

## Exercising woman's basic power: a story reflection

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study is to disclose the sexist oppressions experienced by the female protagonist in a story, to observe the solidarity she received in going through the oppression, and to examine her personal basic power to release the oppression. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The method used is analyzing the source of data is in the form of the characters' monolog, dialog, and author's narration which are collected intensively in the short story. This study is based on the perspectives of bell hooks (1984) that elaborates sexist oppression, solidarity and personal basic power. The sexist oppressions experienced by the female protagonist in a story that is caused by the social value embedded in the patriarchy society that puts woman as the subordinate and Anita's father is the male antagonist who shows domination over her. In the story, Anita's husband is the male protagonist who gives his empathy to Anita to go through the oppression. The last result elaborates that solidarity obtained will support Anita to exercise her basic power. This is required to face the oppression and to release Anita from sexist oppression so that she will be able to put herself from margin to centre.*

**Keywords:** Personal Basic Power, Sexist Oppression, Solidarity

**Article History:** Received 5 Des 2021, Final revision 24 Feb 2022, Published 27 Feb 2022

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### Introduction

Women and their related issues are never ended-up to the present. It is the worldwide issues that raise inequality for women. Women face difficulties to show their existence, while men easily show their existence. That is one of the gender inequality phenomena, caused by superiority of men over women (hooks, 1984).

As the consequence men dominate and control women. The patriarchy system makes the gender inequality possibly happened. The sexist oppression must not be happened to anyone because it is human against human which is a criminal action and intolerable (hooks, 1984). Consequently, the movement is performed by feminists to vocalize and stop the sexist oppression over women since it breaks the value of humanity (hooks, 1984).

Sexist oppression is demeaning actions over women who have different colour, class, race, any others different backgrounds that may potentially cause gap. In this case bell hooks

(1984) argued that women are the most victimized sexist. It is because women are put at the subordinate position. Yet, they do not consider it as the oppression since it is institutionalized through the culture in where they live.

The responsible reason for gender inequality occurred is women live in the culture that operates patriarchy system. The system creates male domination over women that leads women become victims. Their sharing victimization lead them to share their sources as well. The shared sources become the soul for establishing bonding between or among them. Furthermore, the bonding supports them to create unity front and to achieve the goal that is stop sexist oppression.

As women bonding, they share solidarity that may strengthen women resistance struggle. The resistance is very essential for their struggle to face, go through, and stop the sexist oppression. At the same time it shows that they

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DOI: 10.30595/lks.v%vi%i.12389, ©2022 Leksika. All rights reserved.

exercise their personal basic power. As they exercise their basic power, they show how powerful they are. In a such a way, bell hooks (1984) proposed that definition of power should not refer to the domination over others. Consequently, men who are powerful are not because men are able to dominate women. Yet, women are powerful because they are able to successfully resist the domination over them that cause inequality, injustice, inharmonic.

Based on the previous explanation, in this article, the writers focused on the female protagonist named Anita in (*IYSLTFM*) short story who experiences sexist oppression. She feels frustrated to face the oppression in her life. However, her husband shares his empathy to help her to release her frustration. Additionally, the empathy shared builds bonding to Anita. The bonding supports Anita to perform her personal basic power. Hence, Anita is able to face and go through the oppression over her and show her identity in her life.

Finally, Anita is a female protagonist who represents what bell hooks (1984) stated in her book about the feminists activist movement who struggle the position of women in the society from margin to center. Basically, the writer is interested in choosing (*IYSLTFM*) short story by Akhil Sharma because of two reasons. Those are the short story is included into 100 years of the best American Short Story and the author of the short story named Sharma presents women and their issues regarding the inequality experienced by women that relates to the writers' focus. Moreover, the author achieves winner of the 2001 PEN/Hemingway award and the 2001 Whiting Writer's Award.

There are several previous studies closely related to the topic. A study (Nur: 2017) was aimed to find out actions of disregarding patriarchy and social boundaries toward women. Another study (Yusuf and Susilo: 2020) described the resistances of woman's struggle that the women have same capability to survive in their lives. Shinta (2018) focused on the inequality of power relation issues. Soraya (2018) also described the women power, particularly in handling complex problems in their life. The study by Yuliati (2021) revealed the women's oppression and empowerment.

All the previous studies are related with this article in terms of the female characters who

represent feminist theory, such as the female characters resistance to struggle for their rights, women oppression, sisterhood, women subordination, and inequality of social structure between women and men.

This article purposes to examine three women issues as those are described in the short story. Those cover sexist oppression experienced by the female protagonist, women solidarity obtained by the female protagonist, and personal basic power performed by the female protagonist. All the previous studies which are relevant to this article lead this article to develop to examine three women issues continuously. In a such a way, the sexist oppression experienced is required to analyze the solidarity obtained and the solidarity is also required to observe the personal basic power performed by the female protagonist named Anita. Those three analysis indicate the feminist theory from margin to center. Particularly those show Anita who experiences sexist oppression due to her father domination by then she obtains solidarity from her husband so that she is able to exercise her personal basic power to stop sexist oppression and her existence is recognized. Here, the uniqueness of the article is revealed.

To help the writers to conduct the study, bell hooks' feminist theory (1984) is chosen. Her names is Gloria Jean Watkins. She writes her names as bell hooks to memorize her grand mother names, Bell Blair Hooks. She writes bell hooks as lower case letter since she sees the fact that as a women she is invisible, marginal, subordination. The letter represents the existence of a women in the society who apply patriarchy system that is male domination. She proposes her feminist theory that focuses on the women movement to stop sexist oppression. Her approach to feminism shows that she must not approach feminism from the same perspective that is white western women movement to get equality to men. Since according to bell hooks the last objective is too absurd to achieve since to which men women to be equal.

bell hooks (1984) begins her theory with the factual phenomena that women are the most victimized by sexist oppression. Furthermore she suggests that women should bond based on the share source they have in order to build front unity to stop sexist oppression instead of sharing

their experiences of victimization that may strengthen themselves as the powerless creatures. Finally, she recommends to redefine powerful not as domination over others but as

### Research Method

This study employs descriptive qualitative method. According to Gay (1996:208), descriptive qualitative involves intensive data collection. By using this method, the writer identifies, describes, and analyzes oppression experienced, solidarity obtained, and personal power performed by the female protagonist in a short story. The source of data in this study is

### Results and Discussion

This part will discuss the result of the study. There will be three results of this study. Those meet the objectives of this study. Those are the sexist oppression experienced by the female protagonist named Anita, the solidarity received by the female protagonist, and the personal basic power acted by the female protagonist.

#### *The sexist oppression experienced by the female protagonist*

The short story is written by the male young Indian American named Akhil Sharma who narrates Anita as the female protagonist who experiences sexist oppression. The short story entitled (*IYSLTFM*) elaborates how disparate Anita in her age twenty-six as she faces an arranged married to a strange man. The man named is Rajinder who is Anita's father choice

Here the evidence of the previous explanation about sexist oppression faced by Anita.

*Three months earlier, when our parents introduced us, I did not think we would marry. The neutrality of Rajinder's features, across the restaurant table from me, reassured me that we would not meet after that dinner. It was not that I expected to marry someone particularly handsome. I was neither pretty nor talented, and my family was not rich. But I could not imagine spending my life with someone so anonymous (Sharma, 1996:501)*

The quotation shows that Anita does not expect that she is arranged to get married with Rajinder to whom her parents introduces. She assumes the dinner will be her last meeting with

exercise personal basic power to be creative and affirming. Based on all those explanation, this study is conducted to examine how Anita transforms herself from margin to center.

(*IYSLTFM*) short story. The data of this study is in the form of the characters' monolog, dialog, and author's narration which are collected intensively in the short story. The collected data which are presented descriptively then are analyzed based on bell hooks's perspective (1984) that focuses on three women issues. Those are sexist oppression, women bonding, and personal basic power.

him. She does not realize that the meeting arranged by her parents determines her destiny as a wife of the man she does not recognize before. Anita is described as an ordinary woman who is neither beautiful nor talented.

Yet, the description does not mean that as an ordinary woman then it causes her to easily accept a strange man to be her husband. This really indicates that her voice is not involved into the decision to whom she will marry. Supporting that argument, Narasati (2019) states regarding the term superiority, we need to know that women are always figured out as the inferior creatures. That why, Anita is considered an inferior character whose voice is not needed to decide for her future husband.

The description also represents east culture that father hold the authority in his family. That patriarchy structure is final and un-debatable. That structure shows clearly the sexist oppression in terms of no choice accessible for the female protagonist. In this case, Fatmawati (2017) states that patriarchy is a social grouping system that emphasizes father's or man's authority.

The next quotation also strongly shows the sexist oppression faced by Anita.

*Two days after that Pitaji asked me if I would mind marrying Rajinder, and because I could not think of any reason not to, I said all right. Still, I did not think we would marry. Something would come up (Sharma, 1996:503)*

The quotation describes that she must positionate herself as a daughter to follow her father decision. Similarly, the quotation that states *because I could not think of any reason not to,*

*I said all right* overtly indicates that it shows she does not dare to reveal her true feelings and hesitates to speak up to her father. Therefore she does not have a strong reason to rebel and disobey his parents' decision. Towards Anita's case, hooks (1984) explained that Anita loses her freedom to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex-determined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Women are commonly stereotyped as subordinate among men in society (Shinta, 2018).

The first point of view Anita narration at the next quotation shows physiological problem she experiences due to her arranged married.

*As the days until the wedding evaporated, I had difficulty sleeping, and sometimes everything was lost in a sudden brightness. Often I woke at night and thought the engagement was a dream* (Sharma, 1996:503)

The quotation shows that Anita still does not expect that she should marry the man her father's choice. Hence, she feels everything like a nightmare. She surrenders and sincerity to the destiny of her life. Based on hooks (1984) elucidation it is the practice of domination most people are socialized to accept before they even know that other forms of group oppression exist.

Furthermore that is a basic oppression that is happened in the domestic life in which the family hierarchy build. The evidencedelivers the practice of Anita's father domination over Anita that causes her in difficult situation. Anita experiences difficult sleep and anxious deliver her mental violation as the impact of the an arranged marriage. Violence is probably the most obvious and visible form of oppression (Hani & Suyudi, 2016) and Anita is described as the one who recieves visible mental oppression.

The following first point of view's narration about Anita strengthens previous description about her psychological crisis.

*Only then, as Asha, grinning, described the ceremony, did I realize that I would actually marry Rajinder. I was shocked. I seemed to be standing outside myself, a stranger, looking at two women, Anita and Asha, sitting on a brown sofa in a wide, bright room* (Sharma, 1996:503)

Anita experiences restless, confused, and depressed to know that she marry a strange man. She does not want the marriage will be happened though she does not mind to marry a man she does not him before at all.

The clause, "I was shocked" really informs that Anita is in the psychological crisis due to her arranged married. She is the bride who is not happy in the party for her wedding. Her subconscious can not hide how sorrow her feeling is to face the fact that she sits in the aisle chair as a bride for anonymous man.

hooks (1984) states that the patriarchy society stressed women's powerlessness, condemning male exercise of power as domination. Relating to the case experienced by Anita, as a daughter she is depressed mentally. Nur (2017) states that men and women are different because of society has set them up with. It is observed for men to be strong and women to be weak. Supardan (2020) states that society will legitimize their gender identity should they conform to the norms.

This is due to the power of the father who dominates in determining her life. The powerlessness of the female protagonist is a symbol of the oppression she experiences in the patriarchy system. Arianto (2018) states that in the family, decision making is dominated by men, as well as in the wider society. Bhasin (1996:5-10) also mentions that the fields of women's life are normally under the men's control.

The quotation that states *I was shocked. I seemed to be standing outside myself* strongly indicates that she has no power, she is mentally tormented of having arranged married by her father.

Desmawati (2018) states that women's biology is closely related to their oppression, as well as all the manifestation of sexual assault or as one who is the fundamental cause of women's oppression. It shows the female protagonist is mentally oppressed by her father's action.

Additionally, woman who lives in family with patriarchal ideology becomes object of oppression. Supporting that argument, Wilany (2017) argues that feminism known as emancipation and can be defined as awareness of oppression and extortion towards women in society, at work, in family and awareness of women or men to change the condition.

The female protagonist must be ready to accept all injunction even it is related to her

destiny. Her condition is weak with a sore mentality and no rebellion. From this case, it can be seen that Anita is oppressed by her own father. It is understandable since her father takes control over the whole member of his family in the patriarchy model. Due to the power held by men, oppressions against women occur by the values enforced by the system of patriarchy (Gilligan and Snider, 2018:13-14).

### *The woman solidarity*

A literary work is considered to contain the spirit of feminism if it not only shows the oppression experienced by woman but also raises the solidarity as well. The form of solidarity in the short story is reflected by husband's behaviour to accept Anita as his wife sincerely and patiently.

He understands very well the depression Anita experiences by having an arranged married. It then invites him to give his sympathy to Anita, his wife. It is happened on the first day of their marriage, Rajinder guides Anita patiently into their bedroom. Rajinder said; if he is happy to marry Anita and makes Anita feel calm. It is a form of support he leads Anita is able to go through the barrier in the marriage. Rajinder realizes that his marriage to Anita is the injuncton by Anita's parents. Rajinder helps and supports Anita to go out of her traumatized feelings. Compassionate behaviour of full sympathy is for Anita to recover her from the oppression experienced by her. Rochmah (2015) states it demands that women should be treated as autonomous subjects, and not as passive objects.

The following monolog shows the first time Anita and Rajinder enter their bedroom in the first day of on the first day of being husband and wife:

*Rajinder closed and bolted the door. A double bed was in the center of the room, and near it a small table with a jug of water and two glasses. The room had yellow walls and smelled faintly of mildew. I stopped crying and suddenly felt very calm. I stood in the center of the room, a fold of the sari covering my head and falling before my eyes. I thought, I will just say this has been a terrible mistake.*

*Rajinder lifted the sari's fold and, looking into my eyes, said he was very pleased to marry me. He*

*was wearing a white silk kurta with tiny flowers embroidered around the neck and gold studs for buttons. He led me to the bed with his hand on my elbow and with a light squeeze let me know he wanted me to sit (Sharma, 1996:505)*

The quotation explains the moment when they enter the room as husband and wife. It shows the condition of their room which already has a double bed and other furniture. This also shows the feelings of Anita who has stopped crying and feels calm when enter their room. It also shows the husband's actions when he justifies the sari that covers her forehead. Then the husband looks into her eyes and said that he is happy to marry to Anita. He leads her slowly and gently towards the bed.

hooks (1984) states that solidarity may strengthen their resistance struggle. Relating to the case experienced by Anita that she receives support from her husband. Rajinder behaviour's can release Anita from feeling oppressed. It shows that Rajinder gives such deep sympathy and concern to her.

The quotation that states *I stopped crying and suddenly felt very calm* strongly indicates that female protagonist needs reassurance and support in dealing with her trauma. The commonality of feeling, the desire to end domination is a shared belief among those who experience subordination (Biana, 2020).

From sad to feeling calm, is the support that Rajinder gives her. Then the support given by the husband to Anita is the form of concern and the words in the monologue above that *said he was very pleased to marry me* show if Rajinder decides to support Anita to go out of oppression and it is a symbol of his support that he said happy to married with Anita to makes her heart feels calm on the first day as husband and wife.

The oppression experienced by the female protagonist in arranged married by her parents makes her depressed and becomes a victim of sexism. The discussion about women is always placed secondary to men or cultures, although, in Eastern culture/ Asian culture, women do have an integral part of society (Turuk, 2020).

Therefore, she really needs support in order to be strong to face all the oppressions in her life. This support became her foundation in peace of mind. Anita's husband's role is a form of supporting for the female protagonist because of his actions. The husband realizes that his marriage was only an arranged marriage from

Anita's parents. It thus shows clearly the solidarity received by female protagonist is the husband accepts his wife's condition patiently and sincerely. Also he gives a deep sympathy to her.

The next quotation strengthens the argument how cares Anita's husband to her who feels depressed at the first time married is.

*"We can put the TV there," Rajinder said softly, standing before the window and pointing to the right corner of the living room. They made him appear humble (Sharma, 1996:505)*

From the quotation above Anita's husband speaks softly to her. It shows that the husband seems humble to Anita. The situation is still formal and awkward with each other, but the husband tries to understand Anita's feelings at that time. For hooks (1984) women were acknowledging helplessness and powerlessness as well as a need for support. There is even the assumption that women are second-class human beings, who although they have beauty, do not have the same existence as men (Yusuf & Susilo, 2020).

It shows Anita's role as a wife is still under pressure with her new status as a wife. It happens because of an arranged marriage by her parents. She looks weak because her feelings have not completely calmed down. Therefore, support is very necessary for her to deal with this painful situation. Soft expressions from her husband are the forms of support so that Anita can feel peace of mind. The quotation that states *Rajinder said softly* it indicates that Rajinder knows that the situation in their house is still tense. Therefore, Rajinder tries to melt Anita's heart by speak softly so that Anita feels comfortable living with her husband.

The solidarity is given by Rajinder as a husband to Anita as a wife through her gentle and polite behaviour. His treatments to Anita show a very sincere love for her. Her husband realizes that Anita is still in shock to become a wife due to the arranged marriage. Her husband's efforts to make Anita feel in peace and happy are always done to relieve her oppression. He decides to keep faithfully by her sides and makes Anita smile again.

Accordingly, at the moment of Anita's birthday, Rajinder surprises Anita by celebrating her birthday at the Taj Mahal. This is Rajinder's act of supports for Anita so that she can forget

her heart trauma and oppression. Rajinder's behaviour is a form of sympathy and concern for his wife. Anita sees her husband's behaviour that makes her realizes that Rajinder is a good husband. Anita's thoughts prove that she is slowly get peace and quiet with her new life as a wife.

*On my twenty-sixth birthday he took me to the Taj Mahal and arranged to have my family hidden in the flat when we returned in the evening. What a good man, I thought then, watching him standing proudly in a corner. What a good man. Being his wife was not so bad. He did not make me do anything I did not want to (Sharma, 1996:507)*

The quotation explains that husband celebrates Anita's birthday at the Taj Mahal and makes plan with her family. Anita thinks that her husband is a good man. The husband can make Anita happy. She is also very proud to be Rajinder's wife. His behaviour is very good and makes his wife as the queen in his life. The husband never asked Anita to do something she does not like. Anita is given the freedom to do whatever that makes her happy.

#### *The woman's personal basic power*

The female protagonist's actions in dealing with the oppression by her parents are her personal basic power. The female protagonist who is portrayed as a daughter obeys her parents' injunctions, which is to be married to an anonymous man. She shows the strength to accept and face all the oppression experienced by her.

Thus, they enter the room for the first time. Anita tries to dispel the panic she feels. When her husband sleeps next to her, Anita tries to calm down. She acts her inner power to go through the oppression. Her basic power is shows when Anita dares to enter the room as husband and wife and tries to look at her husband when he is asleep. However, her being able to sleep and lives with her husband is the chosen courage of her life. Anita's action to survive and tries to be patient with the situation is the basic power of a female protagonist as a woman she doesn't want to fall in sadness.

The following monolog shows the first time they enter the bedroom and Anita tries to look at her husband's face:

*He took me silently in the bedroom, on the mattress beneath the window with the full moon peering in. When it was over and Rajinder was sleeping, I lifted myself on an elbow to look at him.*

*I felt somehow that I could look at him more easily while he was asleep. I would not be nervous, trying to hide my scrutiny, and if the panic came, I could just hold on until it passed. I thought that if I could see him properly just once, I would no longer be frightened; I would know what kind of a man he was and what the future held (Sharma, 1996:501)*

From the quotation above, she enters the bedroom with her husband. When her husband sleeps, Anita can easily see him. Anita does not feel nervous, tries to take it slowly, and if she starts to feel panic, she will hold it in. Anita tries not to be afraid anymore when she sees her husband and thinks about what kind of a man her husband arranged by her parents.

For hooks (1984) they need to know that the exercise of this basic personal power is an act of resistance and strength. It shows the female protagonist tries to face the oppression experienced with her personal basic power. Even though she knows her marriage is happened because of her parents arranged for her and never thought about getting married before. However, the female protagonist tries to face all the struggles she faces.

She tries to see and accepts a husband who is very anonymous to her. As she enters the bedroom, she tries to deal with her feelings such as panic, fear, and nervousness. The experience is an inner power that she does to be able to face the oppression in her life.

The quotation that states *I would not be nervous, trying to hide my scrutiny, and if the panic came, I could just hold on until it passed* strongly indicates that Anita tries to hold back the panic, this is her basic power acted by Anita. In a stressful situation because for the first time sleeps next to her husband and also tries to look at Rajinder's face when asleep she accepts her husband steadfastly.

*When I placed the necklace of marigolds around Rajinder's neck to seal our marriage, I brushed my hand against his neck to confirm the reality of his presence. The pandit recited Sanskrit verses, occasionally pouring clarified butter into the holy fire, which we had just circled seven times. It is*

*done, I thought. I am married now. I felt no different (Sharma, 1996:503)*

The quotation explains that female protagonist places a flower necklace around her husband's neck to seal their marriage. She puts her hand on her husband's neck to confirm the reality of her marriage. The female protagonist realizes that she has married at that moment.

According to bell hooks (1984) these powers can be used to advance feminist struggle. It shows that the female protagonist realizes that her marriage actually happens. She exercises her basic personal power to accept the arranged marriage by her parents. Soraya (2018) states that all of the characters were able to achieve self-actualization is not only by her struggle, but also supported by their good mental and moral and self-confidence.

When she wants to legalize her marriage symbolically it shows the action of the inner power that she exercises. She tries to rise up and get out of the oppression. From the quotation states that *I brushed my hand against his neck to confirm the reality of his presence* strongly indicates that her patience, sincerity, and surrenders to her destiny are the basic power of a woman to be able to escape the oppression that occurs in the patriarchy system.

Thus, the basic power that Anita applies is when Anita has the courage to deny her husband's condition and pay attention to him. This shows that Anita accepts Rajinder as her husband even though this form of arranged marriage by her father. Her basic power is Anita's step towards a happy life with her husband. Anita's situation at home is starting to calm down and realize that as a wife it is to ask and pay attention to her husband. Anita dares to greet Rajinder first and ask how his day happens.

The following dialog and monolog show the first time Anita encourages to greet and asks Rajinder and feels in happy situation:

*"All right," he said, stepping onto the balcony.*

*He smiled, and I felt happy.*

*His helmet was in his left hand and he had a plastic bag of mangoes in his right. "When did you get home?" The "you" was informal, and I felt a surge of relief.*

*I waited until seven for the power to return; then I gave up and started to prepare dinner in the dark. I sat beside Rajinder until then. I felt happy*

*and excited and frightened being beside him* (Sharma, 1996:516)

From the quotation above the female protagonist asks how her husband is. It shows because of the husband answers and smiles to Anita. She is very happy to see her husband smiles at her. The husband speaks to her informally, makes Anita feel relief. Then, evening came she prepares for dinner, and sits beside her husband with feelings happy and excited.

From hooks (1984) claims that it should clarify for women the powers they exercise daily and show them ways these powers can be used

## Conclusion

Based on the result of the research, it shows female protagonist as Anita in short story raises the issue of women's oppression in patriarchal system that practice of domination by the parents over female protagonist. Women is perceived as inferior, weak, and marginalized whereas parents regarded as superior, strong, and dominant.

The sexist oppression experienced by the female protagonist is the practice of domination applies by parents over her. The form of

to resist sexist domination and exploitation. It shows that a female protagonist uses her power to fight against the sexist oppression in her life. Nurhayati (2019) states as it is always claimed by feminist theorists, circumstances or discriminations are not the end of women's struggles to fight for more equalities.

The quotation, *I felt happy and excited and frightened being beside him*, strongly indicates this resistance action is that female protagonists can rise up and go through to live happily and harmoniously free from all the oppression she experiences. With the power she has, she begins to love her husband and lives happily ever after.

oppression experienced is arranged married by parents. Next, observe the solidarity received by female protagonist is an action behaviour by the husband so that she can rise from the physically oppression she faces.

Last, examine the personal basic power acted by Anita in order to be able to face all the oppression towards happiness and peace of life. The implication of this research should make the women know an aware that they have powerful to be strong and ability to stop the oppression she experienced towards a peaceful and brightness.

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