



POWER AND SEXUALITY IN ARITHA VAN HERK'S JUDITH
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ABSTRACT

In the novel Judith, Aritha Van Herk presents a woman who achieves power by adopting traditional symbols of men's and women's power to create power for women. She depicts how a woman protagonist fights backs, crosses all the hurdles in her life and succeeds. The sex plays a major role in this novel. The novel gives the subtle meaning that the real feelings of a woman are never understood by a man. This is the story of a valiant woman who uses all her knowledge, bravery, wisdom and charm to lift her status to the level of men in her life. The protagonist transforms herself from a timid girl to a courageous woman. Each and every action of this valiant protagonist shows the gradual change in her character and personality, throughout the novel. This paper is an attempt to show how Judith's hate of 'petting', her right for sexual pleasure and right in sexual relation, her right against exploitation by male domination, and predominantly her power over men.

In the novel Judith, the lady protagonist undertakes the role of her father by running a pig farm. Even in initial stage, she starts to do the works of men and voluntarily takes the role of man. She shows her indomitable courage converting a barn into a pig farm and growing pigs there. She performs the role of a man by administrating the role as an undertaker of a pig farm. Judith's attachment towards the pigs shows that she replaces pig in the place of man and by doing so she equates man to pig.

Aritha Van Herk deliberately compares men to pigs to show women are superior to men. This can be felt from her description of pigs and Judith's care and love for pigs. Judith spends most of her times with pigs and takes care of them dearly. She brings them up as her pets and she considers pigs as men. She says that men are also like pigs. She weighs men and pigs in the same measure scale saying both have similarities in sexual intercourse. For them sex is nothing but sexual fulfillment. Van Herk symbolizes that 'castration of pigs' is 'castration of male-domination'. This is the first time she compares men into pigs and chooses the latter to degrade men in general. Pig farming is considered as men's work and pigs are a bit difficult to handle.

Judith transforms herself as a pig farmer. She does castration better than male and tries to control the power of male. Van Herk symbolically demolishes the male power exhibiting Judith as a powerful character. She shows her hatred towards men and indirectly gives the idea that all men should be castrated and be made sexually inactive. Castration is considered as a work of male. Jim wrongly castrates the pigs and makes them shed blood. Judith, who sees all this ridiculous stuff of him, voluntarily takes up that job and castrates the pigs perfectly. It shows the courage and strength of Judith, who metamorphoses herself as a 'man'. Jim appreciates and admires Judith's ability and capacity to castrate pigs. She plays the role of a man and breaking the rules of woman. She slowly elevates herself from a soft woman to a valiant woman.

Van Herk shows Judith's interest in developing the pig farm. Judith is very happy to see when her pig farm-increases in numbers. The ultimate aim of Judith is to change her father's pig farm by creative in barn. The barn fills with pigs and she wants to take care of them all alone. Simply she finds happiness and solace in pigs and that growth. The role of power describes through her ownership of pigs.

Van Herk presents all the hazardous works of women through Judith. Even as she works in office, she carries out many jobs. The general concept of a man is that 'man can do anything and woman cannot'. Judith shatters this opinion by handling different kind of jobs – typing

letters, memoranda, signing in all documents, and any kind of business activities etc.

Van Herk portrays 'Judith' as a powerful and domineering character. She presents her protagonists that women are not inferior to men. She obviously proclaims that women are not dependant and they do not want to be exploited by men in this world. She feels that life with a man is not necessary and it is absurd to adopt a preconceived notion that 'a woman should live with a man'. Through Judith, Van Herk reveals that there are some kinds of sophisticated exploitation being implemented by men against women.

Judith has sex with her city lover and gets a car from him. She utilizes her sexuality and power to get a M.G. car as a compliment from her city lover. One can understand that woman can even use 'sex' as a kind of power to defeat her enemies. Similarly, Judith is a very cute and courageous woman, who dares to do anything which is equal to men. She quotes, "I wanted to and so I asked him to do it" (J 142). This context shows that she does not run out of interest and it is an urge. So she allows Jim to make love to her and sex plays a major role in this novel. The novel gives the subtle meaning that the real feelings of a woman are never understood by man. Jim fails to satisfy Judith. Being a woman, she has control over everything whether it is pig farming or sex. She changes the traditional way of life prescribed for a woman.

Judith's sense of power and intellectualism clearly shows that she never wants 'petting', which is a symbol of 'oppression'. She is a modern woman and represents the feminine revolt against male domination. She does not want anyone to pet her and keep her under their control. Economically she wants to be equal and independent. Even in sex, both are equal, including the pleasure and emotions also.

Judith remembers her father calling her "Judy-girl" and "little Judy". But she never wants to be a pet to anybody not even to her father, because he is also a male. Being an independent and feministic in nature she does not like other people calling her "little Judy", including her father:
... You are my little girl, my only little girl, aren't you, Judy, my little girl come here, Judy, you little sweet-heart, daddy will take care of you and this is all for you, we'll stay together forever and ever. (J 180)

She thinks that petting and pampering by her father is also a kind of male chauvinism. Her father thinks that she is a small girl, incapable of doing heavy work and cannot sustain the pig-farm. She is aware of her age, but now she can handle any kind of Herculean task. This shows her power of thinking and boldness to face any situation. She treats her

pigs like human beings and one can understand her closeness and the casual way of treating.

Judith does not like to be a pet for anyone. While she is in sexual intercourse with Jim, she does not like him calling her "Judy", "little-girl", "little Judy". Jim says her, "Judy, shhh, listen, little girl, don't be so afraid all the time, you're safe now, my little Judy, shhh" (J 184). Even during the sexual intercourse, she does not want to be petted and underestimated by anyone. She is very conscious of being a feminist. When Jim calls her "little Judy", she feels that she is harassed. To avoid such kind of embarrassment she strictly tells Jim not to belittle her calling little Judy. Judith says:

She pushed him away and stood up, straight and tall with that skirt draped down the length of her leg and the thin blouse sticking to her skin. "I'm not little. I'm twenty-three years old. And if you dare to call me Judy, you'll pay". (J 184)

It shows that she possesses concrete articulation and assertiveness superior to men and it apparently shows her 'power' over men.

To substantiate her idea of woman having equal status with man, Van Herk beautifully pictures the dialogue between Judith and Jim. Here Judith openly declares that she doesn't want to be petted, because she feels that through the process of petting Jim would claim that he is superior. She feels that it is an indirect domination of male over female.

In this novel, the writer tries to touch the most sensitive and dominant theme of sex. She deconstructs the idea of sexual relationship of man and woman, and their connection to life. Sex is not a crime and it considers as a sacred or divine relationship. Women are not inferior to men, at the same time stresses that women cannot be dependent on men. The writer insists that there should be equality in sex and both man and woman should involve in sex with mutual understanding. Both man and woman is equal partner in sex, none is superior. Thus the author wants to establish the feminist ideology.

Van Herk tries to demolish the social construction of married life. She feels that for sexual intercourse, men and women need not get married or get united in the bond of marriage. She believes that having sex is a physical and biological urge. So, she captures that sex is not connected with marriage. To establish the equality in sexual relationship, she remarks that 'the actor and the acted upon must be given equal status'. She feels that domination in sex is a kind of sexual assault.

While she is in the office, her Boss uses to call her as an assistant. She is really proud and feels good that she is called as an assistant and not as a secretary:

"Well, would you like some wine?"

"At lunch?"

"Why not?" He smiled. "Nothing is too good for my new assistant."

She liked that, being called an assistant instead of a secretary. (J 63)

Her Boss asks her to have some wine. But she refuses to drink wine saying "no thanks". Judith likes to be called assistant by her boss. Because she feels that word 'secretary' indicates a symbol of domination.

The pig sty shows the symbolic significance of the economic condition of Judith. She gets money through the pig farm. She works out in the pig farm like men and gets money through doing business with pigs. She shows the power of women and proves that it is always equal or somewhat higher than men. She manages the total barn without distraction. It shows the attachment and closeness of her towards the pigs. This involvement brings her complete satisfaction both consciously and economically.

When Judith starts to live in the city, she works in an office. Later she fall in love, he is an officer in a city. Van

Herk presents her lover as a symbol of maleness as she does not give any name of the person. She portrays him as a general and ordinary man of society. Though Judith has a lover, she does not want to be dependent on her lover's manipulative domination. It shows that she does not like losing her identity and power to a male.

Judith has her own perception of marriage. She is eccentric, who does not want to struggle with husband and children. She is a typical unconventional woman, who has feelings of her own. She thinks about her neighbour Mina, who compromises herself for sex and gets trapped as wife and mother. Judith feels herself superior and has no boundaries like Mina. Unlike her, she enjoys the life with pigs and barn and never wants to be fettered by any other social boundaries.

Judith breaks all the age old false assumption that 'women are always dependent and slaves in sex'. She shatters another foolish assumption about her virginity. During the sexual encounter Norman with all his anxiousness asks her "did it break?". This sentence criticizes the male domination in sex:

"Judy, am I hurting you?"

Refusing to answer him, she forced his clumsy too-careful fingers into her, pushed herself over them, aching for slow clean strokes instead of his feeble bungling, his awkwardness so irritating that finally she drew away from him, blind with anger.

He was wide-eyed, anxious. "Did it break?" (J 106)

While Judith is in an excited moment that sexual thoughts she uses to turn around frequently in the bed, and hold the pillow tightly. At that time she says, "Hell, I need a man. A good, honest fuck" (J 119). One can realize the longing of a woman for sex. She longs for a good lover and expresses her feelings about sexual pleasure. When sex is a common thing to all, women can think and speak about sex. Night of pleasure is not only for men but also for women. So the longing and expectation are not for alone but for the whole women folk. She has right to speak, think and feel about sex, nobody can question her about it.

Even though the advance of women into this modern society is significant, women are still considered as powerless compared with men. Men may think that women are powerless, but it is hard for women to get power and high status. They feel that women are always in their possession powerless and obedient. Men feel insecure if they are not in higher position than women. They possess high status in the field of office, business and farm to show their responsibility in everything. It is obviously hard for women to get more power than men. In my opinion women should take advantage of situation like Judith. Even in adversity, they should not miss a chance of opportunity given to them.

To conclude, one can study Judith for self-advancement and empowerment. Like Judith, women have to accept their physical weakness and should do anything to empower them. It is important for men and women to uphold their status by cooperating with each other. One can make the society equal for both genders. In belief that the situation can be improved by spurring the ambition which possess to each one create a better society.

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ABBREVIATION:

J - Judith