of the threat of blackmail of his good name. It is their culture that the birth of a girl symbolizes sense of evil. In the summer there is no rain and all field is dried up. The weather becomes disastrous for farming. During the famine O-Lan gives birth to another girl child but dead. Later Wang Lung notices bruise marks around its neck.

Buck succeeds to expose the attitude towards girl child in China. There is scarcity of food. A false rumor is spread among villagers by his uncle that Wang has a large amount of food and silver but villagers find no more than a few dried beans and a bowl of dried corn and snatch the grains. At this Wang comforts himself: "They cannot take land from me" (53).

He does not sell his land even in his extreme poverty and disaster. Wang decides to go to southern city to save them from starvation. Life is not so easy in South. Wang pulls rickshaw but hardly is able to pay his rent, his wife and children beg there. They live the life of pauper in the city. So Wang longs to return to the land. There is not the money to return to their land on their bad days they want to sell their girl. Then suddenly a riot occurs, the crowd of hungry people and Wang himself swarm into the big house to loot the property. Its owners abandon the house. Wang encounters with the rich man who fails to flee the house. Wang demands for money and gold from that man. He receives a large amount of money and gold from the man and manages to return his land.

With that money, Wang is able to buy good seeds, full grains of different plants, an ox and farm tools, returns home which is in a bad condition, repairs it, and hires help for farming. O-Lan helps her husband by working hard in his sorrow and prosperity. She is again with child, gives birth to twins this time. Wang becomes a prosperous man who sends his sons to school and buys the remaining lands of great Whang family. He establishes himself as rich as former Whang family. The wealth of family is connected with harvest of Wang Lung's land which is the core theme of the novel *The Good Earth*.

Six years of fortune of Wang has passed away. On the seventh year, a great flood comes there and covers the field. Therefore, there is nothing to do for the farmer Wang. He becomes idle, sinks into lust and luxury. He goes to town's teahouse to pass the time; there a concubine, named Lotus, attracts him. Meantime, Wang's uncle comes back with family. Wang brought Lotus and her servant into his house.

O-Lan is ignored. She is constantly in pain after the birth of the twins. She wishes to see her eldest son's marriage before her death. The eldest son is betrothed with the daughter of Liu, a grain merchant. After the ceremony, O-Lan dies and not after Wang's old father also dies and are buried into the earth.

One day, Wang's eldest son suggests his father to move the vacant great house in town, a house where great family used to live. Wang agrees this idea. Wang's whole family moves to the house except his uncle and aunt. Wang's uncle's son goes to join the war. The house of Whang has now become the house of Wang. Wang spend more time in his town house than his lands. After the death of the Ching, Wang begins renting some of his lands to tenants.

As Wang grows older, he becomes less attracted to Lotus and yearns for another slave girl named Pearl Blossom. Wang Lung loves Pear Blossoms, but his

love for her gradually turns into the love of a father to his daughter. Pear Blossoms patiently serves Wang who is now a very old man. Wang Lung leads a quiet, isolated life in his court, seldom visiting Lotus. Several to and fro lies in the life of Wang, several things have changed but his love for land is constant. Wang returns to his house on the land with Pear Blossoms and his first daughter. One day, his two eldest sons visit him and they go out. Wang follows silently and hears them making plan to sell the land. Wang cries and says that selling of the land will be the end of the family. Although they promise him that they will never sell the land it seems clear that they are lying and will sell the land.

Literature Review on: *The Good Earth*

The life of women is one of the principal subjects in Buck's writing. Her perception on her father's dominating attitude toward women and Chinese culture's mistreatment of women are the major causes to develop the sense of feminism in her. All of her writings are simple, conventional in technique however her best works reflect keen perception about humanity. Buck, here, tries to bring up the pathetic condition of women under the patriarchal culture of China. The dominance of male characters runs all over the novel.

After the publication of this novel in 1931, it won the unanimous critical praise. Critics have commonly emphasized on depiction of Chinese life and culture, but some other critics have criticized for its style and characterization. However, critics in succession have analyzed this novel from different perspectives like anti-racism and feminism. Buck as a strong supporter of women's rights, who felt great sympathy for Chinese women, portrays the social formation of China which dominated women according to the interest of men. The exposition of widespread

prejudices and patriarchal structure of Chinese society is the significance of the novel. This novel receives a variety of impressions and different reviews for and against it.

Buck's *The Good Earth* is critically acclaimed for its depiction of Chinese life.

As Kiang Kang Hu points out in *The New York Times Book Review*:

Her portrait of China may be quite faithful from her own point of view, but she certainly paints China with a half black and half white face and the official button is missing... She capitalizes such points, intensifies them and sometimes "dumps" too many and too much of their kind on one person, making that person almost impossible in real life. (370)

Hu criticizes the novel as being far less to Chinese life. Buck says of it: "Any one who knows those portraits most realize how far from the truth of life they are; the said pose, the arranged fold, the solemn, stately countenance, the official button. I have dealt in lights and shades. I have purposely omitted the official button... And I am less interested in tradition than in actuality" (371). From this it is clear that her experience and knowledge about China was broad and she was confident to write about it based in actuality.

Most of the critics were impressed with Buck's depiction of China. Critic Phyllis Bentley remarked:

Mrs. Buck aims to present Chinese customs as familiar, natural and correct, because so would her characters regard them (These customs) are copiously illustrated, but always presented, as it were, unself-consciously, as part of natural process of living; never by slightest word or turn of phrase does Mrs. Buck call attention to the difference of these customs from our own. (1)

The Good Earth uses a chronological form which proceeds at a fairly regular pace. Bucks stories are chronological narratives of a piece of life, seen from one point of view, straightforward, without devices; they have no complex plots, formed of many strands skillfully twisted, but belong to the single strand type with the family, however, rather than the individual as a unit.

According to *Rediscovering Pearl Buck the preface to Peter Conn's Pearl S.*

Buck: A Cultural Biography:

Many of her books contain narrative and descriptive passages of considerable drama, powerful scenes of work, warfare, ceremony, childbirth and poverty that manage to transcend the often commonplace prose in which they are presented. And whatever their literary merits and defects, her novels, short stories and essay regularly raised unsettling questions about the racial and sexual status quo.(3)

As her writing style is smooth, nothing forced or difficult, she has written *The Good Earth* in simple, direct and narrative style. In this novel, her sentences and paragraphs flow clearly and easily. She uses simple words to describe thoughts and feelings of Wang Lung, a farmer who could not read or write. About her style, *The New Statesman and Nation, 1931* writes:

Mrs. Buck does not compel one's interest by any particular dexterity in prose of inventiveness, but simply by the clarity and honesty of her narrative ...the book closes with Wang Lung not only a grandsire ,well-endowed with descendants, but standing also in a way as a symbol of passing China.(366)

Much has been written about Pearl Buck's style of writing in *The Good Earth*.

According to *The Living Church*, "This is the real stuff of humanity, a narrative as

elemental and inevitable as some of the Old Testament, as grandly simple in form” (369).

Despite the positive responses from her contemporary critics, some of the harsh responses too are given for *The Good Earth*. Among them Young Hill Kang comments in *The New Republic*:

None of her major description is correct except in minor details... *The Good Earth*, though it has no humor or profound lyric passion, shows good technique and much artistic sincerity. Thus, it is discouraging to find that the novel works toward confusion, not clarification. Its implied comparison between Western and Eastern ways is unjust to the latter.(368)

Buck’s novel can not be separated from real life because her novels show the bitter reality of common people. To present the picture of real life as it is her importance seems upon the reality of her characters and incidents. One of the greatest strengths of Buck’s novel is characterization. Regarding her skill of presenting the real characters, *Dictionary of Lliterary Biography on Pearl S. Buck* remarks: “Pearl Buck’s genius as a writer lies in her ability to portray her characters in a universal manner, their joys, sorrows; problems and disillusionments transcend cultural barriers to become understandable to all readers”(1).

A sense of humanity is always there in her writings. The abstractions involved in her stories have universal appeal and she has written with understanding of human beings weathering severe hardships. Talking about her humanitarian effort *Pearl S. Buck-Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* writes, “Many of Buck’s life experiences are described in her novels, short stories, fiction, and children’s stories. Through them she

sought to prove to her readers that universality of mankind can exist if man accepts it (1)".

Though Buck was an American writer brought up in China, her exposition of the east especially China in her novels became mostly criticized subject. Buck challenges previous stereotypes of presenting the east by the western writers. Perhaps for that reason, after the nomination of Nobel Prize for literature in 1938, a large number of protests went up. Some critics labeled her as orientalist writer. *The Nation*, 1931 writes: "Mrs. Buck is undoubtedly one of the best Occidental writers to treat of Chinese life, but *The Good Earth* lacks the imaginative intensity, the lyrical quality, which someone who had actually framed Chinese soil might have been able to give it" (366). Quoting Peter Conn, Robert Shaffer writes in *The Nation*:

A feminist, anti racist and early multiculturalists who challenged Americans to abandon previous stereotypes. She believed that only by acknowledging their status as a minority group in an increasingly transnational and interdependent world could white Americans begin to cope with the challenges of the modern age. (30)

He further says, "*The Good Earth* battled against...derisive attitudes, exchanging the stereotypes of earlier American representations of Asia with a more firmly grounded portrait (129).

It's no doubt that Pearl Buck was one of the most popular writers of the century and had an impact on the twentieth century American literature but she was excluded by cannon of American literature. In the word of Robert Shaffer she is "hidden in plain sight". It is because of her anti- racist attitude, perhaps she had long been excluded in American cultural history. Quoting interpretation of Peter Conn about her exclusion Robert Shaffer writes in *The Nation*: "It was due to her novel's

focus on Asia, on women, on the lives of ordinary people and on cross cultural concern issues deemed unimportant by the professors and literary critics who “constructed the lists of required reading in the 1950’s and 1960’s” and to her insistent dissent from American cold war policies” (2).

The Good Earth is considered an important novel in the cannon of world literature. Different critics studied, appreciated, and analyzed the novel with different perspectives. However the critics so far have overlooked one of the important aspects of the novel that is role of women and their position in Chinese society. It still lacks the feministic way of reading which is one of the major aspect of the novel. The study of this novel will be incomplete if it does not address feministic perspective. Thus, this study analyses how women are portrayed in the pre revolutionary Chinese society.

II. Feminism

Introduction

Feminism is a collection of social theories, political movements and moral philosophies largely motivated by or concerned with the liberation of women. In simple term, feminism is the belief in social, political and economic equality of the sexes, and a movement organized around the belief that gender should not be the predominant factor shaping a person's social identity or socio-political or economic rights. As Oxford Advance Learners Dictionary defines the term: "belief in the principle that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men"(428).

Feminism was coined in the literary theory at the beginning of twentieth century. The main aim of feminist theory is to seek the conditions that play vital role to shape the lives of women and it also explores the cultural understanding to be a woman. Feminism counters the inequality between sexes which favors male gender. It was raised mainly to upgrade or to uplift the voice of women in larger literary framework, and is now interrelated with social, political, legal, economic and cultural framework and equality. Feminism advocates the women rights for the equality of the sexes, their emancipation and identity. It questions long standing dominant male phallogocentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature. It is concerned with the marginalization of all women who examined the experience of women from all races and classes.

Patriarchal social systems have ignored the power, capacity and ability of women and are marginalized and have created the female figure according to their needs. M.H. Abrahams in his *Glossary of Literary Terms* mentions some issues indicating in feminism which is briefly mentioned below:

Western society is passively patriarchal, male centered and control and conducted so as to subordinate women to men all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. What is feminine and what is masculine are merely the cultural constructs generated by the omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization. (89)

Women have been treated as inferior since a long as male has believed themselves as superior. Thus, to pinpoint the history of feminism is a complex task. If a broad concept of feminism includes women acting, speaking, and writing on women's issue and rights, then we can see that these concerns go back as far as recorded history.

Feminism in English language did not enter until the end of the nineteenth century. Although feminist thinkers have always existed many people consider Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792)* to be one of the first written works that can unambiguously be called feminist philosophy. A prominent American feminist, Elaine Showalter formulates three categories of feminism according to historical development in her essay *Toward Feminist Politics*. They are 'feminine', 'feminist' and female phase.

The first phase started from 1840 to 1880, marked the female voice rising in literature though buried in so called feminine substance and got immensely affected by male literature tradition. In this phase women writers like G. Eliot and Bronte Sisters imitated and internalized the dominant male aesthetic and tradition and standards which required that women writers remain gentle women. The main area of their work was their immediate domestic and social circle.

The second phase dated from 1880 to 1920, demands for the political and social equality and protest against the dominant tradition, social values and injustices

on women. This includes writers like Elizabeth Robins, Olive Schreiner who however remained dependent upon prominent masculine aesthetics.

The third phase dated from 1920 to present, seeks the independent identity and existence of women. This includes the writers like Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf ventured to counterbalance the male dominated literary sphere and realized the historically sex polarized tendency in literature. However they could not dispose the blames put upon them by male writers nor could they explore the actual physical experience of women. It was only after the post war novelists such as Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing that we see female aesthetics and distinct female view of life. They have countercharged men for their taboos stamped on women and have focused on all areas of female experience.

Most feminists believe discrimination against women still exist worldwide and there is no single way to women liberation as they are inferiorised socially, mentally, politically, economically, culturally, racially and so on. As the term feminism covers a broader scope, it has been defined, analyzed, reviewed, criticized, redefined, deconstructed or in other words it has been pulled and stretched from so many directions for so long. Some feminist theories question basic assumption about gender, gender difference and sexuality including the category of women itself as a holistic concept and some question the male/female dichotomy offering instead a multiplicity of genders. Still other feminist theories take for granted the concept of woman and provide specific analyses and critiques of gender inequality and most feminist and social movements promote women's rights, interests and issues.

Over the years, several types and subtypes of feminist ideology have developed in academia, politics and society.

Radical feminism

Radical feminism is a branch of feminism that views patriarchy as a basic system of power upon which human relationships in society are arranged. It seeks to challenge this arrangement by rejecting standard gender roles and male oppression. Radical feminism described a totalizing ideology and social formation which dominated women in the interest of men. The true aim of radical feminist is often not only to abolish the existing patriarchy, but to undermine men replacing the supposed patriarchy with a different structure representing similarly oppressive attitudes with only the gender reversed. Radical feminism appeared in Elaine Showalter's reinterpretation of gender studies and got nourished by her followers. It has been established as a feminist literary criticism, an extreme rebellious stream which appears as hostile to patriarchy unlike liberal feminism. It gives a positive value to womanhood rather than supporting a notion of assimilating into arenas of activity associated with men.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism asserts the equality of men and women through the political and legal reforms. It focuses on women's ability to show and maintain their equality through their own action and choices. According to liberal feminists, all women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality; therefore it is possible for change to happen without altering the structure of the society. It addresses the problems of unequal rights or artificial barriers to women's participation in the public world, beyond the family and household. Public citizenship and the attainment of equality with men in the public arena are central to liberal feminism. Unlike radical feminists they emphasize reform of society rather than revolutionary changes. The main agenda

of liberal feminism is collective responsibility for the formation and development of liberal society, which supports equal opportunity between sexes.

Marxist Feminism

Marxist Feminism defines the position of women in terms of socio-economic basis. It developed from the issue of the underpayment of women, sexual harassment and exploitation of female workers by male workers at factories and limited employment of women in income generating sources. Marxist feminist believes that the main reason of gender inequality lies in the unequal distribution of capital. They argue that the secret of sexual oppression lies in the unanimous authority of men over property and capital.

Socialist feminism

Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labor. Socialist feminist see women as being held down as a result of their unequal standing in both the workplace and domestic sphere. Prostitution, domestic work, childcare and marriage all are seen by socialist feminist as ways in which women are exploited by a patriarchal system which devalues women and the substantial work that they do.

French feminism

French feminism is distinguished by an approach which is more philosophical and literary. Its writings tend to be effusive and psychoanalytic. It is concerned with feminine writing from the position of women and accepts Lacan's account of language/ culture as a masculine order but do not accept his positive affirmation of that masculine order as equivalent to civilization or society. They question the assumption that feminity can only be seen from the point of view of phallic culture. French feminist assume that language constitutes human reality. Through language

representation culture inscribes social and sexual identities in the bodies and minds of biological or psychological individuals. They are of the notion that women discourse can be inserted into phallogocentrism by finding or writing blank spots, contradictions and gaps. Helene Cixous argues that writing and philosophy are phallogocentric and along with other French feminists such as Luce Irigaray emphasize 'writing from the body' as a subversive exercise.

Postcolonial feminism

Postcolonial feminism is critical of western forms of feminism, notably radical feminism and liberal feminism and their universalization of female experience. Post colonial feminist argue that culture impacted by colonialism are often vastly different and should be treated as such. Post colonial feminist argue that oppression relating to colonial experiences, particularly race, class, and ethnic oppression, has marginalized women in postcolonial societies. They challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. Postcolonial feminist today struggle to fight gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than through those imposed by western colonizers. They object to portrayals of women of non western societies as passive and voiceless victims and portrayals of western women as modern, educated, and empowered.

Third World feminism

Third World feminism has been an organized feminist study under postcolonial feminism. Third World feminist view that feminism is not a foreign ideology imposed on Third World countries but instead developed on its own in Asia, and the Middle East as women struggled for equal rights and against the subordination of women in the home society in general.

Introduction to Third World Feminism

In recent era, women voices have not only come out from white, educated European women but also minority groups as well as non Western women thinkers and women writers. Third World feminism is a form of feminist theory which sets itself in opposition to the dominant or hegemonic feminism of white, middle class Anglo-Americans. It is a revolutionary emergence of a new feminist consciousness amongst women in the Third World. It emerged from the many differences between women's struggle in the West and in the Third World. Third World feminist think that Western model of feminism becomes inappropriate to the particular condition of Third World countries. They say that as the theory, Western feminism couldn't speak in favor of women of all rank and race. White feminist are accused of Euro centrism in their attitudes towards women in the countries of the Third World. White Euro centric feminists are challenged for their universalizing theories women's common oppression.

Third world feminist charged western feminist that they are more imperialist than of feminist. Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes in her *Feminism without Border*:

Western feminist writing on women in the Third World must be considered in the context of global hegemony of Western scholarship. One such significant effect of the dominant "representation" of Western feminism is its conflation with imperialism in the eyes of particular Third World women. (21)

Third World feminist are arguing to avoid universalize claim about women and situate feminism in a specific social, economic, cultural, historical, and political context for analysis especially when discussing the Third World. Chandra T. Mohanty again puts her view "Western feminist writings on women in the Third World subscribe to a

variety of methodologies to demonstrate the universal cross cultural operation of male dominance and female exploitation” (33). Third World feminists do not see themselves as a homogenous group but neither do they see their difference in opposition to one another thus rejecting the presentation of Third World women as a homogenous category in Western feminist texts. They believe that their feminist analyses are results of political organizing and political mobilization initiated and sustained by women within Third World context. It is not a mimicking of Western agendas; it has its own history.

Western feminists today often present themselves as modern, educated, controlling their sexuality and their bodies in stark contrast to their image of the Third World women. Very often Third World women have been presented as the “oppressed” without any further analysis of the form and extent of the process of oppression. Chandra T. Mohanty again, “In any given piece of feminist analysis women are characterized as a singular group on the basis of shared oppression what binds them together is a sociological notion of the “sameness” of their oppression”(22).

In Western feminist text, term like “women’s problem/s” often hides the fact that women from different class, culture, race and religion face very different challenges and can experience even contrasting outcomes of the same social phenomenon. For example, the problem Mozambican women faced with polygamy, the dowry system and initiation rites are different from that of Indian women faced with dowry murder; sex, class and cast oppression and also different from that of Chinese women faced with practice of altering the feet of girls and killing of female child. In *Dislocating Cultures* Uma Narayan opines, “Third World feminist contestations are responses to problems women confront within a variety of Third

World national contexts and an integral part of the political debates and disputes within these nations” (ix).

Thus Third World Feminism insists that each Third World society is distinct and is shaped by its cultural tradition, religion, social norms as well as the position of particular nation state in the world system. For this reason they insist that they need to combat against the politics as “Westernization” and attempts to dismiss Third World feminist view. Uma Narayan further says:

Third World feminist urgently needs to call attention to the facts of change within their context, so that our agendas are not delegitimized by appeals to “unchanging traditions”. We need to point to how demands that we be deferential to “our” Culture, Tradition and Nation have often amounted to demand that we continually defer the articulation of issues affecting women. (31)

It doesn't mean that Third World feminist totally rejects the women's movement, they are both active in the women's movement as a whole, which they conceive of as the white women's movement, but they are also perhaps more fundamentally actively involve in the movements which work on issues of civil rights.

Third World feminist believe that feminism is not purely a gendered term, it is the intersections of the various systemic network of class, race, sexuality and nation. Their writing focus on gender in relation to race and class as apart of broader liberation struggle. The struggle of Third World women is against racism, sexism, colonialism and monopoly capital. Sexuality is becoming a leading issue amongst Third World women, and with it a new debate about sexism, racism, imperialism and their relationship to patriarchy is opening up.

Patriarchy and Female Body

Patriarchal culture has been practiced from centuries since male has captured the dominant position over every aspects of the society and female has been deprived of their rights related to every field and sector. Patriarchal society created female position as secondary. Women were treated as inferior since male believed that they were superior. They always tried to handle and put female under their control to establish their snobbish superiority.

Male controlled power over all aspects of the society: politics, society, property, capital, culture, literature, myth, religion, language and so on and defines the things as their will. Patriarchy is male made norms to subordinate female for their comfort. 'Patriarchy' according to *Glossary of Literary Terms*, "that is male centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic"(89).

The patriarchal society required women to be objects. They were treated as animal without any human consideration and supposed to be private property. They were bought and sold as commodity. *The Women's Movement Today* says, "the concept of "patriarchy" denotes this general system where social practices, institution (church, family, state), and cultural images organize the power that men exert over women" (239). Women have been always defined with reference to man and not he with reference to her. He is the subject; he is the absolute-she is other. Renowned philosopher Plato's view on women:

There is no pursuit of the administrators of state that belongs to women because she is a woman or to a man because he is a man. But the

natural capacities are distributed alike among both creatures, and women naturally share in all pursuits and men in all. (38-39)

Plato's concept clearly shows irrationality of male dominated culture that without any proof how male can doubt on her capability, how women is perceived and judged, where is they placed in the society. In this way female is always presented as less than human being, subservient and complementary to male.

In every sphere of life male have displayed their satisfaction in feeling that they are lords and try to prove women are secondary creature created to serve men. Female were supposed to be good daughters, wives and mothers moving only from the protection of their father's roof to the protection of their husband and sons. They were expected to comply the male members of the family, faithful with their husband, home, children and other family members. Female child is always supposed to be a burden. A girl child is an unwelcome birth and can even bring shame to families unable to produce a boy. Killing of female child before or after birth is still in practice in patriarchal society.

In patriarchal culture, there is not only male dominance over female but female are taught to perceive their own subordination in the name of socializing themselves. As a result women also desire male child and feel pride for being the mother of male child. They feel humiliation for being a woman. Female power, capability, their toil, contribution are always been minimized and are oppressed and they have little opportunity for individuality. Female are restricted to talk. They shouldn't be spoken too much, if they do, they are noted as characterless. Their talking, walking, wearing, laughing and other activities are measured by patriarchal norms.

Philosophers, writers, politicians, priests, have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. Literary works which considered as a great literature also can not be aloof from the patriarchal ideology. In them, male characters are shown as brave, ideal, courageous, intellectual, and perfect where as female characters are given marginal and subordinate roles, represented as complementary in opposition to masculine roles. Aristotle said, "The female is female of a certain lack of qualities" (*Changing Status of Women*, 31). In the patriarchy order the image of women like other conceptualization, has been male created. They are motivated to show female is intellectually inferior and biologically weak. On the writings of psychologist Sigmund Freud female body defined as lacking penis. A woman body is received as being less than man's. The result of this conclusion was that women were viewed as less capable than men and their physical difference, such as being able to have children and generally physically weaker than men. Men created oppressive and restrictive ideologies of femininity and the roles of women were expected to play in society. In any circumstances, patriarchal society is not ready of acknowledge any other possibilities of women in the society than a second sex.

The issue of female body has long been connected with female subordination and patriarchy. According to poet Adrienne Rich, "the woman's body is the terrain on which patriarchy is erected; power is exerted through the use and control of women's bodies and sexuality"(239). Western society defined that women's gender and sexual identity were tied to her biological sex.

The ideal or perfect female body constructed by patriarchal society negatively affects women. Female body is presented in advertisement, media and private conversation in such a way that women seek to achieve that idealized body image

which is unnecessary subjugation to women that leads women's position as mere objects of male consumption. It is seen in the society that the reason behind the attraction of female to make perfect body is to please the male. Allured by perfect body image which is fashioned by dominant cultural ideals, women participate in their own objectification. Ideal body becomes more desirable and to achieve that image women put themselves in greater risk. They practice over exercise, eating disorders, complication of extreme and unnecessary cosmetic surgeries and many more which can permanently damage their hearts, lungs, livers and other organ. The concept of wasp waist in Western society, little bounded feet in China, thirty two virtues in Hindu culture all are designed by male to control over female body and to subordinate their position. Not only that, male also wants to control over the issues like: pregnancy, abortion, giving birth to child which are related to reproduction. Male wants to rule the society by controlling female body. "Controlling women's bodies is a way of controlling women" (44). According to *The Women's Movement Today*:

Battles over reproductive rights are perhaps most obvious example of the social control of women's bodies. Women of all race and classes face daily the specter of governmental control and interference in their healthcare, including access to range of birth control methods, abortion, fertility treatments, hysterectomies and many more. (44)

Various rules and regulation are made related to reproduction for women. Patriarchal society taught women to give birth male child is perfection and pride for themselves. They do not hesitate to abort if there is a girl.

Taking female body in relation to reproductive process had given negative connotation. Female were historically oppressed and disempowered in conventional

masculinity imagination. They were taken biologically designed to inferior status in all spheres that privilege rationality. Margrit Shildrik with Janet Price opines:

As the devalued process of reproduction make clear, the body has a propensity to leak, to overflow the proper distinctions between self and other, to contaminate and engulf. Thus women themselves are, in the conventional masculinity imagination, not simply inferior beings whose civil and social subordination is both inevitable and justified but objects of fear and repulsion. (3)

The powerful oppressive patriarchal ideas made early feminists reluctant to engage with the female body and found difficult to provide positive theorization of it. The second wave feminist saw optimism and led to positive theorization of female body. Margrit Shildrik with Janet Price further present, “The uniquely female capacity to give birth ‘naturally’ has been taken up as the center of women’s power, simultaneously to be jealousy guarded against the incursions of biotechnology and celebrated in its own right”(4).

Female body continues to be a subject of great interest in feminism because it carries the burden of current cultural, social, political and economic values. Feminism has from the start been deeply concerned with the body either as something to be rejected in the pursuit of intellectual equality according to a masculine standard or as something to be reclaimed as the very essence of the female.

III. Patriarchal Hegemony in Chinese Society

Society and Female Subordination:

It is no doubt that Chinese culture was patriarchal. The formula of “thrice obeying” was widely accepted in traditional China. Women were expected to comply with their fathers or elder brothers in youth, their husbands in marriage, and their sons after their husbands deaths. The society was designed to female subordination. The dominance of males runs through relationships. A wife who has borne sons is entitled to more respect and consideration from her husband than she has borne only daughters.

Through the story of poor farmer’s life, his relationships with his wife, his father, his village, tradition and culture, the novel reflects a picture of patriarchy which deeply rooted in Chinese society. As Wang Lung and his father begin this family strand, one by one, characters are introduced from Wang’s view point. In regards to women in his societies, he portrays them for what they are worth. In spite of the smooth surface, the novel shows a complicated feminism. On the one hand the women situation is clearly, almost gruesomely presented; Chinese village society is patriarchal, oppressive, and stultifying to women. A woman has not her own existence as a human in the society, which is exclusively masculine society with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judge feminine conduct from masculine point of view. Women are behaved such as they are the things to be used by males. In the first chapter, when Wang goes to take his Betrothed O-lan, the slave of the great house, the Old mistress says to Wang, “take her and use her well”(13).

O-lan, the protagonist of the novel however, seems to be bold and brave but in the hands of her husband, who is tyrannical and unkind, becomes weak and powerless. A woman in practical life is judged by men’s law as though she was not a

women but a man. In the same way O-lan is designed and molded by Wang Lung with his own consciousness and patriarchal norms and values. Therefore O-lan's identity is confined within the wall of her own house. However, in some circumstances, O-lan seems to be versatile but under the constructed rules, norms and values. She seems to be handicapped and remains within the limited space and time.

Woman has to obey man. Whatever the task she has to do not for herself but for her husband and she is compelled to bear only sons not daughter. In the novel the Old mistress orders O-lan, "Obey him and bear him sons (14). So women's identities are constructed and categorized in the society by the male and if the female tries to go beyond such constructions-they are paralyzed or physically punished. The clearest illustration of this occurs through the eldest son of Wang Lung to his wife: "we must put the women together in the innermost court and we must watch their day and night and keep the gates barred and the back gates of peace ready to be loosed and opened" (326). Thus they took the women and the children and they put them all into the inner-court. The eldest son and Wang Lung watched the gate day and night and the second son when he could, and they watched as carefully by night as by day.

The patrilineal descent of property and surname that demonstrates women's social and legal inferiority to men was an institutional form that persisted unchanged over centuries. In traditional China women did not own land. Inheritance went from father to sons or other male relations this was still in case in most of China at liberation. Once born, girls have no place to claim in the family. When the slave who conceives by the uncle's son gives birth to a baby girl, Wang Lung is relieved because if she had given birth to a son, the baby would have had to be acknowledged. Because it is only a girl, the new born child is not important. When Wang becomes involved with Lotus, a concubine, he demands the two pearls from O-lan. O-lan hands over

them to her husband without a word, which are only possessions that have any monetary value to her. These situations demonstrate that female had no rights over property in traditional China.

A male child was taken as a good fortune to the family whereas a girl child was considered as a burden and misfortune. The principle function of a wife in Chinese society is to bear sons. When O-lan, announced she was with child to her husband, Wang Lung immediately begins to assume that the child will be a male child. Wang has not even a simple human sympathy upon his wife at the time of her pathetic condition, at the time of bearing a child. Instead of giving special care to her at that time he gets feeling of victory. He says to his father: "It is a man child" he called triumphantly. "You are grandfather and I am father"(17). Similarly when the time comes for eldest daughter in law to give birth, Wang Lung desperately wishes for a grandson. He bribes the goddess of mercy with a new robe and even threatens the earth God to give him a male grand child. The birth of a male child in a family is an occasion to be celebrated and appreciated. The birth of a girl, on the other hand, is a shameful and bitter affair.

The novel *The Good Earth* presents psychological, social and economic operations of patriarchy. During time of crisis women were often sacrificed to help out financial difficulties in the family such as: infanticide, concubinage and finally selling daughters. The psychological order of women's behavior is controlled, they are raised to be subordinate to men and they are content with few possessions. Women's basic role in society are bearing children (preferably sons) and working inside the house. All of these psychological, economic and social characteristics of women are inferior to men; hence these works reveal a copious amount of operations of a patriarchy. Foot binding, the cult of chastity and virginity, and stricter rules

against the remarriage of widows are cited as evidence of the growing oppression of women. Women's behaviors are easily controlled by a patriarchal society and so are the social norms, traditions and practices.

The Status of Women

The novel is more than just one man's struggle to rise to economic success, focuses on the depiction of Chinese women in that era. The novel portrays these women with great realism by including traditional Chinese practices like foot binding, wife purchasing, and keeping concubines. O-lan's character thoroughly traps into the struggles and accepted ways that lower-class women must deal with. In addition, readers do sympathize with O-lan and her daughter's sacrifices made to maintain the household's well being. Lotus Flower, on the other hand, stirs up feelings of resentment for the hurt, she inflicted on O-lan by intruding on their marriage. Furthermore, *The Good Earth* exemplifies a dynamic portrayal of women in traditional China through the novel's other female characters too.

Buck explores the status of women in traditional Chinese culture, through the female characters, by focusing on the hardships and limitations faced by women, from abuse in childhood to servitude in adulthood. O-lan, appears in the very beginning of the novel. At the age of ten, her parents sell her off to the Great House of Hwang, where the village's wealthiest landowner resides. At this time in China, poor families would often sell their daughters off for slavery or prostitution. Since O-lan is not an attractive individual, the Great House uses her as a slave in their kitchen. When her owner, the Old Mistress, explains O-lan's appearance to Wang she claims, "You see she has the strong body and the square cheeks of her kind. She will work well for you in the field and drawing water and all else that you wish. She is not beautiful, but that you do not need" (18). The Old Mistress reinstates what Wang's father tells him

before their marital relationship begins: “and what will we do with a pretty woman? We must have a woman who will tend the house and bear children as she works in the fields. A pretty woman will be forever thinking about clothes to go with her face!” (8). Wang Lung’s father helps Wang realize that a hard working woman is more important than a beautiful one. Later when Wang first meets O-lan, he immediately notices her feet were not bound. It is shocking that women of many classes rush to submit themselves to such torture: after so many years of suffering, it presents a unique opportunity to gain the respect and recognition of the in-laws, who will praise the beautiful tiny feet even beyond her dowry, as an undeniable proof of her capacity to suffer and obey. However, O-lan’s parents could not afford this Chinese luxury to her due to poverty as mentioned by Old Mistress:

This woman came into our house when she was a child of ten and here she has lived until now, when she is twenty years old. I bought her in a year of famine when her parents came south because they had nothing to eat. They were from the north in Shantung and there they returned, and I know nothing further of them. (18)

After Wang Lung’s marriage to O-lan, she starts to understand her new role as a farmer’s wife. O-lan’s presence brings great changes to the family. She acts more as a servant to Wang Lung rather than a marital partner. O-lan not only takes over many of the household responsibilities, but she is also striving to find ways to please Wang Lung. When she prepares hot water for his father, she says, ‘I took no tea to the old one-I did as you said’ (27). Wang continues it as hard as he did before their marriage, but life is more luxurious with her presence. After working all day in the fields, he comes home to a clean house and a meal prepared for him. The next day O-lan goes to the city to pick up droppings from the animals and uses them to fertilize

their fields, never once being asked to do any of these chores. Day by day, O-lan accompanies Wang out in the fields without a single complaint about the hard labor.

O-lan's diligence is typical of Chinese peasant women; however, she exceeds that of peasant women in general. O-lan makes mockery of modern natural child birth. She simply has a child, and bears it alone-without a doctor, midwife, or her own husband's help. It shows clearly that O-lan receives lack of affection throughout her life. Growing up as a slave, she is expected to work through the struggles of her own. By living in an environment without any affection from anyone, she adapts to a life without sympathy. So by the time she gives birth to her first child, her independence is extraordinary.

The novel also illustrates how a peasant woman finds happiness. After the birth of her first child, the key to O-lan's happiness is her pride. At the time of her first emergence of anger, she tells Wang, "When I return to that house it will be my son in my arms. I shall have a red coat on him and red-flowered trousers and on his head a hat with a small gilded Buddha sewn on the front and on his feet tiger-faced shoes". The Old Mistress demands that she takes the first child back to the Great House for her to see. By presenting a baby boy in stead of a girl, she is praised and treated with respect by the people of the Great house, hence, allowing her to feel a sense of pride. If she were to have back a girl, she would have been sent back to her parents' home, as a way of humiliation, or simply be discarded or sold. In addition, she is proud in her success being a wife to Wang as well as a mother who has produced many sons for the family. Such pride is particularly touching because O-lan wants and expects so little from life.

At the onset of time, O-lan's loyalty as a wife surfaces. Instead of condemning Wang for his inability to provide for his family, she stands by his side with hope.

Times are so harsh for the family that they need to beg to acquire food since Wang sternly stresses he is not a beggar. O-lan says, "I and children can beg and the old man also" (100). She cries to the villagers, "A heart, good sir-a heart, good lady! Have a kind heart-a good deed for your life in heaven! The small cash-the copper coin you throw away-feed the starving child!" (100). She has now taken control of the family's welfare, and even Wang Lung seeks her guidance. Afterwards, the couple joins a mob in the raiding of rich man's gates, and O-lan shows Wang the jewels she retrieves. She hands over all the jewels to her husband to invest in land. She keeps just two small pearl for herself. Wang's greed sets in; he begins to lavishly spend money on material goods. He also engages in sexual affairs with a concubine named Lotus Flower. Additionally, he buys her copious gifts. His greed overcomes him, and he demands the two pearls from O-lan. Even though they are the only possessions that have any monetary value to her, she hands them over to her husband without a word. She continues to accept the situation and stands by her husband's side in spite of his selfish demands and his affair with the concubine.

Another perspective of the role of Chinese women is illustrated with Lotus Flower. As explained earlier, Lotus is Wang's concubine. There was no such thing as divorce to keep concubine. In many ways, she is O-lan's opposite. She dresses silk and wears jewelry along with an enticing scent. Her feet are bound so she is not expected to work. Her weight becomes a problem since she binges on sweet meats and sits around all day everyday. Lotus' demeanor towards children differentiates from O-lan as well. She tells Wang "I will not stay in this house if that one (Wang's mentally handicapped daughter) comes near me, and I was not told that I should have accursed idiots to endure and if I had known it I would not have come- filthy children of yours!" (211). Wang finds her remark intolerable nevertheless; she comes back two

days later to please him and things are back to normal. Even as a concubine, Lotus holds more power than O-lan.

Wang Lung and O-lan's daughters introduce the last and most important time in Chinese women's lives. Unfortunately, O-lan strangles her first-born girl child due to their lack of money to provide for feeding mouth. Not much is spoken from Wang after this occurs because it is their third child and it's a girl- an evil omen. Their eldest daughter receives little attention and nurturing throughout her first years and as a result, she grows to be mentally handicapped.

O-lan's youngest daughter demonstrates the fate of an attractive girl in a well off Chinese family. At the age of ten, her mother binds her feet against the girl's will. She hates the fact that her feet are like this because the pain is excruciating and she cannot sleep at night. However, when an argument about foot binding arises with her father she tells him, "and my mother said I was not to weep aloud because you are too kind and too weak for pain and you might say to leave me as I am, and then my husband would not love me as you do not love her" (252).

As a peasant wife, O-lan works both in the house and in the fields, the following lines exemplify it, "In the afternoon she took a hoe and a basket and with these upon her shoulder she went to the main road leading into the city where mules, and donkeys and horses carried it home and piled the manure in the dooryard for fertilizer for the fields" (28).

Similarly, a woman could be a household slave, like cuckoo as well as O-lan herself in the great House before her marriage to Wang Lung. In the reply to Wang's query whether she can prepare food, O-lan replies, "I have been kitchen slave since I went into the Great House of Hwang. There were meats at every meal" (22).

A woman could be a prostitute serving any man's pleasure, in a tea house like Lotus Flower who performs this role under the guardianship of Cuckoo. Cuckoo indicating the prostitute says: "and I suppose you have not looked at anything else, have you, eh? No pretty little hands, no sweet smelling cheeks?"(175). Further, she says, "There they are, their pictures. Choose which one you wish to see and put the silver in my hand and I will place her before you"(176).

Similarly, a woman could be a concubine serving only her master's pleasure, again like Lotus when she assumes this role in Wang's house. Wang possesses two women together without divorce to first one:

So these two women took their place in his house: Lotus for his joy and pleasure and to satisfy his delight in beauty and in smallness and in the joy of her pure sex, and O-lan for his woman of work and the mother who had borne his sons and who kept his house and fed him and his father and his children.(216)

A woman, who also could be an upper-class wife like the eldest son's wife in the Great House, with servants to wait on her and do the housework. Rich or poor if she is a wife, her principal function is to bear sons- "obey him and bear him sons and more sons. Bring the first child to me to see"(18). The Old Mistress tells O-lan on her wedding. Therefore, women in *The Good Earth* have been portrayed as subservient.

Foot-binding Practices

Another aspect of Chinese life that seemed designed to make women suffer was the practice of foot binding. The Chinese custom of foot-binding was meant to please men aesthetically and to enhance a man's status by showing he was wealthy enough for his wife or concubine not to work. We may compare bound feet with the "wasp" waists that were fashionable for western women in the nineteenth century.

Those waists, which a man could enrich with his two hands, were achieved only by tight corseting that forced the internal organs out of place and often caused injury. Tight corseting was not as crippling as foot-binding but it had the same purpose to please men.

The Good Earth gives much insight into the ways in which women were treated in Chinese society around the time in which the story takes place. Foot-binding is a practice that is mentioned several times throughout the novel: “the woman’s hair was neat and smooth and her coat clean. He saw with an instant disappointment that her feet were not bound” (17). Small, bound feet are considered beautiful and desirable female characteristics. Thus, when Wang Lung discovers that O-lan’s feet are not bound, he is disappointed. O-lan’s unbound feet will continue to irritate and repulse Wang Lung: “Once or twice he looked back at her. She plodded steadily on her big feet as though she had walked there all her life, her wide face expressionless” (20). In the middle part of novel too, we can trace example of foot binding practice. As Wang Lung becomes wealthier and idler, he begins to carefully examine O-lan. Realizing that she is ugly, Wang Lung is repulsed by her appearance. In a rush of anger, he mentions her unbound feet, and O-lan is immediately ashamed and apologetic. She promises to bind the feet of her daughter. Wang says to O-lan, “I have labored and have grown rich and I would have my wife look less like a hind. And those feet of yours...” (170). O-lan whispers in fear, “my mother did not bind them, since I was sold so young. But the girl’s feet I will bind ---the younger girl’s feet I will bind” (171). It seems as though a woman who wishes to be loved by her husband need to have small bound feet. This is what O-Lan seems to have instilled in the second daughter. His second daughter tells Wang Lung that she has been ordered

by her mother not to say anything against her foot binding because without bound feet, she will not be loved by her would- be- husband.

Female Babies as Misfortune and Burden

Female babies are considered worthless and burdensome. In order to ward off evil spirits from their first born son, O-Lan and Wang Lung pretend that their child is an undesirable female with an incurable disease. So, they want the baby die. The following extract clearly justifies the ideas mentioned above:

“What a pity our child is a female whom no one could want covered with smallpox as well! Let us pray it may die.”

“Yes...yes...” said his wife as quickly as she could, understanding dimly what a thing they had done. (51)

A second girl child is born during the famine. Although it is not explicitly told, it is suggested that O Lan kills it immediately after birth: “It would be merciful if there were no breath”, he muttered, and he heard the feeble cry—how feeble a cry... ”(82). It is mentioned that there was no second cry and over the house the stillness became impenetrable. But for many days, there had been stillness everywhere, the stillness of inactivity and people, each in his own house waiting to die:

“Where is the child?” he asked.

She made a slight movement of her hand upon the bed and he saw upon the floor the child’s body.

“Dead!” he exclaimed.

“Dead” she whispered.

He stooped and examined the handful of its body--- a wisp of bone and skin--- a girl. (82)

The novel also gives insight into what was considered proper female behavior in Chinese society. Wang Lung is shocked to see his older girl cousin, a daughter of the uncle, talking freely to a village man. A free interaction between a grown man and woman is considered scandalous, inappropriate, and disgraceful. Wang Lung, meeting his oldest girl cousin thus one day, was so angered for the disgrace done to his family that he dared to go to his uncle's wife and says:

Now who will marry a girl like my cousin, whom any man can look on? She has marriageable these three years and she runs about and today I saw an idle lout on the village street lay his hand on her arm and she answered him only with brazen laughter!" (59)

In response to this, his uncle's wife answered with anger, "well, and who will pay for the dowry and for the wedding and for the middleman's fee?" (60). It clears us how much a girl becomes burden for the family.

There is the belief that birth of a female child in a family is a misfortune reverberates throughout the book. When O-Lan had her first daughter, she tells to Wang Lung that the child is not worth mentioning. Because it is only a girl, it does not deserve any recognition. Wang Lung's uncle finds himself unfortunate because of his woman. He says to Wang Lung:

If I had been my destiny, to have married a wife as your father did, one who could work and at the same time produce sons, as your own does also, instead of a woman like mine, who grows nothing but flesh and gives birth to nothing but females...I too might have been rich now as you are. (62)

Wang's aunt screams at once with anger:

ah, it is something you do not know—to have an evil destiny! Where the field of others bear good rice and wheat, ours bear weed; where the houses of others stand for a hundred years, the earth itself shakes under ours so that the walls crack; where others bear men, I, although I conceive a son, will yet give birth to a girl—ah, evil destiny! (60)

Female as Stock in Market

The sense that female children are commodities to be constantly bought and sold persists throughout the novel. During the famine, men sell their daughters in exchange for money or farming tools with which they rebuild their lives. People sell their daughters in exchange for money. O-lan tells her husband Wang Lung that she was also sold by her parents to the Great House of Hwang during a difficult time. Therefore, she is willing to sell their eldest daughter to get Wang Lung back to his land. We can examine it with the following expression of O-Lan:

“There is nothing to sell except the girl”, she answered slowly. Wang Lung’s breath caught.

“Now I wouldn’t sell a child!” he said loudly. “I was sold”, she answered very slowly. “I was sold to a great house so that my parents could return to their home.”

“And would you sell the child, therefore?”

“If it were only I, she would be killed before she was sold... The slave of slaves was I! But a dead girl brings nothing. I would sell this girl for you--- to take you back to the land”. (118)

A man nearby his hut tells Wang Lung that like many others, he has had to sell his daughters to survive. According to him, others kill their daughters as soon as they are born instead of selling them as slave. The man says to Wang Lung:

“...last winter we sold two girls and endured, and this winter, if this one my woman bears is a girl, we will sell again. One slave I have kept—the first. The others it is better to sell than to kill, although there are those who prefer to kill them before they draw breath”. (119)

When Wang Lung returns to the land, he discovers that all of his girl cousins were sold by his uncle during famine. Even the ugly one, who was poke-marked, was sold for a handful of pence to a soldier who was passing through to battle.

Woman is taken as a commodity for man. Wang attracted towards a concubine having perfect ‘body’ image that was created by male dominated society, which is to please man. “he choose one most beautiful, a small, slender thing, a body light as a bamboo and a little face as pointed as kitten’s face, and one hand clasping steam of lotus flower in bud, and the hand as delicate as the tendril of a fern uncurled”(126).

One day many days later a man came bearing a small delicate maid of seven years or so, wanting to sell her and Wang Lung said he would not have her at first, for she was so small and weak. But Lotus saw her and fancied her and she said pettishly, “Now this one I will have because she is so pretty and the other one is course and smell like goat’s meat and I do not like her...” (286). Wang Lung responds her, “Well, and let it be so if you wish it” (287). So he bought the child for twenty pieces of silver and she lived in the inner courts and slept on the foot of the bed where Lotus slept.

In the novel, Buck explores the condition under which human being is categorized as having masculine and feminine traits. She tries to deal with the social and cultural problem of such categorizations as 'masculine' and 'feminine' which bears significance in human being. She communicates her claim that being a human; a woman needs a sense of love, respect and equality rather than domination and

subordination. The birth of a child whether it is a girl or a boy must have equal right to live on this earth. A girl child should not be taken as misfortune and burden. She should not be disturbed like Wang's second daughter by masculine norms and values. At last, the novel significantly addresses the problem of women's identity and an exploration of the suffering of women in a male dominated society.

IV. *The Good Earth*: An Unfolding of Women's Status

This research work critically examines the status of women in pre-revolutionary Chinese society. Although, their role varied, all women are subservient because of culture and old rigid tradition and values. In this research work an effort has been made to make a critical study of Pearl S Buck's *The Good Earth* from the feminist point of view.

The patriarchal culture prevalent in the pre-revolutionary China provoked Pearl S Buck to write this novel in which she endeavors to portray and criticize such society simultaneously. It also examines how cleverly Buck expresses her experience that the society she lived in and experienced which was founded on the assumption of male superiority and female subordination.

The world of the *The Good Earth* is a world where all the women suffer. The society where the protagonist of the novel O-lan exists, believes that women are for the pleasure and assistance of men; their role is complementary part of men and they should fulfill their natural feminine functions. It considers them "different" from men and warns not to compete with them but to depend on them for everything, especially for their identities. It has rewarded them for the limited role of wife, mother and mistress all of which are pleasing and beneficial to men. The brave, laborious and courteous woman like O-lan has to suffer because she is just a woman. She doesn't have any status in society even though she earns many assets for Wang Lung. She is much disturbed by the cultural norms and values too. Similarly, though Lotus and Cuckoo try to live the life of pleasure, they fail to keep up their identity because they are the concubine and slave of Wang Lung respectively and both are subordinated to a man.

In this novel, the inferior status of women in traditional China is portrayed with the great emotional impact. The casual way, in which a fellow refugee talks of strangling a girl child at birth or selling her as a slave is itself a shock. Wang Lung and O-lan deal with both these alternatives. A crucial event in their marital relationship occurs when O-lan, submits her to her husband's authority, hands over two pearls at the middle part of the novel: "Why should that one wear pearls with her skin as black as earth? Pearls are for fair women!" And then after an instant's silence he cried suddenly, "Give them to me- I have need of them!" (188).

Wang Lung's father helps Wang realize that a hard working woman is more important than a beautiful one. When Wang first meet O-lan, he immediately notices her feet were not bound. By no means is it shocking that women of many classes rush to submit themselves to such torture: after so many years of suffering, it presents a unique opportunity to gain the respect and recognition of the in-laws who will praise the beautiful tiny feet even beyond her dowry to suffer and obey.

All the women portrayed in the novel are submissive. As a peasant wife, a woman works both in the house and in the field as O-lan herself does. She could be a household slave like Cuckoo. She could be a prostitute serving any man's pleasure in a tea house, like a Lotus Flower or a concubine serving only her master's pleasure; again like lotus when she assumes this role in Wang's house. Finally, she could be an upper-class wife like the eldest son's wife in the Great House, with servants to wait on her and do the housework. Rich or poor if she is a wife, her principal function is to bear son.

The prominent aspect of this novel is how women are portrayed in the pre-revolutionary Chinese society. The role of the women in Chinese society is woven throughout this novel. Depending on their social status, each female character within

the novel provides readers a different perspective of woman's role during that period. In addition to their roles, the author includes the trials and tribulations these women must face as well. As a whole, the importance of these female characters is based upon their contribution to fulfill the ego of male protagonists and as being providers of support to both family and order in society. Moreover, they are portrayed to be consistent with the Chinese culture of that period.

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