A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON WOMEN CHARACTERS
IN THE WORKS OF
D. H. LAWRENCE AND JOSEPH CONRAD

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Introduction

This paper aims to show how the women characters in the selected novels, struggled to obtain their emancipation from the male domination that was going on in their own societies. It reviews and analyzes women characters as depicted in D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* and Joseph Conrad’s *Almayer’s Folly*.

During this analysis it is found that the voice of these women characters is the same as the voice of feminists. Feminists view the world as being unequal in treatment and this is the same issue we encounter in relation with female characters in Lawrence’s novel. Ursulla and Gudrun in *Women in Love* are aware of the inequality prevailing in their own society and they have a desire for freedom—longing to come out of it. They are opposed to male domination and inevitably they reject the male superiority.

*Women in Love*

In *Women in Love* Gudrun longs for the kind of freedom that a man like Gerald enjoys in their society. When Gudrun sees Gerald’s swimming in the lake, she envies him and she cries, ‘God, what it is to be a man! … The freedom, the liberty, the mobility! … You’re a man, you want to do a thing, you do it. You haven’t the thousands obstacles a woman has in front of her.’ … supposing I want to swim up that water. It is impossible, it is one of the impossibilities of life, for me to take my clothes off now and jump in.’ She criticizes the society for these inequalities. Similarly, Ursula is strictly against the male domination; she shouts, and raises her voice against this inequality.

The women are in search of their own identity. They have to struggle against different obstacles. They challenge the obstacles encountered in their own family circle as well as in society. In spite of numerous difficulties, faced by them they go on persevering to achieve their goals. Lawrence has shown their success—Gudrun and Ursula both become mistresses.

Through different scenes Lawrence has shown Ursula as a person who is against male superiority and domination. In chapter nine in mare scene, Gerald by spurring the mare makes her stand in the railway while she is scared of the locomotive horrible noises. Ursula and Gudrun are observing the scene. Ursula can’t tolerate it, she can’t be indifferent so she cries with a voice which is so ‘powerful’ and ‘naked’. ‘He’s a fool, and a bully. Does he think it’s manly, to torture a horse? It’s a living thing, why should he bully it and torture it?’ Ursula speaks of equal rights for her and him. In fact the equality which she cries for and discusses with Gerald is the equality of men and women in the society.

Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence lived during a period when colonialism was the prevailing social order. Eventually, comparison between their women characters should be done
by considering the fact that the setting of their novels differs, Lawrence’s women characters belong to the world of the colonizer, while Conrad’s women characters belong to the colonized. Women are under subjugation everywhere, now and then. In their relationship with men in addition to colonizer-colonized relationship. This is what has been called ‘double colonization’, which, in fact, makes their pain and suffering multiple.

Women in colonized societies are marginalized, the opportunity of expressing themselves, achieving the high peaks of success has been taken from them. In their own society they live in isolation. They are prevented from taking part in social, cultural, and political activities, therefore marginality touches all aspects of their lives. They are powerless, exploited and have a subordinate position in society, they try to invert the structures of the domination. They struggle against oppression and injustice. The women who are living in these societies have to bear not only the traditional form of domination but also the new forms of exploitation.

We cannot speak of women characters in Conrad’s work without speaking of colonialism. There is a connection between these characters and the place where they are living in. Although women play a relatively small part in his novels, they however play an important role in his stories. His women characters are in search of their identity and eventually, reject domination.

**Almayer’s Folly**

*Almayer’s Folly*, Conrad’s first novel, is the story of colonialism narrated through the life of a Malay girl whose life has been destroyed by two colonizers—Tom Lingard an Englishman and Kaspar Almayer a Dutchman. The first plays the role of her adopted father and the second, that of her husband. Tom Lingard ruins her life three times—first by attacking to the Sulu pirates and killing all her dearest relatives. On the second occasion he forces her to marry Kaspar Almayer, thus ruining her future. And the third time, when he separates her daughter Nina from her in order to educate the girl. Tom Lingard and Kaspar Almayer are the representatives of the colonizer and the Malay girl is the representative of the colonized.

What Lingard has done to this girl is an act of colonialism—killing all her relatives, he separates her from her past, then he becomes her adopted father. This speaks volumes on what the colonizer does with the colonized. In order to civilize her, he sends her to a convent.

After marriage to Almayer she is aware that she is nothing more than a slave for him. In course of the story we are witness to her pain and suffering, but in the end we find her with her own sense of identity and culture. In fact, she has not changed because she has resisted domination.

While Ursula and Gudrun in *Women in Love* decide about their marriage themselves, Mrs. Almayer has been deprived of making such a decision. It is Lingard’s order and she has to accept it. She prefers to marry a man of her own people, to have a usual life of a Malay girl with all its suffering and hardships. ‘heavy work’, ‘fierce love’, ‘intrigues’, ‘gold ornaments’, and ‘domestic drudgery’ are superior to living with a white man who she considers as an enemy.

While Mr. Almayer looks at the Malay girl as a slave, Mrs. Almayer is aware ‘that according to white men’s law she was going to be Almayer’s companion and not his slave, and promised to herself to act accordingly.’ But during twenty odd years of married life she finds herself at the position of a slave in his life. ‘What have I been? A slave all my life, ….’
In *Almayer’s Folly* women do not have any special social activity. Mrs. Almayer desires a different life for Nina, because she does not want her daughter to have the same destiny. So she helps her to run away with Dain in order to be a ‘Ranee’ in the future.

Nina struggles to fit into one or the other of the cultures that she inherits. With a Malayan mother and a European father, she is heir to both cultures, but fits into neither. Brought up to be a European by her father, she is not accepted in that community and eventually rejects her European heritage for her Malayan heritage. She demonstrates a strength of character and will, as she chooses her own fate, rather than having others determine it for her. In this way, she shows herself to be the dominant force in the novel, a unique situation for a woman. Nina is an independent girl both in thought and action. In spite of her love for her father, ‘She dreamed dreams of her own’.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, in the works of both authors, women characters are under male domination. However because of a gap of 25 years between the writing of these two books and living in a colonized society, women in Conrad’s book (*Almayer’s Folly*) are doubly colonized members of their own society. So they are marginalized and through the story we cannot see nearly any social activity of them, while in D. H. Lawrence’s book (*Women in Love*) in spite of domination, women have achieved most of their goals.

**References**

