

## LIZZIE'S OPPRESSION IN SARTRE'S *THE RESPECTFUL PROSTITUTE*

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### *Abstract*

*This article discusses about the drama, The Respectful Prostitute, written by Jean-Paul Sartre. It also talks about the oppression experienced by Lizzie in the drama, The Respectful Prostitute, written by Jean-Paul Sartre. This article has two purposes: (1) describe how Lizzie was oppressed in the drama The Respectful Prostitute written by Jean-Paul Sartre, (2) describes the effects experienced by Lizzie after the persecution. This article uses the theory of **feminism, radical feminism and woman oppression**, while the approaches are the psychological approach and sociological approach. This analysis proves that Lizzie had been oppressed by white people, namely: Fred, Thomas, and Senator. This is proved when Lizzie suffered physical violence such as rape trials conducted by Fred and Thomas. Second, when Lizzie was forced to sign a letter that contains a false statement that Thomas did not kill The Negro.*

**Key Words:** *Woman oppression, Radical feminism, Feminism*

### **A. Introduction**

Literature is a term used to describe written or spoken material. Broadly speaking, "literature" is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most commonly used to refer to works of the creative imagination, including works of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction. Sometimes people think that reading literary work is only wasting their time because there is something that is more important to do besides reading a literary work. Jones states in *An Outline of Literature*: "literature is simply another way we can experience the world around us through our imagination (1968: 1)". Similarly, Hudson (1965: 10) defines that, literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they thought, felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate enduring interest of all of us. It is clear that literature is the way to express opinions and imaginations through experience in life.

In this article, the writer is interested in the drama entitled *The Respectful Prostitute* written by Jean Paul Sartre. *The Respectful Prostitute* is one of greatest works of Sartre. This drama contains some interesting ideas. In this case, the writer analyzes one of the interesting ideas, that is the oppression of woman which happens to Lizzie. Woman oppression is discrimination based on gender, especially discrimination against women. In this drama, Lizzie is the white woman who is a prostitute, and is being oppressed by the white man named Fred. Her oppressions begin when she is asked by Fred to sign the letter that says The Negro is the suspect of the murder in the train. In fact, Lizzie does not want sign the letter, she tells the truth. Finally, Fred gets angry and oppresses Lizzie until she signs the letter.

Some relevant theories are used to support the analysis. The theories include woman oppression and patriarchy. While, the appropriate approaches applied here are psychological and sociological. Psychological approach is used when Lizzie have conflict with herself while sociological approach is used when Lizzie have conflict with the people surround her. Moreover, the writer uses library research to collect the data. Punch states that library research is an additional possibility for data in qualitative studies includes documents, diaries

and journals, other written materials and non-written qualitative data such as audio-visual materials or artifacts (2000: 58). It means that library research is a technique to find other information about the object which is discussed.

Furthermore, the oppression of woman is the result of patriarchy system where in this system man has a strong position than a woman. So, woman oppression and feminism have a close relationship. In a *Feminist Perspectives on Woman and Man*, Frye states that the word “oppression” is a strong word, it repels and attracts, it is danger and dangerously fashionable and endangered, it much misused, and sometimes not innocently (2000: 10). It means that the oppression is a bad action because it is very dangerous and hurt someone, especially if it happens to women.

Patriarchy is a term which talks about men’s domination toward women. In this case, men always take control over women’s right. Kumar states that

“Patriarchy” is a term associated with the radical feminist of the west- the genre of feminism that advocates the universal condition of male domination over women in all institution of society: from the state, to motherhood to marriage. Patriarchy is the extreme form of gender relations where woman are always disadvantaged by male control (2007:5).

It is clear that men always get priority almost in all aspects in life. Meanwhile, Rowbotham states that patriarchy as follows:

Patriarchy, as a concept for female oppression, has been used over time in a variety of ways. It has been discussed as an ideology, as a symbolic male principle, as the literal power of the father, as a method of controlling women’s sexuality and fertility and as an institutional structure of male domination. (2006:52)

It means that patriarchy is the system which dominates and controls women’s right. Moreover, men always attack and oppress women who are regarded as weak creatures, so patriarchy becomes a symbol of male domination.

## **B. Discussion**

### **1. Lizzie’s Oppression**

Lizzie is a young white prostitute, she comes from New York. She is oppressed by the white man, Thomas, Fred and the Senator. They oppress Lizzie in two different ways. First, she is forced to sign the wrong statement which states that The Negro is the killer of the other Negro in the train. The second is the physical abuse that is done to her.

#### **a. Forced to Sign the Wrong Statement**

Lizzie’s oppression begins after the accident in the train. The accident has a victim that is the Negro. He is killed by Thomas with a gun because the Negro is protecting Lizzie. She is protected by the Negro because drunken Thomas tries to rape her in the train. The Negro is a kind man. He never differentiates people by their background, such as race, religion, and sex, so that he protects Lizzie.

Lizzie knows that The Negro is protecting her, so she wants to say the truth that The Negro is not guilty. Hearing the statement that Lizzie will say the truth, Fred forces Lizzie to sign the wrong statement saying that the Negro is the killer of the other Negro in the train. It begins when Lizzie and Fred are talking about nigger in Lizzie's place. From that conversation, Fred remembers that Lizzie is the one in the train and he thinks that Lizzie knows the accident in the train clearly. So, he will bring Lizzie to the judge and ask Lizzie to tell that the Negro is guilty. He also tries to persuade her with money and the wealth that he has but she refuses it until the police comes.

JOHN : Sit down. [To FRED] You told her what's what? [FRED nods.] I told you to sit down. [He pushes her into a chair.] The judge agrees to let Thomas go if he has a signed statement from you. The statement has already been written for you; all you have to do is sign it. Tomorrow there'll be a formal hearing. Can you read? [LIZZIE shrugs her shoulders, and he hands her a paper.] Read it and sign.

(Sartre's *No Exit And Three Other Plays*. 1989: 259).

From the quotation above it is clear that John oppresses Lizzie. He asks Lizzie to sign the letter. It can be seen when John asks Lizzie to sit and ask her to sign. John is the police. He is the white, so he helps the white too. John helps the same white men because the white in this drama is more dominant than The Negro. John wants Lizzie to sign the wrong statement which is written in the letter so that the white will be safe from the law.

## **b. Experiencing Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is the act which is done by the physical contact. It is any intentional and unwanted action toward Lizzie. Sometimes, abusive behaviour does not cause pain or even leave a bruise, but it does not feel good. The examples of abusive behaviour are punching, kicking, and choking.

Lizzie experiences physical abuse from the white men. They are Fred, Thomas and The Senator. The first time, it is done when Lizzie finishes running the vacuum cleaner, Fred asks Lizzie to cover her body and he also talks about sin. Lizzie feels that Fred is a hypocrite because they have make love in the night. Fred does not recognize that they make love because he just remembers that he was drunk. It makes Lizzie fade up and she seduces him by kissing and inviting him to make love again.

LIZZIE: All right, all right. I'll cover it. [She covers the bed and laughs to herself{.}"It smells of sin!" What do you know about that? You know, it's your sin, honey. [FRED shakes his head.] Yes, of course, it's mine too. But then, I've got so many on my conscience- [She sits down on the bed and forces FRED to sit beside her.] Come on. Sit on our sin. A pretty nice sin, wasn't it? [She laughs.] But don't lower your eyes like that. Do I frighten you? [FRED crushes her against him brutally.] You're hurting me! You're hurting me! ....

(Sartre's *No Exit And Three Other Plays*, 1989: 248)

The quotation above explains that Lizzie invites Fred to make love once more. She kisses him and seduces him in order to make Fred remember that they had make love in the night. The physical abuse that is done by Fred is when he crushes her until she feels hurt and screams.

## 2. The Effects of Lizzie's Oppressions

Some actions definitely cause some reactions or effects. The writer tries to analyze the effect of the oppression of the main character named Lizzie in the drama entitled *The Respectful Prostitute*. The oppression of woman is a bad action. In this drama Lizzie is experiencing some oppression which makes feel uncomfortable. The oppressions of Lizzie create some effects, they are; she loses her freedom, she becomes the victim of white patriarchy, and she feels guilty.

### a. Losing the Freedom

Freedom is being able to have enough activities, friends, social basis of self-respect, and to give the argument. Giving some arguments belongs to the freedom to talk. Freedom to talk is when people have an argument to talk or share with the other people without any pressures. Although in freedom to talk, people may say, speak, and argue anything, but it must be in rule and honest. Besides that there is freedom to do something in our place such as in our house. In the drama *The Respectful Prostitute*, the main character, named Lizzie, wants to say the truth, but the white men do not give a permission to talk. It is one kind of freedom that is freedom to talk.

Lizzie loses her freedom because of the oppression that is done by the white men. She feels under pressure after the accident that killed The Negro. She is being oppressed because she knows the accident clearly. In this drama, the men especially the white men are more dominant than the women. So, woman such as Lizzie lives under depression. Here is one of quotations that show Lizzie lives under pressure.

THE SENATOR : Give me your hand. [He forces her to sign.] So now it's done. I thank you in the name of my sister and my nephew, in the name of the seventeen thousand white inhabitants of our town, in the name of the American people, whom I represent in these parts. Give me your forehead, my child. [He kisses her on the forehead.] Come along, boys. [To LIZZIE] I shall see you later in the evening; we still have something to talk about. [He goes out.]  
 FRED [leaving] : Good-by, Lizzie.

(Sartre's *No Exit And Three Other Plays*, 1989: 265).

The quotation above shows Lizzie loses her freedom. She wants to say the truth but the Senator persuades and forces her to sign the letter that contains a wrong statement. She knows the truth but she does not have the evidence to strengthen her argument.

### b. Becoming the Victim of White Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social system in which the role of the male as the primary authority figure is central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over

women, children, and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and is dependent on female subordination. Historically, the principle of patriarchy has been central to the social, legal, political, and economic organization. Most forms of feminism characterize patriarchy as an unusual social system that is oppressive to women. In feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women.

The second effect of Lizzie's oppression is when she becomes the victim of white patriarchy. Consider the following quotation.

FRED : How much do you want?  
 LIZZIE : I don't want a cent. FRED: Five hundred dollars. LIZZIE: Not a cent.  
 FRED : It would take you much more than one night to earn five hundred.

(Sartre's *No Exit And Three Other Plays*, 1989: 257)

It shows that Lizzie becomes the victim of white patriarchy when Fred asks how much money that Lizzie wants. Fred tries to persuade Lizzie by giving her some money. He feels that Lizzie is a prostitute, therefore Fred believes that she needs money. He thinks that money can solve the problem. Fred persuades Lizzie by giving her some money in order to make Lizzie sign the letter. However, Lizzie refuses it. She does not want any money because Lizzie just wants to tell the truth that The Negro is not guilty.

### c. Feeling Guilty

The last effect of Lizzie's oppression is feeling guilty. Guilty is one kind of human's basic feeling which shows the expression of regrets after doing something wrong or impolite.

Usually the one who feels guilty cannot forget the accident or moment which makes them feel so. In this case, the one who feels guilty is Lizzie. She does something wrong that is signing the letter. It is wrong because the letter contains the wrong statement. It can be seen in the following quotation.

LIZZIE: Good-by. [They all go out. She stands there overwhelmed, then rushes to the door.] Senator! Senator! I don't want to sign! Tear up the paper! Senator! [She comes back to the front of the stage and mechanically takes hold of the vacuum cleaner.] Uncle Sam! [She turns on the sweeper.] Something tells me I've been had-but good! [She pushes the vacuum cleaner furiously.]

(Sartre's *No Exit And Three Other Plays*, 1989: 265).

It shows that Lizzie feels guilty. It is proved by her regret after Lizzie signs the letter and the white men, Fred, The Senator, and the police leave Lizzie's place. In hurry, Lizzie runs to The Senator, she tries to catch up The Senator and asks him to tear up the letter. She does not want to sign the letter, it is too late because The Senator has gone. After that moment she feels guilty. She feels that she is a devil because she does not say the truth.

### C. Conclusion

The drama entitled *The Respectful Prostitute* is written by Jean-Paul Sartre. The writer chooses the drama as the research entitled *The Woman Oppression in Sartre's The Respectful Prostitute*.

There are three objectives of study. They are, to explain the oppression which is experienced by Lizzie, to describe the causes of Lizzie's oppression and the last is to describe the effects of Lizzie's oppressions toward herself.

The library research is applied to collect the data of the research. Hence, the data are analyzed by using the theory of character, characterization, feminism, radical feminism, women oppression, and patriarchy. Psychological and sociological approaches are used to analyze the data descriptively.

Lizzie's oppressions are divided into two. First, Lizzie is forced to sign the letter that contains wrong statement. She finally signs the letter because she has no choice. Second, Lizzie experiences physical abuse that is done by the white men, Thomas, Fred, and The Senator. The physical abuse hurts Lizzie and she feels uncomfortable.

Furthermore, the effects of Lizzie's oppression are divided into three. First, Lizzie loses her freedom because she does not have any evidence to say the truth. Second, Lizzie becomes the victim of the white men patriarchy because the white men are dominant. Third, Lizzie feels guilty. She feels guilty because she signs the letter that contains the wrong statement.

Finally, after writing this article, it can be learned that men should treat women as well as they can because without women, men is nothing.

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