



## Latitudes of Capitalist Exploitation and Patriarchal Subjugation: Female Disenfranchisement in Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace*, A Marxist Feminist Study

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### Abstract

The suppression and the melancholy under which women generally suffer are dual. In most environments and epochs of history, women face oppression in two spheres: the public sphere, which is related to the societal environment in which she lives -capital or colonial-and the private sphere, mainly associated with the tyranny inside their houses. Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace* is filled with explicit and implicit references to women's problems in society and in their homes. The study, "Latitudes of Capitalist Exploitation and Patriarchal Subjugation: Female Disenfranchisement in Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace*, A Marxist Feminist Study". It foregrounds the atrocity of the conditions in which women live.

Moreover, the paper examines the causes that drastically subjugate women and their outcomes. It claims that women receive oppression from two tremendous realms; additionally, they are marginalised within a particular frame. The option for women is taken; they are characters, and their role is chosen. Hence, the problem of the study is how women's retardation might be uprooted from society and their melancholy overwhelmed. They can neither express their inner feelings nor overthrow their dual foes. Thus, their world is devoid of any pleasant incidents; it is but a monotonous pain.

**Keywords:** Feminism, The Diamond Necklace, Patriarchy, Capitalism, Love

### Introduction

It has frequently been said that literature serves as a screen through which life is projected. Undoubtedly, the female issue is the most significant and pervasive, permeating practically every aspect of real life and providing a rich source of material for writers. Literature has represented the oppression, tyranny, and subjugation that people have endured throughout their lives as history meticulously depicts it. The writers depict all that melancholy and calamity in a fictitious manner to heighten their readers' consciousness. One of the prominent literary works that reflects the ideology of socialist Marxist feminists and the atrocities of the capitalists is *The Diamond Necklace*. The paper, which is titled "Latitudes of Capitalist Exploitation and Patriarchal Subjugation: Female Disenfranchisement in Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace*, A Marxist Feminist Study", elaborates on the impact of capitalism and patriarchy upon women. Culture determines the empowerment of men. Thus, it is the social structure that empowers men over women. Such restriction is not decided by biology nor an innate fact; instead, it is socially and culturally constructed.

The influence of Marxism as a political movement is widely practised in the analysis of literary texts. In contrast, feminist theory is applied as a social, political, and economic movement across various literary texts. The paper examines the influence of capitalism on women in a society that denies them social power and the right to multiple forms of self-expression. Thus, the paper claims that Maupassant propounds that women's lives are double-slaving; they live as enslaved for their husbands with no privilege and money besides their wage for their work outside their house, which is not compatible with the hardship, as they have no reward and compensation. The factors behind this fact and its corollary are the paper's primary concerns. Moreover, it sheds light on the influence of naturalism on literary texts. The movement, as it appears in the short story, affects many writers,

especially Maupassant. The paper argues that the discussed short story presents women as slaves of enslaved people when they are descended from a proletariat family because they are already looked at as enslaved people in their family, besides their husbands or fathers being slaves to capitalism. The paper also analyses how the heroine suffers the effects of capitalism on society as a whole and on women in particular. It highlights the significant disparity between the lifestyles and luxuries of capitalists and the proletariat. This highlights the stark contrast between the proletariat and the working class, who cannot afford life's necessities, and the capitalists, who enjoy numerous luxuries. Moreover, the paper discusses social, economic, and cultural marginalisation that prevents women from exercising their fundamental rights.

### **Marxist Feminism: Theoretical Background**

Economic equality is considered one of the staple issues for socialist feminists. This branch of feminism seeks to achieve equality by more evenly distributing money, property, and wealth between men and women. The political philosophy that bolsters such ideology is collectivism. It is a political theory that advocates for collective control over production and distribution. Eradication and overthrow of capitalism and patriarchy are the most important goals that social feminists want to obtain. Such theoretical ideologies sustain and advance the issue of women's economic emancipation, defined as the ability to achieve financial autonomy. Therefore, Women's liberation is inextricably intertwined with the larger struggle to end capitalism and the class system. Marxist feminists believe that women's oppression stems not only from patriarchy but also specifically from their exploitation within a capitalist system that uses women as cheap reserve workers and undervalues domestic work; therefore, the core idea is that women's oppression results from capitalism.

No need to say that the idea of the Marxist Feminists derived from Karl Marx (1818-1883), the German Philosopher who stratified society into three major classes: The aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat. He believed that the aristocracy in the past and the bourgeoisie today could afford so many luxuries because the proletariat was kept in poverty, and that capitalism is primarily to blame. Thus, they believe that capitalists dichotomised society into the upper and lower classes. That is why Marxist and materialist analysis endeavours to rectify such a hierarchical atrocity in society (Hall 78). Accordingly, Marxist theory inspired feminists to apply it to their own analysis, particularly regarding the impact of the capitalist system on women.

Building on the above idea, a trend in feminism emerged: the struggle for the rights of female factory workers and the economic status of women in general. They believe that there will be no emancipation for women without economic autonomy. Moreover, they think that women should have their own pocket money, and they proclaim that women's labour and men's labour should have the same salary under the hegemony of capitalism. Hence, they believe that liberation can only be achieved by working to abort both the economic and cultural sources of oppression. The philosophy of social feminism is a multifaceted theory that builds on Marxist feminism, highlighting the role of capitalism, the oppression of women, and radical feminism's ideology regarding gender and patriarchy. The throwaway radical feminism's chief concept is that patriarchy is the sole exploitation of women; besides, they emphasise the fact that

women should be financially independent and they should not be objects under the mercy of capitalism. They believe that economic dependence is a tool used to subjugate them further. Thus, they emphasise that liberation from economic, social, and political injustices for women is an essential goal they pursue.

Numerous aspects of Marxist ideology have become the focus of social feminists, particularly the historical materialist perspective. The core ideology of Marxism, which is that class and class struggle and economic development are the only defining aspects of history, is rejected by the socialist feminists because they believe that women's condition should be included. Feminist critics believe that women inside the realm of capitalism are of two sorts of bitterness: gender oppression -patriarchy- and class exploitation -capitalism- (Bebel 75). They focus on two prominent spheres for women: the private and the public. They believe that absolute freedom for women means being free in both spheres.

Sometimes such theoretical frameworks were nominated as Socialist/ Marxist feminists, it was primarily associated with the second wave of feminists during the late 1960s and 1970s in Britain, in particular, sought to extend Marxist analysis of class variation into women's history of their material and economic oppression, and how family and women's domestic labour are constructed (Selden *et al.* 125). There is a broader difference between the amount of money a man achieved and that of a woman in a shared environment, social milieu and circumstance. Such a variation affects the representation of women in society. Michele Barrett, in his *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (1980), presents a Marxist feminist analysis of gender representation, arguing that women are deprived of their right to possess money, which affects them drastically (Ibid., 125). Various important women critics, through their texts, criticise the way women live. They believe that women are marginalised economically, psychologically, and politically. For instance, Virginia Woolf asserts in her *A Room of One's Own* that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." The room stands as a metaphor for liberty, ownership, and the privileges that she deserves. It is equivalent to the core idea of the Marxist feminists, which is that women should have their own pocket money. Thus, according to her, women require financial and psychological independence to pursue their careers (Habib 216). Moreover, Woolf's main aim in her work is to show women's material disadvantages compared to men and the relation between male power and the professions, namely law, education, and medicine (Selden 118). Therefore, women need money and a room of their own. Women can only achieve intellectual and creative freedom if they have personal space and financial independence.

### **Female Self-abnegation and Abjection**

The short story reflects the most crucial episodes in women's long struggle for freedom from suppression, prejudice and conventional taboos. It reveals her long-sustained spiritual sufferings under oppressive ideologies. The most challenging phase of women's struggle occurred in the early Nineteenth Century; therefore, Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace* is regarded as very timely and very welcome. The work brought to light the truth about the social position of women in the nineteenth century, which had hitherto been suppressed, revealing their positions, frustrations, and rebellions.

The work presents the nineteenth century's reaction toward

the fancy of romanticism and realism. It has some elements of realism but is firmly opposed to romanticism. Therefore, it is considered to be a work that goes beyond realism. Naturalism embraces determinism, detachment and scientific objectivism. The movement wants to transfer the scientific study of "ecology" to social research and literature. Moreover, naturalism attempts to mimic the methods of physical science and draws heavily on the principles of causality, determinism, explanation, and experimentation (Habib 171). In light of such a concept, women's issues appear to be closely related to their position in society and their identity. Various social forces profoundly influence women. Those sources operate within the class to which the oppressed women belong. The impact of capitalism and patriarchy greatly devastated the proletariat women. Their position obliged them to endure their sufferings.

Therefore, as shown in the short story, the causes of women's calamity may be due to their heredity and environment. Impulses of nature and social restrictions are the staple point, that naturalistic writers tackle. Besides, the tone is generally objective; they believe that truth may be found in nature. They apply the theories of both instincts and Darwin to fictional writing (Galens206). This fact indicates that the idea of naturalism originated in science, but literary writers shifted it into literature. Such scientific ideology was transmitted to sociology and became a part of their study. Literature follows the same notion. Thus, the idea became an approach to analysing literary texts.

Maupassant was a naturalist, thoroughly influenced by the naturalistic ideology. Thus, his work is influenced by naturalistic ideology, and many naturalistic features may be noticed in the poem. Naturalism as an approach in literary criticism emerged due to the same scientific discoveries and their influence on literature. Darwin's theory is regarded as the most influential factor in the emergence of this approach. The idea adopted by Darwin and Spencer in biology in the mid-nineteenth century diminishes human beings, reducing them to mere products of heredity and environment. Moreover, for them, human beings are human beasts. Hence, literature is influenced by scientific discoveries; many literary writers have accepted and incorporated these scientific inventions into their work. To emphasise, Émile Zola soon states the principle of naturalistic fiction, arguing that novelists should treat their material as scientists do (Yeganeh124, 125, 126).

It is an approach used to understand and analyse literary texts embodying the idea mentioned. The core idea of the naturalists is to elaborate reality in terms of natural forces: heredity, environment, and physical drives. It is an endeavour that applies a scientific method to fictitious writing. To understand naturalists, it is better to compare them with the realists. Realists proclaim that people can make moral choices, while naturalists believe that people cannot (ibid 125, 126). Thus, naturalists believe that the life of a confident human being is bound by certain restrictions and factors, and he can do nothing beyond those limits. Hence, according to naturalists, natural forces determine human life, not human ability. For instance, in the short story, the protagonist faces a harsh, impoverished life due to her family's low socioeconomic status, as her parents are proletarians. Therefore, the text has many naturalistic traits. The Naturalists' tone is pessimistic and their writings are hapless, depressing and coarse. Some naturalist literary texts evoke admiration and compassion in their readers by portraying

their hero or heroine struggling against overwhelming disaster (Ibid 125).

Naturalists often emphasise determinism or the inability of human beings to resist the biological, social and economic forces that dictate their behaviour and fate. Building on naturalist ideas, numerous literary texts emerged. For example, Émile Zola wrote experimental novels that considered man as a social and psychological phenomenon, taking into account heredity and social conditions (Habib 172). From those mentioned above, it appears that man is a product of both biological and social forces, and is under their influence.

Fatalism, on the other hand, appears in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly among many great writers of that time who were under the influence of naturalism. The core idea of the philosophy was that humans are the victims of fatalism, especially women in the mid-nineteenth century. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), a prominent Victorian-era English novelist and poet, was one of these writers who believed in such a notion. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, he portrays women in the nineteenth century who were bound by fate and the ideology of domesticity, expected to manage the household and care for children, yet barred from entering the workforce. The idea is that fate can be cruel. Still, in the end, it can only bring one down to the extent that they allow it to (Fahim 112 *et al.*). Thus, the systems of causality and fatalism were widely prominent at the beginning of the twentieth century; they reflected the significant number of literary works written at that time.

Fatalism's notion is apparently noticed in the text. Mathilde cannot get a job, and she has no engagement with the outside world beyond her house, even though she cannot conceive of it. She has no opportunity to run the race simply because she is a woman. Therefore, she has no right to enter the race in her society's realm. Such a fact demonstrates how women in the nineteenth century were governed by fate, and "[They] had no marriage portion, no expectations, no means of getting known, understood, loved, and wedded by a man of wealth and distinction" (Maupassant 369). They were designed to be the angels of their homes, with their kitchens depicted as their paradise (Fahim111). Overall, women had a tailored life; they either chose the kitchen or the kitchen.

### **Crisis of Appearance: Semiotic Failure**

It is crucial to observe the social context in which the short story burgeons. This story begins in Paris in the second half of the 19th century. At the time, European societies were divided into upper, middle, and lower classes. The notion of class controlled the minds of almost everyone. The most important target for any person was nothing but to climb the social ladder. Even the economic ladder is considered part of it, because Mathilde, the stereotypical woman of the nineteenth century, wants to climb it. Finally, she becomes a victim of such a dream (Fahim *et al.* 111). Class stratification was the most significant issue, affecting a large portion of the population. Sometimes, a man could buy his way into a higher class by acquiring wealth. A woman could improve her status by marrying into a higher class.

Thus, the short story's context is capitalist because, in the nineteenth century, the bourgeois revolution spread across almost all of Europe. This fact is widely represented in literature. As France transitioned from a primitive to a capitalist society, urbanisation began, introducing new ideas and methods that affected people and concepts.

The allusion to an aristocratic life was prominent; inhabitants of different classes sought to conform to the reality of their society, fantasising about living an aristocratic life to change their status. The following quote from the short story is the best evidence for that: "She danced with intoxication, with passion, made drunk by pleasure, forgetting all, in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a sort of cloud of happiness composed of all this homage, of all this admiration, of all these awakened desires, and of that sense of complete victory which is so sweet to woman's heart".

Maupassant presents women in his own society as suffering from two calamities: the affliction of capitalism and patriarchy. Mathilde Loisel, the heroine of the short story, suffers under the harsh atmosphere capitalism imposes on her. Her dilemma is to rescue herself, but her endeavour leads her to a bigger calamity. She lacks economic autonomy; whenever she desires a material object or multiple ones, she must ask her husband. In addition, his husband, marginalised by capitalism, has a stable little amount of money, which enables him to have food only, which is why Mathilde regards him as an enslaved person. It is difficult for him to afford any luxuries in his life, let alone satisfy his own wife. Such an image in the short story aligns with Marxist theory, which posits that material realities determine the quality of life. Food, housing, clothing, and education are very costly. Capitalists enjoy all those mentioned sufficiently, whereas the proletariat cannot afford even necessities (Hall 76).

The presence of women at that time illustrates how capitalism controlled the inhabitants. Furthermore, its dominance over people is clear. According to nearly all women during the period when the short story was written, class is the most significant factor, and any woman who does not reach the upper class is virtually insignificant. The heroine leads a double life of servitude because Mathilde works in her own house as a servant for her husband, who also serves the capitalists.

The social condition in which Mathilde lives is comprehended and analysed by the work of Angeles, *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Angeles' feminist theory can be applied to the short story. Angeles asserts that women's subjugation is related to private property and the state. Maupassant foregrounds such a theory as he visualises for his readers a heroine who lives as a labourer under her husband's mercy, and when she wants any material object, she cannot have it because she doesn't have free pocket money. She is not economically independent. Thus, this reality applied to almost all women at that time, and she served as a representative example for the entire group.

More importantly, the situation in which the heroine finds herself is elaborated by the French feminist critic Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) in her *The Second Sex*. She argues that the Male perspective defines what it means to be human, including what it means to be female. Therefore, according to her view, women are subordinate and have nothing to possess. Mainly, her depiction focuses on French society, which may make it more relevant to the circumstances in which Mathilde lives.

Marriage in the short story is not portrayed as a means to give pleasure to women; rather, women in the 19th century, as depicted in the short story, were primarily marrying for economic support and social acceptance (Fahmi *et al.* 109). Such a fact reveals the idea of invisible female slavery because women are bound to the restrictions and of society.

Regarding economic support, when women marry for financial reasons, it is clear that they are not financially independent and lack their own source of income. Mathilde's marriage is not for the sake of sexual pleasure fulfilment, not for emotional love, but it is for raising her economic standard. Mathilde feels that "She had married beneath her" because she was "one of those pretty and charming girls born" (Maupassant 369). Thus, it is unrelated to the love she got married and the idea of obtaining money and economic support, which are the two most crucial factors behind her marriage.

The theory of fatalism and causality plays a vital role in Mathilde's marriage to a lower-class man, which implants calamities and afflictions in her heart. Because she was born into a low-income family, she has suffered the catastrophe of poverty and all this was because of her own fate. She had no means to acquire the luxurious items that fortunate women like her wealthy friend, Madame Forestier, enjoyed, and, due to her lower-class status, she lacked the sufficient dowry to attract rich men. She was penniless, as in "She had no marriage portion, no expectations, no means of getting known, understood, loved, and wedded by a man of wealth and distinction" (Maupassant 370). The writer expresses his negativity towards fate, explaining that Mathilde's life "fate had blundered over her" (Maupassant 370). The idea is that if she accepts her fate and stops trying so hard to change it, she will not suffer too much.

## Conclusion

The study of the short story reveals that Maupassant highlights the atrocities of capitalism against women and the calamities they face under its system. His personal attitude towards women's issues evidently mirrored his short story. The elaboration of the short story about women's issues provides readers with practical feminist criticism on one hand and a reflection of the calamity faced by women on the other. In the short story, the writer depicted patriarchy as a medium and supporter of the capitalists. Besides, he portrays Mathilde as a victim in both cases; neither does she resist the situation nor comprehend it. Thus, the rise of consciousness is absent, and total submission to the problem is present.

The findings of the work might be facts about women, and the results of all the questions concern why their lives are moulded like that. Thereupon, the work's answer to that is the following: women cannot reach their zenith of freedom until they have their own pocket money; their liberation remains fundamentally constrained by economic dependency. Even though Simone de Beauvoir's argument in her *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", might be considered the best approval for the preceding assertion, as the quotation inextricably ties their freedom to their financial precarity. Hence, the research found that economic independence enables women to fully exercise agency over their futures, lives, and bodies. self-sufficiency and equal access to wealth creation, the promise of liberation remains theoretical rather than a lived reality.

Finally, yet importantly, Maupassant depicts women as passive creatures succumbing to external forces. This portrays a negative aspect, and for the writer, women should reject it. Since women suffer under the tyranny of men, they must endeavour to rescue themselves from their current situation. Women's financial independence is not a peripheral concern but a core pillar of feminist liberation.



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