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The Awakening's Rediscovery: A literary Stimulus for Raising Women's Struggle in Pakistan

Abstract *'The awakening has spoken to women's issues across time in many corners of the world regardless of caste, faith, nationality. Being a semi-autobiographical American-Novel, The Awakening was a catharsis against the late-19th-century Victorian constraints on Southern American women. The text challenged the hold of Victorian shackles on women's social, personal, marital, and sexual rights. Although the text had poor critical reception in its own time, it was reaccredited in the 1950s. Since then, the novel has kept on enlightening its readers through its powerful female-characters across times and cultures. This study revisits how the text reflected women's individualism; how readers responded to it, and how it has contributed a change to women's position. The analogy also signifies the degree to which the study could encourage the suppressed women's voice in Pakistan against—social, personal, marital, sexual —injustices that are done to them under cultural shackles, religious romanticizing, and androcentric norms.*

Key Words: The Awakening; feminism; women; late 19th-century; patriarchy; Pakistan; USA

Introduction

In *Women and Economics*, published one year before *The Awakening*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman ridiculed the excess of home and marital worship that strangled women's freedom: "The home is the centre and circumference, the start and the finish, of most of our lives . . . we revere it with the blind obeisance of those crouching centuries when its cult began" (Martin, 1988, p. 18). Kate Chopin's soul rebelled from an early age against the constraints of her Southern Victorian social codes, which lassoed women with restrictions but provided men with maximum freedom. Her crusade against such conditions could be seen notably in her writings. Wendy Martin (1988) explores Chopin's reaction to the South's narrow prescription of identity for women:"In addition to the racist and sexist values of the patriarchal South, there was a general acceptance of the notion of separate spheres for men and women. The public sphere belonged to men, and women were assigned to the private sphere of domestic life" (p.16). Although she was not a member of any particular movement or organization, Kate Chopin's advocacy for the cause of social feminism and women's sexual freedom in her literary writings reached its height in her last novel, *The Awakening.*

Born as Catherine O'Flaherty on February 8, 1851, in St. Louis, Missouri (Seyersted, 1969, p. 13). Kate Chopin received proper social education at home where, at an early age, she was inspired by her father's gracious manner, her mother's gentility, and her great-grandmother's insight regarding the question of women's equality (Felder, 2005, p. 79). Mme. Charleville, her great grandmother, polished Chopin's many talents–like playing piano and storytelling. Father Daniel S. Rankin's (1932) *Kate Chopin and her Creole Stories* inform us that Mme. Charleville guided the young Chopin and told her regional inspirational stories about Louisiana history and strong-willed women that would produce an everlasting influence on her life and writing career (p. 17).

More than any story, Chopin was enamoured of this tale, with its heroine who leaves her brutal husband after giving birth to a son. She chooses to live with her lover, Laclede, without taking his name to avoid the troubles of law. Rankin confides, "It was the great-grandmother's influence that awoke a penetrating interest in the character, particularly in independent, determined women"

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(Seyersted, 1969, p. 17). This influence is discernible in *The Awakening,* where, at the dining table with Leonce, Colonel, and Dr. Mandelet, Edna invents/narrates a story with similar content—"of a woman who paddled away with her lover one night in a pirogue and never came back. . . and no one ever heard of them or found trace of them from that day to this" (Chopin, 1995, p. 97).

Chopin was emerging on the local social scene and was considered one of the most beautiful women in the town, influencing her admirers with her unconventional ways. She married the twenty-five-year-old Oscar Chopin, who was a French Creole from New Orleans in 1870. When she moved to New Orleans with her husband, she met her father-in-law, Dr. Victor Chopin. His domineering and misogynistic character would give birth to the Colonel, Edna's father, a former Confederate officer, in *The Awakening.* The colonel, who thinks husbands should manage their wives with absolute authority, scolds his son-in-law, Leonce Pontellier, for his spoiling leniency towards Edna: " 'You are too lenient by far Leonce" asserted the colonel. 'Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it.' The colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his wife into her grave" (Chopin. 1995, p. 99).

Like Mother O'Meara, her instructor in English at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, Dr. Kolbenheyer again recognized and encouraged Chopin's writing talents after Mr. Chopin's unexpected death. Moved by the literary talent evident in her letters from Louisiana, the doctor encouraged Chopin to pursue writing and science studies. He was of the opinion that writing would divert her attention from her obsession with Oscar, and he was correct. Soon, Chopin diverted her attention to professional literary writing–trying her hand at poems, short stories, novels, diaries, etc. Reading Dante, Cervantes, Goethe, Coleridge, Austen, and the Brontes further supplemented her preparation for writing (Martin, 1988, p. 2-3). The grieving Chopin remained obsessed with her husband's image, writing lamenting poems and her autobiographical first novel, *At Fault*(1890). Therese Lafirme, the novel's protagonist, "had wanted to die with her Jerome, feeling that life without him held nothing that could reconcile her to its further endurance. She felt at once the weight and sacredness of a trust, whose acceptance brought consolation and awakened unsuspected powers of doing" (Syerested, 1969, p. 46). After Oscar's death, like Therese, Chopin rejected business offers from relatives, insisting on managing her business and plantations on her own. Chopin's independent life was going well, but her mother was determined to bring her back to St. Louis. In 1884, Chopin sold everything besides the two small plantations and moved to St. Louis with her children. After going through her own self-assessment in St. Louis, she embarked on her writing career at the age of thirty-one (Seyersted, 1969, p. 46). Her biographer explains: "She was a puzzle to everyone. She insisted on distance and privacy.. . . She never married–thus may have been her love for Oscar. It has also been suggested that she did not want to become dependent again and lose her new freedom and power" (Seyersted, 1969, p. 71, 62).

Chopin touched on many social problems, but the areas related to marriage and women's sexual issues were explored in great depth, particularly in her magnum opus, *The Awakening* (1899). Seyersted (1969) notes: "In exposing the narrow marriage rules and the exaggerated belief in ethical will power, the author tries to be not too direct" (118). She explores psychological nuances and the question of women's equality. She was "fascinated by women who dared to defy conventions and strike out their own. She mostly depicted repressed passion and frustrated women" (Seyersted, 1969, p. 101). Most of her characters are rebellious and aspire to be independent, like Mademoiselle and Edna in *The Awakening* "that speaks radically to issues of gender, sexuality, and the American family" (Felder, 2005, p. 80-81).

This comparative analysis questions women's social, personal, marital and sexual rights in Pakistan through the non-conformist fictional characters of Mademoiselle and Edna in *The Awakening,* who to some degree are a reflection of their creator. Pakistan, which is a developing country, has limited freedom for women. In most cases, a woman is considered her father, brother, husband's possession, etc., which strangles her access to her inalienable rights as an equal human being (Ali, 2019). This androcentric norm is further ratified through cultural constraints and religious romanticizing. This study explores how *The Awakening,* with its universal call on women's issues, challenges constraints on women in the U.S in the late 19th-century and figures out how the novel could instil the same sense of individualism in contemporary women in Pakistan, who are beginning to ask for their basic rights.

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Statement of Problem

The awakening depicts the 19th-century American social, personal, marital and sexual women's issues through its powerful feminine characters and subject matter. Oscillating between her ideals of individualism and societal conventions, Edna remains perplexed during the plot development. She comes to believe that life without independence equates to death. Conjuring an independent life, Edna goes through a number of transformations that end the novel in the strangest way ever. Instead of tarnishing her family and clan, she takes her life in a fancy way. With such a sovereign and sacrificial act, the novel—through its extra-ordinary protagonist—sends a strong message to such souls to confront as well as reform the respective androcentric set of thinking related to women's social, personal, marital and sexual issues in Pakistan.

Scope

The study picks on the thread of American women's rights struggle through American Literature—novel—that how the milieu made Chopin pen *The Awakening*, how the readers responded to it, and how effectively it voiced the women's cause. The study aims to strengthen the budding women's voice in Pakistan in terms of social, personal, marital and sexual provinces. The abovementioned issues are universal in nature and exist across time, cultures, geographies, nationalities, etc. Taking its breath from ethnocultural grounds, the contemporary women's position in Pakistan is noticeably diverse, ranging from the most sovereign to the most reliant virtually in all spheres of life. But the study only draws upon the majority in terms of social, personal, marital and sexual spheres that fall within the text's range. Being almost unexplored, the gap will significantly influence its audience through its novel content and themes

Methodology

For the major direction of the project, the study hinges upon Transformative Learning (TL) theory, which precisely fits to the project's broader theoretical objectives (Hooks 1994; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1997). TL defined as "question[ing] all taken-for-granted values, ideas, norms, and beliefs of experiences that comprise their dominant social paradigm" (Sagris, 2008, p. 1), is a useful theoretical foundation for the study of women's involvement in gender justice and violence prevention work. Derived from liberatory or critical pedagogy, TL centers on the promotion of critical thinking and critical action towards addressing injustice and oppression (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 1989; Shor, 1992). TL includes "deep reflection on positionality, oppression, and related social conditions, with personal transformation as a cornerstone of learning, reflection, and action" (Lorenzetti & Walsh, 2014, p. 55) (Ali).

For the text's literary interpretation, the study applies a trilateral theoretical research design of New Historicism, Reader Response and American Feminism theories to explore the reasons behind the novel's composition, the depiction of actual contemporary milieu, the reader's response, and contribution to women's status. For unearthing the historical impact on the novel, the study relies on New Historicism through Stephen Greenblatt's text, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (2004). Through Wolfgang Iser*'s The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978), which is one of the primary texts of Reader Response Theory, the study explores and gauges the readers' contemporary response to the text. Finally, for the depiction of actual women's issues and contribution to women's position in the society, the study relies on Judith Fetterly's *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (1977) (Ali).

Being a qualitative-interpretive research, the study interprets and codifies the target data through close reading in order to meticulously direct the study to reliable and valid analysis and findings. The study draws upon late 19th-century American literary criticism, historical accounts, and the text itself. For authentic depiction of contemporary position of Pakistani women, the study hinges upon articles, books, surveys, and interviews. For the successful conduction of interviews, the study uses Critical Narrative Inquiry (CNI) to explore the unexplored aspects of women's life in Pakistan which are not documented yet. CNI is a means of exploring lived experience (Josselson & Lieblich 1993; Lieblich et

al., 1998), making sense (Bruner, 1990), communication (Fisher, 1984), and the interplay of individual and social, cultural and discoursal factors (Frank, 2010; Plummer, 1995) (Ali).

Discussion

The awakening, "first published as a disturbing, complex, and glaring truthful novel," was the last great novel of the 19th century and one of the first influential books of the 20th century (Levin: Introduction to *The Awakening,* 1995). Some critics contend that the book was inspired by some local events and other literary stories. Phanor Breazeale, Kate Chopin's brother-in-law, believes that the author took the plot from the life story of a Creole woman who had similar sexual passion. Maupassant's "Reveil" also bears a strong similarity to *The Awakening*. In "Reveil," the protagonist, Jeanne Veasseur, is a woman who loves her husband, but he is sexually cold. As a result, she is attracted to another young man. Both "Reveil" and *The Awakening* can be classified alongside Gustave Flaubert's *Madame* Bovary (1856) in their explorations of female characters' forbidden passion. Diana Epelbaum (2015) notes an additional influence:" As a patchwork of nineteenth-century fictional styles, and as an early iteration of regional, realistic, and naturalistic writing, [Elizabeth Stoddard's] *The Morgesons* stands firmly as a precursor to [Chopin's] *The Awakening*" (p. 123).

The Awakening "is set in New Orleans at the resort of Grand Isle on the Gulf of Mexico, which was a place well-known to Kate Chopin. *The awakening*, until the end, revolves around Edna's gradual awakening to her status as an individual in the society she lives in" (Seyersted, 1969, p. 135). The text attests, "Her marriage to Mr Pontellier was purely an accident" (Chopin, 1995, p. 23). He fell in love with her; she liked him and was flattered by his devotion. She thought they had much in common, but once married, she found out it was not so. In a way, she grew fond of her husband, however, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening the marriage's dissolution. After the marriage, Mr Pontellier wraps Edna in material comfort and fixes her in the constraints of Victorian domesticity. She grows restless and starts questioning her individual, emotional, social, and sexual freedom. The more she exercises her sexual freedom, the more her relation with her family turns sour. Even her lover, Robert Lebron, is no match for her passion and escapes to Mexico. Her awakening leads to her dissatisfaction, causing her to neglect both her hobbies and her domestic duties. She decides to live apart from her family at her own expense to safeguard her individuality and to satisfy her sexual impulses—if not necessarily her restless passion for ultimate individualism, with Alcee Arobin. In some ways, he also turns out, like her husband, to be less charming than she thought, and she loses her faith in him. Robert returns, but he is unable to accept her individual autonomy. She realizes that her patriarchal society is quick to condemn a freedom-seeking woman who neglects her children since she–rather than her husband–is "intended by nature" to take care of them. She plans something uniquely individualistic in the history of female literary characters to preserve both her family's reputation and her freedom:

She had said over and over to herself: "Today it is Robin; tomorrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me; it does not matter about Léonce Pontellier–but Raoul and Etienne!" She understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adele Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children....There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she evenrealized that the day would come when he, too, and the thoughtof him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. . By the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her. How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some newborn creature opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known. (Chopin, 1995, p. 161-2)

This movement of birth is, in fact, the movement of Edna's suicide. Since the publication of the novel, Edna's suicide has sparked a serious discussion among literary critics, who mostly deem it the price of Edna's freedom. Seyersted (1969) presents his commentary in *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*:

Her suicide was entirely valid for her time when her ideas of self-assertion were bound to be condemned outright by the Victorian moral vigilance. Rather her suicide is the crowning glory of her

development from the bewilderment which accompanied her early emancipation to the clarity with which she understands her own nature and the possibility of her life as she decides to end it. Edna's victory lies in her awakening to independence that includes an act of renunciation. (p. 146, 150)

Jules Chametzky suggests that it is a lonely and isolated autonomy that exacts a terrible price. Donald Ringe notes, "the philosophic question[s] raised by Edna's awakening [are] the relation of the individual self to the physical and social realities by which it is surrounded, and the price it must pay for insisting upon absolute freedom" (Martin, 1988, p. 13). Commenting from a psychoanalytic perspective, Cynthia Griffin Wolf sees that "Edna experiences an inner sense of emptiness that no adult relationship can remedy" (Martin, 1988, p. 17). Martin (1988) observes that, among other things, the novel is about "The sexual awakening of a woman who refuses to be defined by the prevailing stereotypes of passive femininity but who lacks the psychological resources and training to resist the tradition of enforced passivity" (p. 17). More specifically, Margaret Culley "interprets Edna's drowning as a kind of liberation from the confining networks of social relationships in which a woman is defined as someone's daughter, someone's wife, someone's mother, someone's mistress, etc." (Martin, 1988 p. 13). Larzer Ziff (1987) says Chopin sympathizes with Edna, but she does not pity her because she intends to advocate the cause of women's freedom through Edna (p. 23). Chopin presents Edna as someone who "fails to see that her passion is for herself and this error perhaps destroys her" (Bloom, 1987, p. 1). She tries to free herself from obligations and embarks on her own exploration. Though she does not find her selfhood completely and takes a middle way to save her children from the label–the children of a "fallen woman"–she claims freedom by taking her own life, which Barbara C. Ewell calls the most ambivalent conclusion in all American literature (Skaggs, 1995, p. 7). Her suicide could not be deemed a failure but an attempt to liberate herself from the constraints of social conventions. One cannot resist admiring Edna's character, which is natural and purely based on human physical and psychological needs. Chopin meticulously portrays the undiscovered sides of a woman's sexuality that had never previously been explored in American literature and emphasized that the portrayal of female sexuality is a unique and a new thing that should be focused on.

Seyersted (1969) declares *The Awakening: A Solitary Soul* is a great novel in terms of its comprehensive dealing with the portrayal of local women, representing the two contrasting extremes of womanhood through Edna and Mme. Ratignolle (p., 140). Similarly, Peggy Skaggs (1995) believes that *The Awakening* explores late 19th-century American women with the characters of Adele Ratignolle, Mademoiselle Reisz, and Edna Pontellier (p. 88). Rankin (1932) claims that through Edna, we study Chopin's feminist and individualist bent of mind (p. 173). Laura Victoria Levin thinks that *The Awakening,* which explicitly explores American women's quest for sexual, social, and emotional freedom, was the result of the "new woman" demanding equality in all ways of life in the late 19th century (Levin: *The Awakening,* The Introduction, 1995 p. v-xi). Chopin places a spotlight on women's issues through her regional realism and leaves readers to decide the consequences of Edna's actions for themselves (Skaggs, 1995, p. 7).

Chopin, who is admired as a transitional figure in modern literature, is commonly considered the "first woman writer in her country to accept passion as a legitimate subject for serious outspoken fiction . . . [who] had a daring and a vision all her own, a unique pessimistic realism applied to women's unchallengeable condition" (Seyersted, 1969, p. 198-89). Chopin is easily compared to her contemporaries, Crane, Garland, Norris, and Dreiser, with Edna bearing similarities to Maggie, Rose, Trina, and Carrie, who are allured by their suitors' lifestyles, wealth, and imagination (Seyersted, 1969, p. 192). Likewise, Gladys W. Milliner compares Chopin with Sylvia Plath in "The Tragic Imperative: *The Awakening* and *The Bell Jar*" (Skaggs, 1995, p. 7).

Critical Reception

As the success of a literary writer depends on readers' responses, the initial reception of some revolutionary works, like Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening,* and Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie,* filled their authors with disappointment (McQuade, 1987, p. 12). These writers were products of their time, yet they were able to transcend those times (Keyser, 1999, p. 21). Kate Chopin was one of those able to see beyond the status quo. Though "objections were frequently raised against her on moral standards, she was admired for her early works–*Bayou Folk* and

A Night in The Acadie" (Martin, 1988, p. 11). But the unprecedented strident critical response she received for *The Awakening* from the same audience discouraged her literary ambitions forever. Though the book was not banned, libraries refused to have it in their collections, and the author was severely criticized by both known and unknown people–receiving almost "no royalty: $109 in 1899, $40 in 1900, and $3 in 1901" (Martin, 1988, p. 11).

Chopin's entry into the St. Louis Artists' Guild was denied (Martin, 1988, p. 8). The heroine's character and the author's sympathetic treatment of her were severely criticized. The publishing company that published *The Awakening* rejected her third collection of short stories. The novel was called trite, sordid, unhealthy, and vulgar. At one point, *The Literary History of the United States* pretended *The Awakening* never happened at all, listing Kate Chopin as a local colourist and making no mention of the novel (Seyersted, 1969). Some reviewers responded so harshly as to silence the author eternally. If Chopin had reacted to the bitter criticism like Louisa May Alcott did, removing the stains of *Moods* by writing *Little Women,* she might have produced many more great texts, but as it happened, she never wrote again, never wrote anything good again; she retreated to magazine pieces (Felder, 2005, p. 81).

The awakening's history and critical reception establish that the novel reflects an authentic picture of the late 19th century's American women through the life of its creator, Kate Chopin and its protagonist, Edna Pontellier. Though Chopin was misunderstood in the first place, the very misunderstanding backfired and proved her point more effectively. She questioned areas related to women's personal lives, which were never explored before, giving women a license to explore their personal and sexual lives more overtly.

Social Constraints

Kate Chopin was born into a world that specifically divided spheres for men and women. Ever rebellious, she never committed herself to the ideals of Victorian womanhood. Instead, she violated those restrictions with her unusual style and often attracted public attention. Luckily, Oscar Chopin, her husband, supported her independent lifestyle and ignored outside opinions–particularly that of his father. Chopin was in search of other individuals like her and tried to form friendships with such people. One of these like-minded individuals was Mrs Bader, a German woman whose lifestyle and singing influenced Chopin and gave her the idea of what a woman should do with her life (Seyersted, 1969, p. 30). Exactly like Mrs Bader, Mademoiselle fancies independent souls who seek art as a source of inspiration. She considerably influences Edna's liberal ways of life in *The Awakening*:

"Do you think I could become an artist?" I do not know you well enough to say. I do not know your talent or your temperament. To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts–absolute gifts–which have not been acquired by one's own effort. And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul." "The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies." Edna was sobbing. . . New voices awoke in her. (Chopin, 1995, p. 88-89)

At other times, Mademoiselle further encourages Edna to defy tradition for her personal freedom: "The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth" (Chopin, 1995, p. 115).

Unlike other women of her time, Chopin engaged in a number of activities that were not considered within the province of women. In Louisiana, Kate learned to smoke, still a daring indulgence for women at the time (Seyersted, 1969, p. 30). When the family moved from New Orleans to Cloutierville, Chopin earned people's admiration for her intellectual superiority and musical and conversational talents. On top of all this, her horseback riding earned the locals' attention (Seyersted, 1969, p. 45). She took great pleasure in walking alone and considered it one of her eternal rights:

When one afternoon, he [Mr. Chopin] takes a nap, she goes for a walk alone: "how very far did I go... I wonder what people thought about me–a young woman strolling about alone. I even took a glass of beer at a friendly little beer garden quite on the edge of the lake. . .. I find myself handling the oars quite like an expert. (Seyersted, 1969, p. 34)

She confides in her diary, "I always feel sorry for women who do not like to walk; they miss so much–so many rare little glimpses of life; and we women learn so little of it on the whole"

(Seyersted, 1969, p. 41).

Likewise, Edna in *The Awakening* challenges many social roles in a way that shocks her relations and upsets her husband, who considers her a part of his lavish lifestyle. During the gradual process of her social and psychological awakening, Edna first tastes her freedom in solitary walks:

But that was the night she was like a little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence. She could have shouted for joy. She did shout for joy. . . . Edna went at once to the bath-house, and she had put on her dry clothes and was to return home before others had left the water. She started away alone. They all called to her and shouted to her. She waved a dissenting hand and went on, paying no further heed to their renewed cries. . . . Edna walked along [alone]the street she was thinking of Robert. (Chopin, 1995, p. 37-8, 74)

In addition to her solitary walks, she ignores her domestic duties, and that further erodes her relationship with her husband. Léonce has a conventional view of marriage and considers Edna a component of his house and property:

She began to do as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her. She made no efforts to conduct the household, . . . going and coming as it suited her fancy. . . . But her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him [Léonce]. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties angered him. (Chopin, 1995, p. 78)

Adele Ratignolle, who is the picture of an ideal Victorian woman in the novel, scolds Edna for her domestic and social negligence—"She neglected her children much of late"–and for living alone: "I advise you to be a little careful while you are living alone here. Why don't you have someone come and stay with you?" (Chopin, 1995, p. 133-34). Her living alone annoys her husband too, who is very conscious about public opinion:

When Mr. Pontellier learned of his wife's intention to abandon her home and take up her residence elsewhere, he immediately wrote to her a letter of unqualified disapproval and remonstrance. . . . He hoped she had not acted upon her rash impulse; and he begged her to consider first, foremost, and above all else, what people would say. (Chopin, 1995, p. 130)

Sexual Constraints

Chopin was intensively interested in women's ability to find physical satisfaction in their marital/romantic relationships. She opined that if the law did not punish adulterous men, it should not go against adulterous women either (Seyersted, 19669, p. 100). Chopin did not actively participate in any women's movements, but she seemed to agree with Victoria Woodhull's philosophy of free love (Seyersted, 1969, p. 34). Although there is no proof to validate the suspicion, after Oscar's death, Chopin was thought to have engaged in an affair with a married neighbor, Albert Sample, in Cloutierville (SparkNotes: *The Awakening*).

This advocacy for sexual freedom finds ample space in Chopin's novels, too. While Edna Pontellier is perhaps the fullest development of this interest, other characters precede her. Mildred Orme of "A Shameful Affair" is considered Chopin's first heroine who awakes to her sexual emancipation. She spends a summer at a farm in Missouri, where she is at first irritated by a young man but later on comes to desire his touch (Seyersted, 1969, p. 109). Likewise, Mrs Baroda of "A Respectable Woman" first dislikes the appearance of a newspaper man, who has come to meet her husband. Gradually she desires to be with him: "She wanted to draw close to him. . .as she might not have done if she had not been a respectable woman" (Seyersted, 1969 p. 111). Through "A Lady of Bayou," Chopin criticizes the Creole culture's romanticized values of women's chastity. Mme. Delisle transgresses the chaste Creole's obligations and deserts her husband for her lover at the last moment (Seyersted, 2015). Mrs Mallard of "The Story of an Hour" feels relief, rather than grief, when she hears that her husband has supposedly died. In "Lilacs," Mme. Farival, who is a French artist living in Paris, has many lovers. Seyersted (1969) asserts, in these stories, that the foreign setting saves Chopin from the claws of American moral criticism (p. 111).

Chopin challenges American norms more overtly through Edna, who gradually awakens to her sexual desires for other men like Robert and Arobin during the course of the novel. She feels such

animal passion for the first time when Robert places his head on her arm: "During his oblivious attention he once quietly rested his head against Mrs Pontellier's arm . . . . She did not remonstrate, except again to repulse him quietly but firmly" (Chopin, 1995, p. 15). Likewise, when Arobin kisses her for the first time, she goes senseless and defenseless under her burning sexual passion: "When he leaned forward and kissed her, she clasped his head, holding his lips to hers. It was her first kiss of her life to which nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled the desire" (Chopin, 1995, p. 115). Edna's inability to fight her sexual attraction to Arobin leads finally to her sexual intercourse with him:

His touch conveyed to her a certain physical comfort. She would have fallen quietly asleep there if he had continued to pass his hand over her hair. He brushed the hair upward from the nape of her neck. . .. His hand had strayed to her beautiful shoulders, and he could feel the response to her flesh to his touch. He seated himself beside her and kissed her lightly upon the shoulder. . . . He did not answer, except to continue to caress her. He did not say goodnight until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties. (Chopin, 1995, p. 128-9)

Personal Constraints

An emphasis on individualism is commonly found in Chopin's personal life and literary writings. Unlike her protagonist, Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening,* Chopin was surrounded by powerful women who defied the prevailing Victorian social restrictions. Further, Chopin herself became the voice of contemporary young women (Toth, 1999, p. 34). As an avid reader of continental writers, Chopin preferred Germany's model of personal freedom and individuality for women to that of other European and American cultures, particularly that of the American South (Seyersted, 1969, p. 23). She advocated different aspects of individualism in her stories through her life-like heroines.

While *the Awakening* is most overtly about sexual awakening, it also is about Edna's process of defining herself outside of the roles thrust upon her. Her first rejection is of the role of mother. In short, Mrs. Pontellier is not a mother-woman. In search of other models of identity, she is inspired at first by the expressive freedom of Creole women like Adele Ratignolle. But later on, the power of her true individualism reveals to her that the freedom of Creole women is artificial, and she begins to pity Adele Ratignolle in her unseen cage:" She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle–a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment in which no moment of anguish visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium" (Chopin, 1995, p. 77).

Edna was figuring out herself among others: "In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (Chopin, 1995, p. 17). She was continuously questioning her outward and inward existence: "that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin, 1995, p. 18). Her psychological progression on the road to her individuality leads Edna to confront her husbands on many grounds. When Léonce asks her to come in–"I can't permit you to stay out there all night. You must come in the house instantly (Chopin, 1995, p. 43)"–she replies in an independent tone for the first time:

She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. . . . She said, "I mean to stay out here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you." She began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream, ... blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility. . . . (Chopin, 1995, p. 43, 45)

She asked herself, "How many years have I slept?" (Chopin, 1995, p. 52). When Adele Ratignolle advises Edna about her domestic and matrimonial responsibilities, Edna hints that she would give up everything, but she would not lose her freedom (Chopin, 1995, p. 65). Her behavior takes more crucial shape: "She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked" (Chopin, 1995, p. 78). Léonce discusses the matter with Dr. Mandelet: "She has got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women" (Chopin, 1995, p. 91). He advises Léonce to leave her unleashed as the opposition will take the matter from bad to worse. She grows distressed at feeling like one of Léonce's belongings and intends to move out to assure her newly-acquired individuality, saying, " [The house] never

seemed like mine, anyway–like home" (Chopin, 1995, p. 109-10).And," without even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter, (Chopin, 1995, p. 117)" she finally moves to "the little house around the block"(Chopin, 1995, p. 117).

Marital Constraints

Marriage is clearly a central topic in *The Awakening*, but Joyce Ruddel Ladenson goes so far as to position it as one of the novel's characters, describing *The Awakening* "as a powerful story of one woman's education as antagonist against Victorian marriage and the social and psychological straightjacket it could produce" (Skaggs, 1995, p. 7). That marriage should receive such harsh treatment in the novel is perhaps surprising given that Chopin was happily married herself. However, the people around her were not so lucky, and she reflected the miseries of those marriages in her many stories.

In *the Awakening*, Chopin explores the institution of marriage in further depth, showing Edna's growing distrust. Although Edna married Léonce with her own will, it was a rash and mistaken decision that haunts her from the beginning to the end of the story. Unaware of her individuality, she obeys her husband blindly. Léonce, however, considers her as a part of his social life and property, noting on one occasion, "'You are burnt beyond recognition . . . , looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered from damage" (Chopin, 1995, p. 2). Léonce was a Victorian husband who believes that children and everything associated with home shall be obediently and silently handled by his wife:

He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation. . . . He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, who's on earth was it? (Chopin, 1995, p. 7)

In contrast to Edna, Madame Ratignolle is presented as an ideal woman whose life begins and ends with her family and husband. Throughout the story, Edna grows negligent of her former duties, which invites Léonce's scolding and anger, further deteriorating the situation between them. One night, Léonce scolds her as she tries to crush her marriage ring–"Once she stopped and taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it. But her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little glittering circle" (Chopin, 199, p. 72). She thinks, "A wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. The nice thing for a woman to say to her husband" (Chopin, 1995, p. 92). She cares for nothing but her children towards the end of the novel: "It was with a wrench and a pang that Edna left her children. She carried away with the sound of their voices and the touch of their cheeks" (Chopin, 1995, p. 132). It is her marriage and children that restricts her from the way of life she fancies and makes her choose to suicide instead.

Contemporary Women's Status in Pakistan

In Pakistan, in spite of constitutional guarantees, political declarations, and efforts of national and international communities, there is a continuing pattern of high levels of discrimination and GBV against women. In a recent World Report, "Standing of for Human Rights: : What is happening to human rights in the world" (2018), violence against Pakistani women and girls—including rape, murder through so-called honor killings, acid attacks, domestic violence, and forced marriage—remained steady. There are a number of socio-economic , cultural and political determinants —like culture, society, family, age, level of schooling, husband, children , economic dependency, households, hijab (veil) observance—that barricade women's access to empowerment (Sheikh, et al., 2015-2016). Women toil while men decide in majority of Pakistani families (Ali and Shah, 2019) (Ali).

If women have a stronger say in family planning, economic decision making, it will unswervingly impact the strength of women's empowerment (Khan and Awan, 2011). Having low enrollment in conventional education, even lower in higher education leads to their unawareness and disempowerment. Greater enrollment in higher education will entitle them to more stable empowerment (Malik and Courtney, 2010). Economic dependency makes them surrender their other forms of rights to their family members (Ali and Shah, 2019). So their overall empowerment can be

helpful both for uplifting the standards of society and the development of the country (Chaudry et al., 2012). Like many other societal functions, Pakistani women lag behind in the arena of national, provincial, and local politics. In most cases, political participation in Pakistan is a masculine department as cooking is a feminine one (Suvorova, 2019) (Ali).

Conclusion

The establishment of the argument in the light of the aforementioned analysis promotes us to believe that *The Awakening* has the potential to awaken the Pakistani woman to her lost individualism —in terms of social, personal, marital, and sexual rights—through its powerful female characters, especially Mademoiselle and Edna to challenge these unjust patriarchal shackles in Pakistan. *The awakening* can play a fairly significant role in opening women's eyes to marital and sexual injustices done to them in the name of religious romanticizing and cultural dignity. If women get awareness of their rights, they are allowed to challenges these unjust and unseen laws in the light of the religion and national constitution. These two entities, which explicitly guarantee women's marital and sexual rights, are the principal sources of law in the country. So in this primary domain of women's rights violation, like the US, the novel is able to resurrect Edna in any Pakistani woman to have right to her individualism and body. Second, the novel has spoken effectively to women's individualism across times and cultures through its powerful universal characters. It can push the same blood in Pakistani women's veins by convincing them of their undeniable rights. Taking inspiration from the message of *The Awakening*, women's voice in Pakistan would find the courage to piece together towards a unified struggle. Being an iconoclastic piece of literature, the novel has the capability to storm through the unjust social norms and customs in the country. If these norms and customs are closely observed, they principally exist for women. They provide men with extreme freedom and lasso women with extreme restraints. This was the actual stimulus behind writing the novel. Chopin wrote it to criticize the double standard of late 19th century American androcentric society, which maintained two different ways of life for a man and a woman. In sum, the text bears the ability to breathe a new air of hope through the hearts and minds of suppressed Pakistani women, whose downtrodden position is considered among the most alarming ones around the globe.

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