

THE IDENTITY OF THE TRAFFICKED CHILD IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: PATRICIA MCCORMICK'S *SOLD*

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Abstract: *This paper intends to do these followings; i) examine the effect of child sex trafficking on the identity of the trafficked child and ii) compare between the identity of the trafficked child before and during the child sex trafficking. For these purposes, Patricia McCormick's Sold (2006) is selected to be studied in this paper. This paper employs a Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System Theory (1994) as the framework of the study. Thematic approach of Braun and Clarke (2006) is used to analyze this literary text. The study finds that (i) child traffickers often try to erase the identity of the trafficked children and replace it with the identity of a slave or a prostitute, (ii) they follow different types of violence such as physical and psychological abuse to destroy the original identity of the trafficked children, (iii) the ecological systems contribute to the development of identities of children and (iv) young adult literature is an appropriate literature to discuss adolescents' issues.*

Keyword: *Child Sex Trafficking, Identity, Sold, Trafficked Child, Young Adult Literature.*

Introduction

Stallworth (2006) labels Young Adult Literature (YAL) as “an electrifying genre for getting today’s young adolescents reading and exploring who they are” (p.59). YAL has been perceived as a tool to help YARs explore their own positions in the society as are portrayed in the fictional texts. Therefore, through reading, YARs will acquire methods of interactions with people in order to share them their issues and ideas (Cart, 2008, p.2).

YAL addresses many issues that are concerned with adolescents such as education, social justice and social diseases. Wells (2003) includes several proposed themes that can be studied in YAL such as “friendship, getting into trouble, interest in the opposite sex, money, divorce, single parents, remarriage, problems with parents, grandparents, younger siblings, concern over grades/school, popularity, puberty, race, death, neighbourhood, and job/working”(p.4).

Through the interaction between YARs and YA novel, the formers will ask themselves many questions starting with who, what, why and how. In this regard, YARs develop their identities by understanding the identities of others through asking and answering the above question words. These questions evoke their feeling of how they see the protagonists and how the ecological structures build protagonists' identities in the selected novel of child sex trafficking. This trafficking becomes a hot debate among people (Alobeytha, Ismail, Shapii, 2016). Therefore, this paper aims to examine the effect of child sex trafficking on the identity of the trafficked child in Patricia McCormick's *Sold*. It also compares the identity of the heroine of the selected novel before and during the child sex trafficking.

Overview

Child trafficking has become a worldwide commerce since a lot of profits have been reaped by the greedy traffickers who consider it "a big business" (Feingold, 2005, p.28h). One of child trafficking types is child sex trafficking which is the enslavement of the girls and selling their bodies to the clients of sex.

For the purpose of this paper, the novel *Sold* has been chosen. It was written by the American novelist Patricia McCormick in 2006. It also has won various prestigious awards and medals such as The American Library Association's Best Fiction for Young Adults, National Public Radio, National Book Award Finalist 2007, Gustav-Heinemann- Peace Prize 2008, Quill Award 2007 and Book Sense Pick 2007.

Few critics treated human sex trafficking in their literary studies, for example, Shade (2007) examined the condition of a female in the Spanish-American fiction where a female is an object of sex. Her gender causes many troubles for her life. This brings about death, whoredom or mental illness for her. Dawson (2010) portrayed the role of literature in describing the marginalized immigrants and how they endured the violence that they were exposed to in the new destination. She explicated how those became an easy target for the traffickers who worked to enslave them. Dawson (2010) also motivated the authors to focus on the literature of the diaspora which focused on identity as a key subject. Furthermore, Schuckman (2008) depicted in one of the most prominent films *Lilya 4-ever* (2002) the portrayal of Russian women who were treated as sexual commodities 'white slaves' in America, Europe and some rich countries where committing suicide was the inevitable end for the majority of the trafficked females. In her essay about Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*, Madsen (2007) addressed the tragedy of comfort woman and how the Japanese army employed Korean women for sex in the World War II. She confirmed how sorrow of the comfort woman was transmitted to the new generation and how this generation could not imagine the survivors' pains because they did not witness the real pain of the survivor.

Unfortunately, the previous studies focused on human sex trafficking and ignored child sex trafficking. They could not distinguish between prostitution and human sex trafficking. They focused on literature that was published in the previous centuries. This current study will study child sex trafficking in the young adult literature which was published in the 21st century.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological System Theory is used as the framework of this study to examine the identity of the trafficked child in the selected novel. This theory encompasses five structures: (i) *microsystem*, the closed environment; (ii) *mesosystem*, the ongoing interfacing between two or more environments of microsystem; (iii) *exosystem*, the exterior environment which has an indirect impact on the person; (iv) *macrosystem*, the impact of cultural

environment on the individual; (v) *chronosystem*, the impact of the environmental act, socio-historical situation and changes on the life of an individual. Unfortunately, mesosystem will not be studied in this current study because there is no available data in the selected novel' *Sold* that discussed the relationship between microsystem's members in the novel. The analysis of this qualitative study is based on Braun and Clark's thematic approach. This approach has six steps: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching steps for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Analysis and Discussion

In this paper, the identity of Lakshmi, the heroine of the novel, before being a trafficked child and her identity as a trafficked child will be discussed in sequence. Lakshmi lived in two distinct ecologies which have both positive and negative impact on her identity. The first one was in her village in Nepal. The second one was during the new slavery period in the Indian's brothel.

The Identity of Lakshmi before Being a Trafficked child

McCormick (2006) raised the issue of a female child's identity who lived in a dysfunctional family (Microsystem) where the stepfather was addicted to gambling, Lakshmi (the heroine of *Sold*) described how her stepfather wasted money during gambling, "why his cot is empty. Most likely, he has spent the night gambling –and losing – at the tea shop (McCormick, 2006, p.25). Lakshmi grew up in this environment which contributed to selling her as a trafficked child. She learned that her sense of self and basic needs were not important for her stepfather who not only degraded her but he failed to offer her the (physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love need as well as esteem needs which are important to achieve self-actualization (self-fulfillment needs) (Maslow, 1962).

The existence of her stepfather made Lakshmi and her mother feel ashamed, distrustful, angry, anxiety, low self-esteem and deconstructed identity. By comparing Lakshmi's family to the other families who had a good relationship with their members as her friend Gita, Lakshmi felt a sense of low self-esteem. Lakshmi stated that:

finally, when I stand, my hands aching with emptiness, I see Gita's family in the plot below ours. Gita's father did not spend his afternoons in the tea shop; he spent his days building paddy walls that could stand up to the monsoon (McCormick, 2006, p.37).

The ugliness of Lakshmi's stepfather appeared obvious when he looked down upon Lakshmi as a commodity, disgraced her by comparing her to cucumber, Lakshmi wanted to tell her mother, " my stepfather looks at me the same way he looks at the cucumbers I'm growing in front of our hut" (McCormick, 2006, p.2). Her stepfather degraded her and treated her as a commodity when he addressed her, "you had better get a good price for them" (McCormick, 2006, p.2). His disgraceful glance caused Lakshmi to have a low self-esteem. Her identity became fragile and this vision created some doubts in Lakshmi's heart that she was a commodity or plant.

The brutality of her stepfather extended to prevent Lakshmi from continuing her study. Her mother refused his decision so she addressed her, "you must stay in school, no matter what your stepfather says" (McCormick, 2006, p.2). His objection to Lakshmi's education because he considered Lakshmi's education a burden and education was reserved for a son.

According to patriarchal societies in Nepal, parents considered male children their economic investments since their perceptions were based on the idea that if they invested in boy's education and high studies they would get back the returns in terms of interest (Jayaraman, Mishra & Arnold, 2009; Phyak, 2011; Hazan& Zoabi, 2012). Therefore, a boy is considered the biggest asset for such parents.

Unfortunately, Lakshmi's school (microsystem) played a major role in deceiving students when the curriculum depicted everything in the city as exquisite and extravagant. Through a dialogue with her new Aunty (the trafficker who bought Lakshmi from her stepfather), Lakshmi illustrated what her idea about the city, "[i]s it true that all the roofs are covered in gold? 'Where did you hear that?' she says 'In school.' I want Aunty to know that I am not a backward girl. I am educated" (McCormick, 2006, pp. 63-64). This deceiving method proved to be an attractive and lucrative offer that drives students to the city but little that they know they would be trapped and become victims of the traffickers in this city.

Despite child trafficking was a common in Nepal (Parreñas, Hwang, & Lee, 2012; Zimmerman, & Kiss, 2017), Lakshmi never heard about child trafficking from her parents or teachers. Therefore, she was not aware of many strange events that took place in front of her such as the money that her stepfather took from the strange woman (aunty). In another situation, based on the order of an old man who accompanied her from Nepal to India, Lakshmi had to pretend that he was her husband. This man ordered Lakshmi, "from now on,' he says, 'I will be your uncle. But you must call me a husband. Do you understand?" (McCormick, 2006, p. 79). By this pretense, the police would not suspect her migrating to India illegally. Therefore, the price of the deception of her identity was very high. If she was taught in her school or learned from her mother and peers about the traffickers and how they deceived the children, she would not be a victim of the traffickers.

Patriarchy is one of the social phenomena that dominated numerous societies in the Third World. It is the basis in the theory of feminism where all activities of the community are linked to the men (Johnson, 2005). The patriarchal system is defined by Hooks (2013):

[a] political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence(p.1).

Lakshmi living a life in a highly patriarchal society where women were oppressed and maltreated since the day of their birth. A classic example of how women should deal with men, her mother implanted in Lakshmi mind how to be a slave to man, "[n]ever look a man in the eye" (McCormick, 2006, p.16). In this society, men always considered themselves superiors and women inferiors. Lakshmi's mother expressed this fact when she informed her daughter about the difference between the son and daughter, "a son will always be a son, they say but a girl is like a goat" (McCormick, 2006, p.9). This image towards females made Lakshmi and her mother lower their self-esteem and altered their identity. This gender discrimination against women is very prevalent in Nepali society where females were inferior to males.

In Nepal, gender discrimination is supported by culture, religion and tradition. Pokharel (2008) states that "Nepal is a religious and male-dominated society where women are considered as secondary to men" (p.2). Lakshmi's society preferred the birth of a son to that of a daughter and there is a common saying amongst these people regarding this preference "Chhora pae

khasi, chhori pae farsi” (Pokharel, 2008, p.2). This statement means a woman who gives birth to a son will take a goat whereas if she gives birth to a daughter, she gets a pumpkin. This illustrated how female had been degraded since the moment of her birth.

This gender discrimination is clearly found in Ama's recommendation to Lakshmi, “if you have a son, feed him at your breast until he is four, if you have a daughter, feed her at your breast for just a season” (McCormick, 2006, pp.16-17). Lakshmi was taught these traditions in the first years of her age. Thus, her identity was always subjugated to the norms and traditions of the patriarchal society. By accepting the norms of the patriarchal society and rejecting the rebelling against these norms, Lakshmi and her mother lost their high self-esteem, because they succumbed to the Nepali traditions. Her mother insisted to teach her the tradition of Nepali's society, she addressed Lakshmi, “[a]t night,’ she says, ‘when your stepfather has gone out and the baby has gone to sleep, I will return. And then I will tell you everything you need to know” (McCormick, 2006, p.15).

Lakshmi could not express her opinion in front of her stepfather due to the Nepali's norms that prohibited women from arguing their men, her mother informed her to listen and obey her husband's orders, she said, “[i]f your husband asks you to wash his feet, you must do as he says, then put a bit of the water in your mouth” (McCormick, 2006, p.17). She always felt inferior to him. Unfortunately, her growing up in this environment did not promote her self-esteem since her stepfather had never appreciated her actions and behaviours in spite of her working inside and outside her home, Lakshmi cited, “I bring him his tea in the morning and rub his feet at night” (McCormick, 2006, p.8). According to Argyle (2008), praising the others for their actions and behaviours make them feel high self-esteem. Lakshmi never felt that her stepfather respected her as a human being, but treated her as a commodity.

The widespread pervasive of violence against the wife in the novel illustrated the hollow relationship that linked a husband and his wife. A husband, who was frustrated from the surrounding environment, looked down at his wife because he imitated his father and he was also affected by macrosystem (norms, law and culture) which supported the patriarchal traditions. This status pushed Lakshmi to ask her mother, “Ama, why, I say, must women suffer so?” (McCormick, 2006, p.17). This question perhaps was asked by her mother, Ama when she was a child, but her mother who was accustomed to the chronic norms and culture accepted it and wanted to convey this heritage of norms to her daughter. She admitted that they had to accept the tradition because as she pretended, “[t]his has always been our fate,’ she says. ‘Simply to endure,’ she says, ‘is to triumph” (McCormick, 2006, p.17).

Girls encounter gender discrimination even in their mothers' wombs when they are killed by stabbing the infanticide in the wombs because of their gender. Sinha (2015) discusses gender discrimination in India and how “the superiority of male gender means a conservative view of Indian society is responsible for female foeticide. The boy is superior to the girl and because of this kind of mentality; the family wants an only male child” (p.2). McCormick indicated the reason that pushed women to drink a liquid that killed the fetuses in their mothers' wombs because they expected that a new birth is a female, Lakshmi cited, “[t]his is also the season when the women drink the blue-black juice of the marking nut tree to do away with the babies in their wombs – the ones who would be born only to be buried next season” (McCormick, 2006, p.12). This gender's discrimination had a big effect on the identity of Lakshmi and other females in her village, thus widening the bridge between the two genders. Males disgraced women and women disgraced themselves.

In Nepal, females face cultural and social taboos when they menstruate. This is a peculiar discrimination against the woman who suffered from their gender. When Lakshmi menstruated for the first time, she was confined for seven days in the cattle shed where no one could see her. She was subjected to some arrangements that prevented her from cooking food, sitting with others, traveling and going to school (McCormick, 2006). McCormick focused on the menstruation issue since this issue was considered a threat to the identity of Nepali woman. Mazzulo (2011) explained the meaning of the Nepali word 'chhaupadi' which means untouchable. That means, the menstruated women cannot be touched because she is dirty during the menstruation (Mazzulo, 2011). The reason behind this practice of menstruated woman returns to some of the Nepali religion which based on the concept that God becomes angry if the woman stays at home and does not go to sleep in the cowshed during her menstruation (Kadariya & Aro, 2015, Ranabhat et.al, 2015).

The Identity of Lakshmi as a Trafficked Child

In the previous section, it was discussed how Lakshmi was treated as a commodity in her village and the reasons behind her low self-esteem. This self-esteem was one of the push factors that motivated her to accept to work as a maid in India without any reluctance. Other factors such as her desire to get rid of her depressed life and her transcendence need (according to the theory of Maslow hierarchy of needs) (Maslow, 1962) motivated her to accept the offer of working as a maid to assist her family financially (Maslow, 1962).

The main drastic change took place in Lakshmi's life when she discovered that she was sold to a sex broker (new aunty, Bimla) by her stepfather, Lakshmi described the situation of selling her, "[t]he woman looks me over head to toe, then addresses my stepfather. 'How much do you want for her?' she asks her veil to her lips" (McCormick, 2006, p. 56). The role of stepfather as a member of microsystem contributed to the deconstruction of the identity of Lakshmi and her possession of low self-esteem when she was sold by the traffickers as a commodity. Lakshmi's body was the factor that determined her price in which it was exposed to bargaining process many times. She heard the woman trafficker (new aunty) said, "she has no hips,' I hear her say. 'And she's plain as porridge. I'll give you five hundred" (McCormick, 2006, p.53). Thus, there was no value for her as a girl and her value was embedded in her body's shape. The traffickers looked down upon the girls as sources of entertainment and sexual satisfaction. They want the body without the identity because they look at the others (trafficked girls) as sexual slaves.

In term of violence, Lakshmi was exposed to different sorts of physical and psychological violence by the trafficker (Madam Mumtaz) who used it to control and govern Lakshmi and other girls. Lakshmi explained how Mumtaz used violence to subjugate her, "[e]ach morning and evening Mumtaz comes, beat me with a leather strap, and locks the door behind her" (McCormick, 2006, p.111). Mumtaz tried to deprive Lakshmi of all necessary basic needs in order to force her to accept her role as a prostitute, Lakshmi mentioned the threat of Mumtaz, "and so she says that she will starve me until I submit" (McCormick, 2006, p.113) but she refused to surrender.

Lakshmi lived days of internal struggle to choose between her urgent basic needs to survive and her resistance to accepting to be a prostitute. This led her to form a paragon of her identity when she refused this offer. The internal power of Lakshmi supported her identity and overcame the violence of Mumtaz. The reaction of Lakshmi to this tactic was not expected from a little girl who never thought that she might be dehumanized like that. She used some tactics that helped her defy the lure of food such as tying her waist in order to deceive and fool her stomach that she was not hungry. Lakshmi cited that, "[h]ow to tie your waist cloth so tight that, at least

for a few hours, you can fool your belly into thinking it's full" (McCormick, 2006, p.113) and swallowing her saliva to quench her thirst. She learned these tactics from her microsystem (mother and peers) who taught her how to cope with the starvation and how to be self-reliance and not to be enticed by attractive things.

In explaining the relationship between identity and resistance, Duveen (2013) illustrated that "resistance is the point where an identity refuses to accept what is proposed by a communicative act, that is, it refuses to accept an attempt at influence" (p. 269). The internal power of Lakshmi supported her identity and overcame the violence of Mumtaz. She resisted the brutality of Mumtaz because she realized that the death was better than the daily death of her dignity while she was still alive. She preferred to die over becoming a prostitute. This resistance pressurized Madam Mumtaz to pretend that she gave up, so she said "I have decided to let you live" (McCormick, 2006, p.120). Therefore, this madam resorted to Mr. Habib, one of the rapists, and asked him to rape Lakshmi. Burgess and Holmstron (1974) indicated that rape is a severe physical attack that produces physical and psychological consequences.

Chronic trafficking made Lakshmi lose her identity gradually because of her daily struggles and sufferings. She expressed that when an American client asked her if she was being kept against her will, she asked herself "my will? This is something I lost long ago. I want to tell him" (McCormick, 2006, p.208). The loss of volition came as a result of physical and psychological torments in addition to the trouble of dwelling in the brothel. This loss produced a low self-esteem. Consequently, Lakshmi became very depressed and subservient.

McCormick confirmed the size of violence that Lakshmi and other brothel's girls were exposed to. This violence usually hurt the trafficked children for sexual purposes and destroyed their self-esteem (Simons & Whitbeck, 1991; Potterat, Rothenberg, Muth, Darrow & Plummer, 1998; Kramer & Berg, 2003).

Lakshmi realized that protecting her identity was the only way to restore her freedom otherwise she would stay in the brothel forever. Therefore, she prepared herself for the day of freedom by rehearsing how to introduce herself confidently. Lakshmi felt that she was ready to share important information with some clients and some people. She states to herself, "my name is Lakshmi, I repeat I am from Nepal, I am thirteen" (McCormick, 2006, p.204). McCormick ended her novel by expressing how Lakshmi regained her identity when the American man and police came to a brothel. She managed to utter the exact words she practiced to the police who then released her from the brothel.

The effect of chronic dwelling in the brothel forced some of them to be prostitutes and consequently forced them to look for rich clients. Their utmost aims were to get money to pay for their freedom and escape from this brothel, Lakshmi told David, the street boy, "I worked hard enough here at Happiness House, I could pay down my debt" (McCormick, 2006, p. 256).

On the other hand, some of those girls could not leave the brothel because they stayed there for a long time and did not have a relationship with their families and they were outcast. Therefore, there was no shelter for them except the brothel. Thus, some of them were keen to stay in this dirty place. They did everything just to stay in as Pushpa who told Mumtaz to do everything in order to stay at a brothel (McCormick, 2006, p. 200). In fact, the whole lives of those girls are summarized in two terms: alienation and exploitation.

The effect of a long staying in a brothel on the girls increased their loneliness. McCormick drew a tragic scene that explained how materialistic traffickers destroyed the value of human being. When Pushpa who spent her life in this brothel became sick, Mumtaz decided to throw her to

the street, “you are of no use to me now! No man wants to make love to walking death” (McCormick, 2007, p. 199). Mumtaz decided to take Pushpa’s baby and sold her after few years if Pushpa wanted to stay at the brothel. Madam Mumtaz asked pushpa, “[s]ell her to me.’ She points to little Jeena” (McCormick, 2006, p.200).

Mumtaz owned the lives of the girls and their children thus; she prevented the girls from using condoms during their work. Therefore, they would have children and they would not think to leave the brothel as Shahanna said, “[s]he knows that once the women have children, they cannot leave. They will do whatever she asks, or be thrown out in the street” (McCormick, 2006, p.148). Pushpa told Lakshmi, “take a handful and hide them under your mattress, but do not let Shilpa see you; she is Mumtaz’s spy” (McCormick, 2006, p.145). Practicing prostitution without condoms brought many sexual diseases to these girls and some of them have AIDS. Their identities were damaged because those girls expected the disease and homeless anytime.

Conclusion

This study illustrated that the traffickers always try to destroy the identity of the trafficked child for sex purpose and replace it with the new identity (prostitute’s identity), the novelist addresses those trafficked girls that they should never give up and they should fight to protect their real identity. The study confirmed that YAL is a suitable type of literature that can discuss young adults’ issues; it reveals that poverty, illiteracy and corrupted government contributed to the emerging of child trafficking. Finally, it also suggested that Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System can be used as a framework for any study that discussed child trafficking.

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