



‘GAZER’ AND ‘GAZED AT’ IN FORUGH FARROKHZAD’S *THE WIND-UP DOLL*

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Abstract

In reference to power relations, it is a male who dominates in our societal hierarchy. He is considered to have dominated the women’s ways of introspecting themselves and that the male gaze is by its nature, humongous. Hence a male is placed at the top corner of a triangle gazing at the female. His look overrules the other and therefore a male is viewed as the ‘gazer’ and the female becomes the ‘gazed at’. Through cultural and social conditioning the behavior of women are strongly influenced by men in the society. The women-‘gazed at’ are objectified by men – ‘gazer’. Forugh Farrokhzad an Iranian poet, uses the figures of speech to depict how the ‘virtues’ of women links to those ‘virtues’ to objects : one either takes it for granted or those that are freely dispensable. This paper aims to analyze how Forugh Farrokhzad in her poem *The Wind-Up Doll* significantly brings out the gaze of the men at the women. She evinces that how variety of cultural and social conditioning perceptions close in on the female body in order to ‘shape’ it in ways covetable to patriarchal institutions of prestige and power.

Keywords: ‘gazer’, ‘gazed at’, hierarchy, dominant, society and Forugh Farrokhzad.

Forugh Farrokhzad, an influential Iranian Poet and a non-conformist, has articulated on human issues. She has necessitated for a recognition of women’s potentialities that goes beyond the conventional binary polarities. In the words of Abdolali Dastghei, Forugh is viewed as a pioneer in modern Farsi poetry, who has symbolized feminism in her work.

Sholeh Walpole has written, “Farrokhzad is Iran’s most revered female poet. She was a poet of great audacity and extraordinary talent. Her poetry was the poetry of protest-protest through revelation-revelation of the innermost world of women (considered taboo until then), their intimate secrets and desires, their sorrows, longings, aspirations and at times even their articulation through silence. Her poems are still relevant in their advocacy for women’s liberation and independence.” Forugh seizes the suffocation of women and people in her poetry without rallying cry. Her poems, pitch contra to the social norms and attitudes of a male society. Her opinions about the male dominant society and dominant male culture in Iran, thwarted her from being herself. Her poetry also articulates the inexorable cries of a woman who is intensely in search of her identity in an oppressive world. She is recognized as “the most important woman in Iranian history, the greatest poetess in Iran, and one of the great poets of twentieth century Iran.” (Brahani,2002,p.59)

Forugh Farrokhzad has magnified the lack of sensitivity towards the portrayal of women in the society. The culture has sketched the women’s bodies in a harmful but enticing way. In the modernized society, the gaze of the camera is on the women. The gazer (the men) gaze at the women (the gazed at). Jonathan Schroeder outlines, “to gaze implies more than to look at- it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze” (Schroeder 1998,208). In an essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Laura Mulvey pins on the idea that women are

represented passive in the anatomy of narrative by portraying them as an object of the male gaze. She also has expressed that woman is the docile receiver of the gaze and therefore she is the ‘Gazed at’ where else, man is the active onlooker of woman, objectifying her and therefore he is the ‘Gazer’.

Laura Mulvey’s view is echoed by Forugh Farrokhzad in her poem *The wind – Up Doll*, translated from Persian by Ahmad Karimi-Hakkah. She brings out the idea of woman – as – object by dint of its metaphors and images. In her poem, though she does not portray the woman as the passive gazer of man in relation to media and markets yet very explicitly represents the same right from the beginning to the end through the phrase ‘One can’:

One can with a fixed gaze
like that of the dead
stare for long hours at the shape of the cup

The phrase ‘One can’ links to the ‘virtues’ of woman in the perception of blatant ethos of men: those virtues are seen as objects whose use where, the gazer takes for granted, or those that are freely accessible and dispensable.

In “Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis” Lacan rightly remarks: In our relation to things, in so far as their relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage and is always to some degree eluded in it – that is what we call the gaze (1979, 72 – 3). In the speculation of feminist film critics women are divested of power as the gaze is mostly a male property and that “women are looked at, not to look; their alienation from the gaze is an aspect of their passivation and reification”. Some theorists make a distinction between the ‘gaze’ and ‘the look’ suggesting that ‘the look’ is a perceptual mode open to all whilst ‘the gaze’ is a mode of viewing reflecting a gendered code of desire (Evans and Gamman 1995,16).

The Wind-Up Doll delineates how, an array of socio-cultural messages focalize on the female body, to ‘shape’ it in ways covetable to men and man-governed systems of rank, regard and power.

One can stand cry out
with a voice quite false, quite remote
“I love...”
in a man’s dominating arms
be a beautiful, healthy female
with a body like a leather tablecloth
with two big hard breasts,
one can in bed with a drunk, a madman, a tramp
rape the innocence of love.

In a male dominated society and under male jingoism women are considered as the less important individuals and their role are always watched through a microscope by others. The men are free and not subservient in the society; whereas a woman is regarded as a subservient being. In our social set set-up, a woman cannot live without men, which is horrific. In their venture in the society the men have to protect the women as they are weighed as a weaker sex and that Shashi Deshpande has rightly responded to an interview about women’s status in the present society that “..... we are not independent, nor do we have our own identity. We are still appendage to men because our society is shaped like that”. Her views endorse that it is the social structure that catalyze hierarchy in the society. This female (‘gazed at’) agony prevalent in our society is intellectually portrayed by Forugh:

One can draw back the curtain
with wrinkled fingers and watch
rain falling in the alley

In the eyes of the ‘gazer’ the ‘gazed at’ is treated as the meek, submissive and weak being.

The poem echoes an unyielding and volcanic voice against the patriarchal constructs. The protagonist in *The Wind –Up Doll* strives to move out of the stifling enclosures of male gaze. Patriarchal system in our society makes women benign and therefore it ensures power to men. Hence in the eyes of men, the women are passive, emotional and a prisoner. So Forugh warns the ‘gazed at’ to eliminate the role of a prisoner, passivation and long- suffering attitude and summons for playing a more active ‘gazer’ role.

One can hide with shame the beauty of a moment
at the bottom of a chest
like a funny black snapshot

The ‘gazed at’ remains amnesic “but blind, but deaf”; surfaces the poet’s metaphorical citation of the meaningless life of the suppressed women in the society. It is in fact the true that the male(‘gazer’) is always dominant in the society as it is based on a hierarchy of power relations. The function of the ‘gazer’ is superseding because the male gaze by its very nature is mountainous. Hence it leads to a denial of women’s identity which is rightly depicted by Forugh; how the ‘gazed at’ hypocritically take the role of a sex toy as to fulfill as the drunk, a madman the gazer.

One can in a man’s dominating arms
be a beautiful, healthy female
with a body like a leather tablecloth
with two big hard breasts ...
in bed with a drunk, a madman, a tramp

The actualization of male gaze rests on the conception of women as a gender and cultural construct of the society we live. Hence the ‘gazed at’ objectify and subjugate themselves involving in vain entertainment which is explained metaphorically:

One can degrade with guile
all the deep mysteries
one can keep on figuring out crossword and puzzle
happily discover the inane answers
yes, five or six letters

The ‘gazed at’ stay behind the curtain of their mind and remain thoroughly stereotyped in the male dominated society. Forugh reveals that the ‘gazer’s’ domination and patriarchy ends up in the inability of the choices of the ‘gazed at’

One can be like a wind-up doll
and look at the world with eyes of glass
One can tie for years in lace and tinsel
...
one can at every lustful pass
Cry out for no reason and say
‘Ah how happy I am!’

The muted voice of ‘gazed at’ is unmuted by the poet in rebellion against the patriarchal structures that constrain to silence her.

Forugh Farrokhzad’s *The Wind-Up Doll* is a critique of male oppressive power. By means of sarcastic metaphors for the ‘gazed at’(women) she significantly acknowledges that the ‘gazer’(men) is more powered and they treat the ‘gazed at’ as the objects. The ‘gazer’ and the ‘gazed at’ are not reciprocal. Forugh as a controversial modern poet articulates Varsha Singh’s view that “The structure of our society is pickled in such a manner, that either we look from one eye, or we close both we never look from both eyes and hence become partial. It is time when instead of just reverting the gaze and creating a binary, we need to produce a perspective which must not be sexist, treating every human being as a human being, not as a male or female.”

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