

# Dismantling the Patriarchal Hierarchy in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*

**Ramesh Prasad Adhikary**

Assistant Professor, English Literature, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, M.M. Campus, Nepalgunj, **NEPAL**

\*Corresponding Contact:

Email: [rameshadhikary29@gmail.com](mailto:rameshadhikary29@gmail.com)

Manuscript Received: 09 Jan 2020 - Revised: 20 Feb 2020 - Accepted: 12 March 2020

## ABSTRACT

This research paper is focused on how Willa Cather portrays the inner rebellion and the passion of a female character, Marian Forrester in her novel *A Lost Lady*. She walks against the social norms and she is presented as a rigid character who dismantles the male created hierarchy woman as a subordinate being in the society. Though she is married and living happily with her husband, somewhere deep down in her heart she is not happy with her husband. Marian seems to transcend her husband's order. At that time female were not allowed to enjoy their freedom like the males. Marian goes against male hegemony and to create her separate identity. As a qualitative research, by using radical feminism as a tool of interpretation, the researcher collected textual evidenced from Cather's novel and interpreted them to fulfill the objective of this research. This research concludes that Cather's Marian has dismantled the social hierarchy created by the male superiority or patriarchy in the novel.

**Keywords:** patriarchy, feminism, rebellion, hegemony, identity

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

**Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY-NC)** license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon work non-commercially, and although the new works must also acknowledge & be non-commercial.



## INTRODUCTION

### *Willa Cather and A Lost Lady*

Willa Cather presents the defiance of patriarchal norms by her main character Marian Forster, the protagonist of this novel *A Lost Lady*. Marian is presented as devoting her time as a housewife helping and caring her husband in the beginning of the novel. As the novel moves forward, Marian seems a rigid character. After her husband's death, she starts her journey to Argentina and settles there. Marian was a woman of extreme caliber has the quality to walk step by step with her male counterpart in her job. She defies the dos and don'ts and follow her own rules and abhors the male norms in this process crossing the threshold created by the male society. The female characters of this novel do not fall into the circumstances as designated by male characters for their struggle in self-hood and contestation with male dominated social inhabitation. She is an active lady to compete

with her male counterpart by freely expressing her viewpoints. She even takes the pattern of the male designed life and subverting the rigid regime of the society. She is a haughty and strong character, who defies the female character of being emotional and rather impulsive. She is unlike the weak sex; rather she shows prudence in any tough situation. After her husband's death, she breaks the cocoon of a docile housewife and rather than being subjected as a poor widow, embarks on the journey of selfhood.

Willa Cather was born on December 7, 1873 in Back Creek Valley in Virginia. She was the eldest child of Charles Cather and Mary Virginia Boak Cather. The family came to Pennsylvania from Ireland in the 1750's. In 1883 the Cather family moved to join Willa's grandparents William and Caroline and her uncle George in Webster County, Nebraska. She attended public schools in Red Cloud and completed her school education from Red Cloud in 1890. She soon moved to the state capitol in Lincoln in order to study for entrance at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Edith Lewis writes, "She felt that they first taught her to think, first helped she to find imaginative thought and that she owed to them the early ideas of scholarship and art that gave direction to her own life and work" (19). Willa Cather's fiction is infused with many of her deeply-held beliefs and values.

Women are being dominated and ill-treated according to the deep rooted patriarchal rules and regulations from the time immemorial. Society has been formed by the male-oriented ideology which has kept women in the inferior position. Social norms and values, behaviors and all the other aspects of the society are controlled and guided by the male authority. Men use their so-called superiority to dominate social, political, cultural, economic and religious aspects. These aspects are made easy to fulfill male's purpose. In such a type of society, power is passed from male to male not to female, such as father to son. Daughters are not given any roles. So, women are helpless and their condition is miserable. Willa Cather has raised voice against male-supremacy and endeavors to place women in the position of men. Cather has written many novels and stories. She has written the novels not for pleasure. Her writings attempt to place women in independent and autonomous existence. Most of the novels written by Cather do have women "heroes" either with autonomous power or with the struggle to keep themselves alive in the society. So, these novels are written not only for the entertainment but also with a holy aim to reform the society. Her novels stand the female heroes to attack the society for not allowing their autonomous role in the society.

*A Lost Lady* depicts the defiance of the male imposed norms and values, by the sole female character of the novel Marian Forrester, who avoids the male notion of women i.e. governing her husband as a docile and submissive character and stooping to his every desire and rules, rather she pretends to be a demure woman, in fact she is a free going woman interacting with every male persona to give her presence marking her existence of a strong female.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the society women are exploited and they are termed as a passive and docile. The conservative thinking regarding their home bound nature and passive remains in male hearts. The male psyche is that women are not capable of handling jobs and they are only good on household works. They think women should not be allowed to do outdoors jobs. But it is rejected by the female protagonist of this novel. She breaks the male code and abhors the predicament of a poor widow and goes out to explore the world by herself.

## Hypothesis

In this paper, the researcher had the hypothesis that Willa Cather's protagonist Marian Forrester shows us that though females may be physically weak but their action speaks louder. If the chain of domination continues, women became rebellious against patriarchy. They too have same desires as males have; only the restriction had made them mute.

## Objectives of the Study

This research paper mainly tries to show how male made norms that female should be under male surveillance are subverted. Radical Feminism came in front to show the pain of the females and their experiences, enlisting them in the common sisterhood. It looks forward to tear the veil imposed by the patriarchal society. This research encourages the females to raise their voice against male patriarchy.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many critics have interpreted Cather's novels from different perspectives. Cather's novels are written in her different circumstances, but the main theme of these novels is to pour out her female experience and to show the true picture of women's life. She wants to improve the condition of women in the society. The phallogocentric norms are challenged in her novels. Social realities are mirrored in Cather's novels. To establish female selfhood and autonomy, Cather's characters, in different ways, fight against patriarchal norms and values.

From beginning of her career, Cather received not only with widespread popular success, but also astonishing critical success. This pattern began to change in the 1930s with the advent of Marxist Criticism. Marxist critics suggested that Cather did not understand or show concern for modern social issues, and they made fun of the romanticism which are in her stories. Whether or not Cather was affected by such criticism, these years were made more difficult by the death of her mother, brothers and her good friend Isabelle McClung.

Cather kept her an active writing career, publishing novels and short stories for many years until her death on April 24, 1947. *A Lost Lady*, from its publication in 1923, has garnered widespread criticism and wide-ranging responses. One of the critics name Lionel Trilling says:

It is Willa Cather's central work of her career. Far from being the delicate minor book it is often called, it is probably her most muscular story. Though it might be short but it is "short and Slight"; not a great novel, not that very "rare" thing in contemporary literature, a nearly perfect one. (11)

The novel presents the story of Marian, who in the novel dismantled the male norms and value, the male construction of a female identity i.e. of a docile and submissive female persona, who after her husband's death should be bound to be at home, rather she is defies this rule time and again by her bold and valiant conduct and interaction with other male characters in the novel, thus resulting as defiance of the male dominated society.

Biblio (2009) states, "Her motive is crystal clear that being a widow, does not ends a woman's life, she rejects being an orthodox submissive and denies to take the stereotypical image of a poor widow, rather she stands up as a bold persona who open ups after her husband's death." Thus she is portrayed as a bold woman who instead of getting intimidated by the circumstances going in front of her takes her own decision and vilify the male created norms against a widow.

Morrow (1984) describes Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady* as the Nineteenth Century Novel of adultery. She also describes the novel as the radical voice of feminist and interpreted it as the novel of feminist rebellion.

Regarding her novel, another critic Bodhani (2015) states

Men believe that women cannot transcend because transcendence is a spiritual sublimity which can only be attended by men. They project women inherently demure creature and man powerful and virile so that the later can achieve transcendence. Some male critics attribute mystical to woman. Such notions have been overcome by the lady protagonist of this novel. She is not a demure and docile character rather she is a character which develops towards maturity and domination as the story moves forward. (12)

In this way she represents the perfect example of a radical feminist, who believes to take the world by her own will rather than blindly following the crowd, she makes her own decision to challenge the world and face the atrocities by her own will. Finding the gap in their criticisms, the researcher has analyzed the novel from radical feminists' point of views.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Radical Feminism, a theory flourished mainly in the 1960s, it is used as a methodological tool in this research. It depicts the male domination imposed towards females. Radical Feminism tries to give counter to the patriarchal norms and values. And it is the common set of rules of do's and don'ts to the feminine gender.

After feminism rose to existence, the talk of women rights and equality took pace. Women in every sector, who were earlier dominated and kept into restrictions by male domain, asked for their identity and equality. Radical feminism was first fully articulated in the late 1960s and it argues that men's patriarchal power over women is the primary power relationship in human society. Radical feminists believe that the root cause of all other inequalities is the oppression of women.

Patriarchal theory is not always as single-handed as the belief that all men always benefit from the oppression of all women. Patriarchal theory maintains that the primary element of patriarchy is the relationship of dominance. Radical feminists have claimed that men use social systems and other methods of control to keep non-dominant men and women suppressed.

Radical feminists believe that eliminating patriarchy, and other systems which perpetuate the domination of one group over another, will liberate everyone from an unjust society. Redstockings manifesto of 1984 posits that radical feminism "got sexual politics recognized as a public issue", "created the vocabulary [...] with which the second wave of feminism entered popular culture", "sparked the drive to legalize abortion", "were the first to demand total equality in the so-called private sphere" (2).

By the early 1970s these new ideas were reflected in a substantial body of literature that included Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, Firestone's, *The Dialectic of Sex*, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and Figs's *Patriarchal Attitudes* (all first published in 1970).

Modern feminist based in United States took their impetus from civil rights, peace and other protest. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1977) signifies a significant stage in "political"

feminist writing on literature. Millet's use of the term "patriarchy" described the cause of women's oppression. Men enjoy power through constraint women. The feminist analysis of politics, therefore, rose from the fact that women have been excluded from the exercise of political power.

Beauvoir (1949) raises this issue regarding woman who has been essentialized in the society with certain stereotypes like woman as a flesh, related to nature, vale of blood, open rose, siren, the curve of hill, the fertile soil, the sap, the material beauty and the soul of the world. Beauvoir's central attack is on the attitude of the scholars and writers towards woman's position. According to them, woman is a "privileged other". Patriarchy always imposes curtailment or a boundary towards women's freedom. Thus for example Rich (1977) accounts of patriarchy explicitly abstracts the position of women from any social context:

Under patriarchy, I may live in purdah or drive a truck; I may raise my children in a kibbutz, or be the sole breadwinner for a fatherless family... I may serve my husband his early-morning coffee within the clay walls of barber village or march in an academic procession; whatever my status or situation, my derived economic class or my sexual preference, I live under the power of the fathers, and have a access only to so much of privilege or influence as the patriarchy is willing to accede to me, and only for so long as I will pay the price for male approval (58).

Here, Rich says that female living inside a boundary itself is a fact that it is natural instinct of male hegemony. Though they may sound protective towards their female counterparts, but in some sense it really looks like domination. Radical feminists believe that eliminating patriarchy, and other systems which perpetuate the domination of one group over another, will liberate everyone from an unjust society. As a form of practice, radical feminists introduced the use of consciousness raising groups. These groups brought together intellectuals, workers and middle class women in developed Western countries to discuss their experiences. During these discussions, women noted a shared and repressive system regardless of their political affiliation or social class.

Women from the ancient time have been termed as the other of man. We could find in Bible that women were created from the ribs of man. A mark of otherness is one's inability to shape one's psychological, social and cultural identity. Men believe that women cannot transcend because transcendence is a spiritual sublimity which can only be attend by men. Radical feminist label has been applied in recent years to a confusingly diverse range of theories; it is the site for far-ranging disagreements at all levels of theory and practice. It is essentially a theory of, by and for women; such, it is based firmly in woman's own experiences and perceptions and sees no need to compromise with existing political perspectives and agendas. It sees the oppression of women as the most fundamental and universal form of domination and its aim is to understand and end this. As Redstockings manifesto of 1969 reads:

Women are an oppressed class; our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor. We are considered inferior beings whose only purpose is to enhance man's lives [. . .] we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition [. . .] the conflicts between individual men and women are political conflicts that can only be solved collectively [. . .] we identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination.

All men receive economic, sexual and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All men have oppressed women (598).

Thus Redstockings statement posits that young women role was essentially that of secretary, housewife or sex object, servicing the political, domestic and sexual needs of male activists; any attempt at raising the subject of women's exclusion from decision-making was met with silence, ridicule or contempt.

Abrams (2004) in his Glossary of Literary Terms mentions:

Western society is pervasively patriarchal, male centered and controlled and conducted so as to subordinate women to men all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. Patriarchal ideology pervades those writings, which have been considered great literature. Most of them are thus male characters; Oedipus, Ulysses, Hamlet, Tom- Jones, Huck Finn etc. Female characters are given marginal and subordinate roles, represented as complementary in opposition to masculine desires. (84)

The patriarchal power of men over women is therefore basic to the functioning of all societies it extends far beyond formal institutions of power.

## **ANALYSIS OF A LOST GIRL**

In the novel *A Lost Lady*, the central character Marian is presented as a radical feminist. Her husband captain Daniel Forrester, is the secondary character of this novel who is presented caring and loving her wife Marian Forrester. But later on the readers understand an insight that in fact the captain has a dominating nature.

Her husband, who is twenty five years older than Marian, is a wealthy person. His decision is an honorable one, but it is a form of betrayal of the marriage contract, particularly that implied between a well-to-do older man and a beautiful young woman. He chooses to let her pay for his nobility; and although she accepts his choice as a compliment. She is completely betrayed or victimized by masculine self-interest. The betrayed, victimized, Marian Forrester wrests a bittersweet triumph from her refusal to assume the role of victim. Her "musical laugh" dominates the novel.

In the beginning of the novel, Marian Forrester seems a woman of substance, she dominates the early and the end part of this novel, we could see from the beginning of this novel, her free flowing attitude towards her husband's friends. Though there are house maids in her house but she feels it is her duty to welcome any male guest, she doesn't mind to welcome them whenever they approach their house.

In a male dominated society a female is strictly supposed to follow the male custom but quite contrarily Marian is shown as a woman who defies such rules and regulation. She welcomes any male visitors in her house. We could see in the opening part of the story, when the boys are shy with her appearance to ask any question, Marian instead approach them first by saying:

Good morning, boys. Off for a picnic? You have a lovely day. How long has school been out? Don't miss it? Run along, and be sure you don't leave the gate into the pasture open. Mr. Forrester hates to have the cattle get in on his blue grass. (5)

Here, Marian is presented as a demure character in the novel initially but her defiance for the masculinity is hidden somewhere under. She though presents herself as a shy and docile character in front of her husband, but like dormant volcano the substance of defiance and denial for the dominating male hegemony is seen from her tone to the boys in the opening phase of this novel. She loves to take challenges in her life and rather taking an easy path she will choose difficult one. She is courageous enough to take the tough path, when in times peoples and mainly female genders are scared of snakes and muddy water, her inclination towards such life threatening things are proof of her brave and solid character.

She is shown as a character that might be concerned with things but not scared. When some male visitors visits her house to see the ailing Captain, she hospitably made them sit in the couch but rather than asking for any tea or coffee she seems directly ordering her maid Mary to bring a brandy from the sideboard. (14) She is shown defying the rules of a good family throughout the novel and one of the traits of radical feminist is that of *avant garde* i.e to create a new rule out of the old and existing ones.

Marian after taking Niel out from his house surprising asks him to have some quality time with Constance Ogden, who is of Niel's same age counterpart, she doesn't feel shame or any iota of hesitation when she says to Neil:

I'm counting on you to help me entertain Constance Ogden. Can you take her off my hands day after tomorrow, come over in the afternoon? Your duties as a lawyer aren't very arduous yet? What can I do with a miss of nineteen? One who goes to college? I have no learned conversation for her! You're a boy! Perhaps you can interest her in lighter things. She's considered pretty (20).

From these above lines, it is clear that Marian is so bold in her words, that she along with flirting with the boy Niel, asks him to have some time spend with a college going girl named Constance Ogden. She is shown here as a woman, who at the times when there was a restriction for female voice, seems hell bent to take the initiative for these two youth couples. She is shown as a woman who has the potential to transcend such male created norms and values. She knows that young couples have a lot of hidden desire underneath their heart so she doesn't believe in relinquishing such desire for the sake of the restricted society; rather such desires should be kept alive and expressed in front of same age peers. Her move might be considered as wrong in the then contemporary society, but she believes that whether wrong or right, a person has to express ones desire completely without taking the societies restricted norms.

The male notion of women as a child bearer and strictly confined in the boundary of home, whose primary work is cleaning, washing and nurturing a child into an adult is challenged by Marian, in this novel. Shame which is termed as an ornament of women is disallowed by the female protagonist of this novel instead of producing a negative consequence of this harmful conduct; she is loved by many male characters in this novel. In the novel we see that not only she demands for male recognition but she throws a caring and protecting glance for her husband. We had seen in most of the cases that male is protective over their female companion but here we could see a different story as she discusses with Niel:

A winter in the country may do him good, he loves this place so much. But you and Judge Pommeroy must keep an eye on him when he is in town, Niel. If he looks tired or uncertain, make some excuse and bring him home. He

can't carry a drink or two as he used. He is unsteady in his conduct. He had trouble always in his life (23).

The way she narrates a previous incident to Niel she seems she is not the woman who should be taken care of, rather she is the one who is solid enough to take care of her husband. She wants her husband to take some vacation in some chilly place so she asks Niel, to take him somewhere where there is cold, and that might be good for his health, we could see as the passage ends her anger for him, these anger itself is evident enough to give the readers a hint that though the captain used to show to the peoples that he is treating his wife well, but deep inside he was a failure towards his wife, as she was nurturing a rebellious perspective for her husband.

Marian is a lady with a determination which is not fluid rather it is as solid as a rock; she can even make her husband shameful in some extent. When he tries to talk about his future plans she mockingly tells him: "And now tell us your philosophy of life,-- this is where it comes in, and if some of us have heard it, we can hear it again. Go on! (32) We could just note the irony in Marian used in the last part of the sentence, it seems that she was fed up off with her husband's way of defining an dream, she mockingly tells him to explain his dream by changing it as a "philosophy", such behavior results the captain into public humiliation, yet he cannot utter any word against his wife. She seems in a commanding position when she delivers this line, keeping even her husband in the back foot. Latter when he explains his plan to the spectators, she even mocks and interrupts his line; we could see her attitude clearly to her husband's dreams.

But Marian in the novel seems hell bent to defy all the male imposed rules to the female persona, when her husband asks her to be in the home all day, she denies his words by saying that she longs to see the river by herself, and she hates being shut up in the house. Instead she forces Mr. Forrester to go out to see the town (37) her fluctuating behavior projects that she instead is masculine in her character and her husband is feminine in male standards, as the latter obeys the former's orders.

Before her marriage to Captain Forrester, she had a previous relationship with a man who was her boyfriend named Mr. Frank Ellinger, in one scene in the novel he tries to dominate Marian, for not replying his letter, he is shown as a robust man, who tries to take some physical advantage with this lady, due to her negligence on replying his letters, he feels offended and ignored so he tries to take revenge on her by physically abusing her, but she refuses instantly and orders him instead and changes his hostile attitude towards her as a caring one: I don't remember! You don't write so many. Be careful, Frank. My rings! You hurt me! Drive slowly, it doesn't matter if we are late for dinner. Nothing matters (41).

In the beginning, she clearly says that she doesn't remember about the letters, and counterattacks Frank by saying that he writes so less letters. But she is not obliged to answer any one of them. She seems clever enough to deviate Franks lust into a wandering, he was attempting to harm her physically but in another instance she changes his mind by asking him instead to take for a ride, and also instructs him to drive slowly and the last line suggest that she is not scared with her husband presence and it won't matter if she arrives home very late.

Marian's conducts itself shows us that she is transcending the orthodox position of a female persona, that of docile and servile, rather she seems quite confident to broke away with such norms and values, whenever her husband takes a nap, she make sure



that she leave the house with her effervescent behavior. As one day when her husband slept she asks Niel:

Come, Mr. Forrester is asleep. Let's run down the hill, there's no one to stop us. I'll slip on my rubber boots. No objections! Not a word! I can't stand this house a moment longer. You see there is nothing for me to do. I get no exercise. I don't skate; we didn't in California. I shall dance till I'm eighty. It's good for me I need it (47).

It means, her husband is taking a nap she escapes from the boredom in the house. Though wives in the old society were to be home bounded, they were to perform the daily chores and wandering around was not cup of their tea, but things are all different with the Marian, she believes in roaming around her house, though she takes time for her husband's nap, but what if once he is already awake when she is out? Yet she is a risk taker and don't have any afterthoughts for such kind of consequences. She doesn't care about any mishap as the second line of this statement shows "no objections", her not tolerating the house itself shows that she is fed up off living with her husband.

Marian is shown as a woman, who doesn't believes to be simply a cog to her male companion, rather she is a woman of substance and things to equally participate in the decisions which her husband makes. She in her actions and words moves a step ahead then her husband when suggesting Niel about life and its complexities. Though due to some reasons Marian and her husband had turned bankrupt yet she assures Niel to assist him financially in his endeavors as she says:

Don't forget us, but don't mope. Make lots of new friends. You'll never be twenty again. Take a chorus girl out to supper—a pretty one, mind! Don't bother about your allowance. If you got into a scrape, we could manage a little cheque to help you out, couldn't we, Mr. Forrester? (61)

It means her husband into the back foot, as they had recently gone through financial crisis, it might work as an irony to her husband, in the sense it gives the negative connotation that a man who is earning for a family has turned into an impotent subject. Though she knows the negative aspect of her line, she is least hesitant to put her mind in front of her husband and Niel. She evens jokes with Niel to make new friends and also a girlfriend. And pretty mind in the above statements suggest that her husband might be dull, as he lost all his property and turned bankrupt. Her intention is to plummet her husband identity and making him realize that he was not in the right track and he doesn't have the rights to dominate a woman, as from the male observing nature he was male no more, as he was unable to support his family. Thus Marian announcing towards providing Niel financial assistance and asking her husband in a mocking way indicates that she is making fun of her husband.

She is a woman who has the guts to show the male persona their own traits, which are unknown to them, as she points indirectly towards her husband's flaws, but she is outright to present Niel's specialty too when she visits his house:

And how handsome he's grown! Isn't the old judge proud of you! He called up last night and began sputtering, "It's only fair to warn you Ma'm that I've very handsome boy over here." As if I hadn't known you would be! And now you're a man, and have seen the world! (66)

Here she seems crossing her lines of male domination with the above statements she has made. As male feelings is to attribute female with certain things such as rose and moon. As Simone De-Beauvoir (1949) wrote in her *Second Sex* that from time immemorial women were attributed with different terms by the male domain sometimes love, fragile and delicate beings, and even sometimes they were compared with orgies and demons, but in the above lines we could see Marian praising and defining a male persona, which itself shows the rebellious nature of this lady protagonist of the novel.

Some radical feminists, the whole idea of the competitive pursuit of power is rejected as an embodiment of male values, and conventional politics is abandoned: organizational hierarchies are avoided; political struggle is relocated from the ballot-box to the bedroom, and separatism is favored over participation in existing organizations or institutions, which are seen as a mere playground for male egoists. For others, however, the identification of patriarchal power within the state is an insight that can further the feminist cause by providing a more realistic assessment of political possibilities than that provided by the liberal approach.

Marian is a woman who has a rebellious attitude towards the male dominated society. She believes equality with the masculine world, she would rather demand for equal position with her male counterparts. As we could assume from her conversation with Niel regarding female uprising and equality:

And tell me Niel, do women really smoke after dinner now with the men, nice women? It's all very well for actresses, but women can be attractive if they do everything that men do. I think just now it's the fashion for women to make themselves comfortable, before anything else (68).

Here, she believes that women should be comfortable doing things rather than strictly following the male parameters of doing this things and boycotting another things. Main thing is women should feel comfortable in whatever they do and must not have concern over the male idea of social etiquette for women.

She believes in taking her own decision as Niel argues and tells her that she shouldn't care about Ivy Peters, the judge who is impudent with her. But she instantly argues back and says:

He has a lease for five years, and he could make it very disagreeable for us, don't you see? Besides, there's more than that. He's invested a little money for me in Wyoming, in land. He gets splendid land from the Indians some way, for next to nothing. Don't tell your uncle; I've no doubt its crooked (75).

The lines gives us a vivid idea that Marian is a shrewd character, who knows how a business is conducted. She is shown a woman with grit, though Ivy Peter had once treated her very badly, yet she is firm with her negotiation with him, as she knows well that, she can dominate later part of the preceding when things works well with them. She is a woman who denies the old image of a woman and assimilates with new one. As we could see from the lines below which she converses with Niel:

I could dance all night and not feel tired. I could ride horseback all day and be ready for a dinner party in the evening. I had no clothes, of course; old evening dresses with yards and yards of satin and velvet in them, but I looked well enough! I always look better after the first glass, it gives me a little color, its only thing that does. When I'm alone here for months, I plan and plot (77).

It gives us her confidence defined in words, though she is female, the male society has always attributed this female world as a weak and docile being, but her statements shows that she is not demure rather she has the potential and zeal to fight with male parameters. She bluntly expresses her desire for alcohol, in male world woman's affiliation with binge drinking is considered as an inappropriate act, which is abhorred by the male dominated society, but Marian is shown breaching such rules and expressing her own desire of drinking without caring for the male dominated society. She is not a housewife material woman rather, in her leisure time she plans and plot for her future endeavors. She is shown as a woman with masculine traits and strength in her character is vividly presented in the above lines.

Her relations with her male counterparts are very slippery, she believes that if male has the audacity to dupe their female companion than she too could perform such things. For that reason, she hears that her previous boyfriend was married with another woman she calls him to give some advice and a bitter lesson to him, we could see from her telephone conversation with her earlier boyfriend Frank Ellinger:

Is that you Frank? This is Marian. I won't keep you a moment. You were asleep? So early? That's not like you. You've reformed already, haven't you? That's what marriage does, they say. No, I wasn't altogether surprised. You might have taken me into your confidence, though. Haven't I deserved it? (82)

Initially she seems courteous talking with Frank in the above lines but as the line moves forward she is shown taking irony as a weapon. She is sarcastic in the sense, she is giving suggestion regarding marriage in the first part, but latter on she demands attention, that why she was not informed regarding the marriage. She is not a woman who should be kept in dark for a long time, though she was married earlier than her boyfriend, but she demands explanation that why she was not informed about the development.

Mariam's rigid strength in the character is shown vividly in the novel, she avoids Niel suggestion and she is not bothered with what the people in the town talks about her, she only cares about her. She doesn't have any complains over the rumors and she is not bothered with any grapevine. She rather enjoys being called by the town people as "Merry Widow", she likes their derogatory meaning of this title. This shows she is a woman who won't care about the peoples conservative thoughts.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the novel presents the valiant female character dismantling the notion of the social norms and values established by patriarchy. Though her husband is seen dominating, Marian seems defying such male domination with her behavior. She is shown as a docile and subservient character, but, her continuous defiance and escapist route from the household chores and her husband's strict eyesight is shown breaking the male restricted zones and transcending these so called zones by surpassing such limitations. Marian is shown as a homely housewife character, but she has a grit and determination to uproot such character in the novel. She knows the domination laden by her husband and her war with her husband is inherent and she plays her part silently. She is shown placing orders to her husband and breaking the docile image. She is shown as a woman who presents her desire and feelings in front of another male persona. To conclude, Marian dismantled the male rules which were attributed to the woman by patriarchy.

## WORKS CITED

- Abrams, M.H. (2004). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Bangalore: Eastern Press Pvt. Ltd.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (1949). *The Second Sex, Woman as Other*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Biblibio, M. (2009). *A Lost Lady by Willa Cather*. Rambling: Book Please.
- Bodhani, B. (2015). "Cather's Works and its sources". *Readers*. 22.3 web 15 Jul.
- Cather W. (1923). *A Lost Lady*. New Delhi: Harper Collins.
- Figes, E. (1970). *The Patriarchal Attitudes*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Firestone, S. (1970). *The Dialectics of Sex*. Texas: Morrow.
- Greer, G. (1970). *The Female Eunuch*. Portland, Oregon: Straus and Giroux.
- Millet, K. (1968). *Sexual Politics*. Chicago: Uillinois, HP.
- Morrow, N (1984) "Willa Cather's A Lost Lady and the Nineteenth Century Novel of adultery". *Woman's Studies*, Vol. 11, issue 3, pp 287-303.
- Rich, A. (1977). *Of Women Born*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc.

--0--

## BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Dr. Ramesh Prasad Adhikary is an assistant professor of Tribhuwan Univeristy, Kathmandu, Nepal. He has been teaching English Literature at M.M. Campus since 2007. He has completed his PhD in Existential philosophy and has been doing his research on English language, literature and literary theories. He has created more than 40 international articles and 18 books on various topics of English literature.

### How to cite this article

Adhikary, R. P. (2020). Dismantling the Patriarchal Hierarchy in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*. *ABC Journal of Advanced Research*, 9(1), 19-30. <https://doi.org/10.18034/abcjar.v9i1.498>