

VIOLENCE AND THE INFERIORITY OF WOMEN IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S *THE LOTTERY* & YUSUF IDRIS' *OQTOLLHA*

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Abstract

The Lottery is one of the most famous short stories that had a great influence in the public media and was adapted into film, theater and even Ballet. Most of the critics dealt with this short story as an example of horror theme. It received a big pile of letters attacking the writer and only thirteen letters out of three hundreds praised it. Educators of various stages especially the high school called for its abolishment from the high school curricula. This paper is bringing back Shirley Jackson into light by focusing on the inferiority and violence towards women in *the lottery* and comparing the theme with *Yusuf Idris' Oqtollha* or "kill her" where women are same in claiming for their rights but the Egyptian woman has her own way to get a wide range of rights to have their role in society.

"A woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine conduct from a masculine point of view."

- Henrik Ibsen from Ibsen's workshop

Violence against women is one of the international issues that occupy the thought of the world at present. Women struggle for their freedom, and for their superiority. They call for their equality with men in all cultures. Many studies dealt with the works of Shirley Jackson concentrating their arguments on the theme of Horror since long ago. This research would bring back the light to her. Her private life influenced her works as she was afraid of the society, she did not like to eat before anybody; also she was embarrassed of her obesity. She devoted herself for her kids and the house works as her priority as all women. Meanwhile, this research would compare between the protagonist of *the lottery* Mrs. Hutchison and the Arab Suzanne the protagonist of *Oqtollha* or "kill her". In both cultures we would observe that women are secondary creatures. But what this research suggests is that the Arab woman

preserves her dignity & rights more than the American one. Despite the fact that the American protagonist has the chance to raise her voice, to protest against violence the Egyptian woman has her own way to stop it.

The Lottery is built on a ritual tradition that is an omen for the good harvest. It is a spiritual prison that the habitants of the country live in for years though it changed through time and terminated from many other neighbors; it is still held in this countryside. On the 27th of June of each year, it is performed. The date of June the 27th notifies the readers of the summer solstice with all its overtones of ancient ritual. Carefully the scene is set the date, the air if festivity. Shirley Jackson depicted the atmosphere of the event, the day was beautiful morning, sunny and clear that indicated a good day, the winner was one of the good luck winners on the contrary to the ending of *the* short story. Boys came at first and began to collect stones for the festival; they were running here and there having fun. They did not care, as they had vacation, they gathered stones for the celebration putting them in a corner of the square. Men were chanting and joking taking care for their children. The last to come were the women who were gathered anxious who would be chosen as a winner.

The Patriarch society

The lottery resembles the society; it is a masculine society; it was lead by Mr. Summers who lead many activities in the village, he came to begin the festival followed by Mr. Grave porting a table with three legged stools and a black wooden box the traditional tools of the lottery. It is suggested that the three- legged stool is of the same importance of the black box. “The significance of the three- legged stool as old as of the tripod of the Delphic oracle, as new as the Christian trinity. For that which supports the present day box of the meaningless and perverted superstition is the body of unexamined tradition or at least six thousand years of man’s history (one of the leg stool) are as old as the memory man and are symbolized by the season, the ritual, the original box, the wood chips, the names of Summer, Graves, Martin, Warner (all cultures have their priesthoods). Became a second leg or brace for the box.”(Nebeker,1974).¹ Through time the tools were changed to be convenient with the atmosphere of the festival. For example the ships of wood changed into slips of paper, and the ritual of chanting changed to a salute etc....

The inferiority of woman is obvious from the very beginning of the short story. When Mr. Summon began the lottery he asked about Mr. Clyde Dunbar and he knew that his legs were broken and his wife would withdraw the slip of paper for him; he asked if she had an older son but she answered that her son was not yet sixteen. Then he asked about the Watsons and she was not permitted to select the slip of paper alone, she picked it up with both her sons.

After he asked about both the Dunbars and the Watsons, he told them about the procedures of the lottery, he began to call the households of the families. In this regard, this short story was influenced by the private life of Shirley Jackson where her writings became a rebellion against the treatment of her husband who was unfaithful and her writings against a male dominated society. “Jackson’s real witchcraft is her fiction” Jackson resembled her protagonists in searching for their identity, they revolt against their husbands and were punished for their disobedience. (Nebeker, H. E. 1974).¹

Tessie rebellion begins with her late arrival at the lottery, a faux pas that reveals for conscious resistance to everything the lottery stands for when

Mr. Summers calls her family name, Tessie goads her husband.” Get up there, Bill.” In doing so, she inverts the power relation... between husband and wife... Her final faux pas is to question the rules of the lottery which relegate women to inferior status as a property of their husbands... ²

They rebel and revolt for their menial existence in the society. Tessie is a symbol for the historical and excommunicated religious character Ann Hutchinson who was sentenced to death, similarly Tessie Hutchinson was the winner of the lottery and stoned by the villagers despite her protests of the unfairness of the procedures of the lottery.

The inferiority of women in *the lottery* is conspicuous. It is like society it seems patriarchal. Men conducted it, the head of the household, typically male, selected the first ballot; the wife drew before her husband, who became “first and last” in the scheme. Men had choice; women chose only when they are already at risk in the lottery pattern. In case of marriage any daughter drew her lot with her husband’s family, not her mother’s. Women moved from their father’s control to their husband’s control, the same as the Arab’s traditions.⁴ When Bill Hutchinson numerates his daughter to draw with his clan Mr. Summon objected and told him that she would withdraw with her husband’s family. The lottery as it is said before served as a male ritual. Mr. summon called at the Dunbar then at the Watson, the Watsons were lucky enough to have a grown up male to draw for them the slip of paper, their son was nervous and ducked his head but as a male society they encouraged him saying “Glad to see your mother got a man to do it”(Charter, 1983), another time they told him not to be nervous... “Take your time, son”. They supported men, while when Tessie complained of the unfairness of the withdrawing of her husband their slip of paper, he blamed her by telling “shut up”.

As the Lottery progressed the name of her daughter and her husband was called and Mrs. Hutchinson shouted let them have chance but according to Persephone myth a mother should sacrifice her daughter and her daughter’s husband but Mrs. Hutchinson had no desire or will for this sacrifice, as if she felt that she would be the chosen martyr; that the blood tie between the two women would displace the patronymical and the matrimonial one which established hierarchy’s order for kinship. Therefore patriarchy saved the daughter. Again the male society pinnacles Eve did not pick the slip of paper but the male head of her husband’s family was the one who drew on her behalf. Thus the lottery rituals separated woman from woman, mother from her child.

At the end of the lottery Mrs. Hutchinson tried to argue her case at first quietly by joking, then by shouting and at last by screaming that her husband did not have enough time to draw the slip of paper. Her protests override her husband’s trials to cut off her objections with “Shut up, Tessie” so that “she is portrayed not only as a woman who is unwilling to be sacrificed for her family and neighbors, but the antithesis of the old ideal of the demure and silent woman.(Whiter,1991) “It wasn’t fair” it was said by Mrs. Hutchinson for more than three times adding that Mr. Summon did not give her husband enough time to select his slip of paper but as it was a masculine society and a lottery with male rites and dominance. Her screams went in vain and the habitants of the village began to stone her till death.

Yusuf Idris’s *Oqtollha* or “kill her”

Oqtollha or “kill her” is one of Yusuf Idris’ short stories that dealt with the violence or inferiority of the Arab woman. In *the Lottery* the woman is humiliated to the extent that at the end of the

short story she was stoned till death not only by the citizens of the village but also but also by her kids. Violence towards women is taught from a very young age. On the contrary of the end of *Oqtolha* or “kill her” love wins, the respect for women had the upper hand. The penetration of the domination of the female soul over her male partner is strong. Throughout the story the call for the death of Suzanne the female communist protagonist by the Islamic Sheikh leader never stopped. It is said that Yusuf Idris was one of the famous writers who supported women rights. The female protagonist at the end of the story is triumphant on the contrary of *the Lottery* though the complaints of Mrs. Hutchinson that the lottery was unfair nobody listened to her and she was stoned to death. In *Oqtolha* or “kill her” her yielding to her killer and her looks at him was a kind of dialogue that to die by hands was better to her than to live without his love or admiration. The complete surrender saved her life.

In *Oqtolha* the setting was a prison in which there were four sections, the first for the political prisoners, the second for the communist prisoners, the third for brotherhood prisoners and the last for the criminal prisoners. The prison was for both females and males but with different recess times. Mustafa was one of the brotherhood prisoners. His sheikh urged him throughout the story to kill the communist female prisoner. Mustafa saw her in one of the recesses and admired her. She was beautiful; and casted her looks on the prisoners but when she saw him they reciprocated their admiration. In other words, the communist Suzanne was seen by the brotherhood Mustafa in one of the recesses they admired each other. Though he was restricted to the instructions of his Islamic religion he could not resist being fascinated by her. His sheikh asked him to assassinate her, but he was hesitant unlike Bill Hutchinson in *the lottery*, he was steady and strong he stopped his wife by saying “shut up” when she tried to protest that her husband had not the adequate time to pick the slip of paper he stopped her by shouting “It isn’t unfair”. Mustafa was not only hesitant, he was not convinced to kill Suzanne without a reason or crime. He did not possess the motive to kill her so he asked his Sheikh why he was chosen in particular to kill her. His Sheikh answered because he was the leader of his group and she was the first in her sector. She was a marked one.

“Why she... in particular?”

Because she is the most beautiful...

But the beauty...

The beauties of the enemy are strength to him and weakness to us

And why I am especially.

Because you are the first, the point of our strength and also our weakness

Is it possible for another one?...

It is not possible...”

Thus, it is the inevitable order of killing, he was chosen. She was the Satan who fascinated the head of the brotherhood and he commanded Mustafa to kill her as he felt the hesitation of his disciple for killing without a cause and his scariness of such a deed he tried to encourage him, telling him that assassination was an easy matter and selected the time at their appointment in the second half of the recess when most of the prisoners whether the religious groups or the atheists go to the rest rooms. To intense his pressure on him, he told him that it was only a bone that made Mustafa away from paradise and immortality. The relationship between Suzanne and Mustafa is other than that of Mrs. Hutchinson and her husband Bill. Bill is more tough than Yusuf, when he knew that the black spot was with his wife and she was the winner,

the one who selected to be stoned to death, he pushed her to her fate in spite of her protests and shouts that he did not possess the enough chance to select the slip of paper, complaining “It’s not fair”. He shouted at her to “shut up” and began with the other citizens to throw stones at her. On the other side Yusuf was hesitant to kill his beloved Suzanne and tried hardly to avoid her assassination, but unfortunately he could not.

“At the restricted time she stretched her hands between two pillars and tried to kiss him to know if he had fever. Mustafa was trembling, he was pale, she tried to put her lips on his forehead to know if he had fever. He was without soul. His eyes were sticking at her face, but he did not see or hear her. With a shiver in his body he tried to kill her, to stone her, he caught her neck. He was astonished because she showed nothing of fearsome, she was serene and secure in his hands”. The writer compared Suzanne with the cat that felt safe in the hands that tap on it. This situation made Yusuf full of anger. According to his philosophy, the principal enmity of fierce is prettiness. Prettiness is the severe enemy of courage.

Later in the story though he kept on pressing on her neck neglecting her prettiness consequently she comprehended that he meant to stone her, to kill her. This time he saw the gaze of her eyes, the gaze of unbelieving that her lover wanted to end her life. At first she was scared then she surrendered to her fate. To die in his hands and by him is better to her than anything else. Yusuf saw as he tried to kill her, he saw a weak smile, no scary look, no hint of fear or even imploring. Yusuf became scared. He could not endure or even imagine this situation. As if the situation is altered he became the suffocated, the victim not the killer. Suzanne on the other hand becomes the happiest victim, her looks asked for death even implored it, complete surrender to her lover. Suzanne aspired death with his hands. She looked as if she never loved anyone but him. In *Oqtollha* “kill her” love changed the basics of the game. It turned the lover/killer into a human being; the female protagonist changed the male protagonist; she was the stronger unlike Mrs. Hutchinson in *the lottery*.

The Arab women had rights more than the foreign women. Suzanne does not care about Yusuf’s love, she cared more that she possessed the ability to change him. She changed the killer into a human being.

“Step by step despite his wish then by his will, become steady, goes up, grown up,... becomes something else other than his mind, a crawling sophisticate, an old is born but has a big heart bigger than all the hearts of the world”.

The stoning of Tessie in *the lottery* left love aside, even respect the whole citizens stoned the winner (Tessie). Though Tessie claimed from the very beginning that the picking of the slip of paper by her husband was unfair yet her rights were usurped. She came late owing to the works of the home. Her role in the society was diminished to the works of the home and being affiliated to her husband, with no other roles in the society. Violence was taught to male sex from early childhood, boys collected stones to stone the victim. She was stoned to death by the stones that were compiled by the boys including her sons. This taught not only violence but also disrespect to the coming generations

Works Cited