



## Women Predicaments in Male patriarchal Society in ‘The Duchess of Malfi’

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### Abstract

Every creature has its own importance on earth, but in human context we distinguished the things. Man is a social animal and they have to live in a society. There are certain rules and regulation which are implemented on human being on behalf of religion, color, caste or creed. In the whole country male became the dominant character on female. Women were torched across the globe only an account of women. They have second position in the society, they accept it whole hearty, but they did not get social status in any community. They are trapped in tradition and custom like a prisoner in a solitary confinement. After birth and before marriage, they are under fathers dominances and after marriage the ‘sheltering tree’ becomes the dominant one. Generally a male can do what he likes; he can act according to his own wish. Man has free will in developing an illegal relationship with any women, but when a female can do so people start criticizing on them. In every tradition marriage has a great importance and people follow it well. In some case, if a husband or wife will die after marriage, the religious or tradition would not allow them to remarrying that leads them in developing an illegal relation. Male are enjoying freely and women’s were bounded under the chains of custom. If a tradition or custom did not gave the position to women but they have no right to suppress them. So, female is not for kitchen in a day and for sex in a night. She is not a doll; she had her own feelings and emotions. In play ‘*The Duchess of Malfi.*’ John Webster depicted the conditions of women through her female character Duchess how she was mistreated by her brothers. The present paper aims to explore the women predicaments in male dominated society in ‘the Duchess of Malfi’ through the character of Duchess



**Key words:** *Power, Patriarchal Society, Feminism, Women Issues and value.*

## **Introduction**

The duchess of mafia is a ghoulish tragedy written in 1613 or 1614, but it is originally published in 1623. John Webster started his dramatic career in the closing year of Queen Elizabeth I. John Webster achieved a great success in his dramatic carrier. He wrote tragedies, tragic- comedies, but waiting tragedies was really his true field. *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are admired through his readers and considered them the great tragedies of Elizabethan Drama. Webster showed Shakespearean art in his dramas that we can found in the works of other dramatists. In Elizabethan tragedies the authors of that particular era depicted the issues related to court and kings. Webster was influenced by Senecan Tragedy and he followed the Senecan elements in his writing. Senecan drama was the key factor in the development of tragadies. Seneca tragedies followed the Greek mythology. Webster followed the same trend in his writing. In *The Duchess of Malfi* Webster depicted the life of Duchess and the role of her brother in her life.

## **FEMALE VALUE IN THE DUTCHESS OF MALFI**

John Webster paved a new path in choosing the leading female characters and their and their firm determination. In *The Duchess of Malfi* Webster showed how a female is trapped in a male dominated society and how her wishes were suppressed in her own house. Kate Aughterson, remarked about women “Women are double victims. In the ideal patriarchal system they are displayed as proxies of masculine power and vessels of masculine legitimate power” (225) and Aughterson also pointed out that in *The Duchess of Malfi* women are sacrificial victims in male dominance. Women are pledge in the superior male hands. According to Laura Bromely, “The language of men in Vittoria’s society reveals that they perceive women only in terms of sexual stereotypes.” She also observed, “Any woman whose behavior departs from the norms of passivity and silence is labeled and condemned as a ‘whore,’ ‘fury,’ or ‘devil” (50)



Duchess a beautiful young widow, she is very innocent but depicted as a complex character. She was betrayed by her brother and warned her that you cannot marry again in any cost. Her brother told her in such a manner that only a lustful woman can marry in order to fulfill her sexual desire. She is very young and want marry again but she is trapped under the traditional taboos. "Through frights and threatening, will assay this dangerous venture" (I, I, 354). On the one hand her brother threatened her and other hand society will not allow her to remarry. Society plays an important role in the life of an individual, so it is the duty of society to concentrate on these issues. Duchess also needs any one in her life who will stand with her. She was very firm in her decision to marry and her brothers are familiar about her decision. Her brother gives her warning of hazardous consequences. Both brothers gave a negative remark about her marriage. It is "entrance into some prison" (I, I, 332) and "Those lustful pleasures, are like heavy sleeps" (I, I, 334) Once her brother left from her room she revealed everything in front of Cariola and requests her to keep the matter secret.

The happiness of marriage turned in melancholy. She got married with Antino of her own choice. She gives the birth of three babies secretly. Corila remains very dutiful for her from the beginning to end. It is very tragic note that Cardinal relationship with Julia. It the male dominance on female that they can subjugate the desire of women and enjoying their life according to their will. Cardinal develops an illegal relation with Julia for entertainment, but he can allow her sister to remarry according to the rituals. This is what we call the male hegemony. When the brothers of Duchess came to know about her marriage, they start harming her. Actually both the brothers are not aware with whom she got married, in this way they start enquiry about her marriage. Cardinal keeps her sister in under observance and not allowed her to come out from her room. Duchess was in pain which her brother give in different ways, she accepted all only for her husband. Cardinal denies her and he does not want to see her face in a day. Her tyrant brother sent some mad persons in her room in order to disturb her. They sing a song in which they start criticizing the young ladies, which is direct insult to Duchess. He send the executioners with roof and coffin, which shows that death of Duchess is near, she does not showed any sort of emotion. Her servant Corila was too upset when she looked the strangers with coffin. The tomb maker starts talking with Duchess and realized her impending death. In



this order Duchess requested to her servant Corila to look after her children. Corila was also helpless and they threaten Corila to come out from the room. They killed Duchess along with her servant and her children only she get remarry.

The death scene of the duchess presents her with pride and dignity. During the torment session, she exposed some words that might depict her character and what she has gone through in her life as:

I am acquainted with sad misery,  
As the tanned galley-slave is with his oar  
Necessity makes me suffer constantly,  
And custom makes it easy. (IV, ii, 27-31)

Before her last breath of her life she boldly replied to Bosola that death is certain and I am not worrying about it. She thought she will meet her husband and her children in hereafter "In th'other world" (IV, ii, 213). She showed her brevity, when the executioners start hanging her and he strongly asks the executioners to pull the rope very quickly

Julia another oppressed female character in the play the *Duchess of Malfi*. Julia is a wife of Castruccio and a mistress of Cardinal. Julia developed extra marital relation with Cardinal. She likes him more than her husband. She told lie to her husband that I have to meet a holy saint in order to meet cardinal. He showed disrespect towards Julia and accused her indirectly and told her all women are immoral. She shed her tears but Cardinal did not showed any sort of sympathy towards her mistress. Julia was aware about all the secrets of Cardinal, but showed disinterest towards Cardinal. He is so inhuman wild fellow that he asked Julia to kiss the Bible that you can not reveal anything. As she kisses the holy bible it was dipped with passion. As she touched the bible with lips she died. So Webster beautifully portrayed the condition of women, women do not have right to love their life according to them. They have to remain under the control of male dominated system.

### **Concluding Remarks**



Thus *the Duchess of Malfi* portrayed the follies of society in which the rights of women were subjugated. Women were mistreated in the society and were treated as toys in their own families. But in this play John Webster frankly showed how Duchess used her language in order to maintain her status in her family. She boldly violates all the norms of the traditional society. Duchess tried her best to break the rules of her brothers, which they imposed on duchess. She opt death but cannot follow the wishes of her brothers. Duchess became the voice of all the voiceless women. The play clearly shows the problems of women and their status in the male dominated society. It is the fault of society because everything comes from society. Society plays an important role in the life of an individual. Society has to keep on equal eye on every one, weather male or female. Everyone has a soul inside the body and has some feelings and emotions.



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