



An analysis of Hale's narrative in debunking social norms and maxims: The Poststructuralist element in *Princess Academy*

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Abstract— In the period of 1960s, in France, the Poststructuralism was emerged having the ideology to question the binary opposition and semantics. The core idea of the Structuralism which was based on these two pillars, hereby confronted before the intellectuals who staunchly adhered the concept of plurality of a given text. Poststructuralists argued that the meaning that derived from a word or symbol, can be various according to the context depending upon the situation. Therefore, the meaning of a word or text must be sought out of the relevant intention of the given context, not by limited or fixed to the binary opposition or semantics. The concept of the arbitrariness of a language was replicated on the anthropological, philosophical, psychological and sociological perspectives separately in order to examine with extensive and inclusive practices. The 'real' meaning is arbitrary according to the exponents of this theory. By keeping that theoretical approach on the foreground, this paper aims to take a fantasy trilogy named, *Princess Academy*, written by Shannon Hale, as a primary text to present the societal context where the author has given narratives tinged with poststructuralist dimension. The characters and the plot those are posited with 21st century feminist point of view, found quite adequate for the descriptive research in the field of women's role in a society through diversity and inclusion. Moreover, it is very significant to put a paradigm as deconstructing the patriarchal narratives and concept of liberation. Shannon Hale's trilogy, *Princess Academy* has plotted so many characters, but for the particular scenario of the research, this article has taken only few of the female characters in the forefront to make a possible representation in the above-mentioned objective.



Keywords— Binary, Coexistence, Kyriarchy, Plurality, Poststructuralism, Society.

A critical approach of poststructuralism and society:

Shannon Hale is an American writer who has produced so many marvelous fictions of fantasy. *Princess Academy* was first published in 2005. The sequel entitled, *Princess Academy: Palace of Stone* came out in 2012 and the last part of the trilogy entitled, *Princess Academy: The Forgotten Sisters* was published in 2015. The plot of the story begins from a fictitious highland mountain named Mount Eskel. The occupation that is accessed by the Eskelites is the mining of an expensive fictitious stone named Linder. Hale introduces a very cunning fantastic feature in the plot, i.e. Quarry-Speech. It is the tool of

communication among the mine workers during their work. They usually make its use when it is needed to be communicated. For an example, due to the deafening blow of the mallets for breaking the stones from the mountain walls, one can say or utter something in his mind to intend somebody else in the mine and eventually the message is communicated to the addressee. "Then, when they needed to speak to another person, the mountain used the rhythm to carry the message for them" (*Princess Academy* 15). One fine morning, a delegation comes from the lowland, the kingly state named, Asland. The delegation is sent from the King of the state who wishes to find out the

potential Princess out of the Eskelite girls aging twelve to seventeen. And, a Princess Academy has to be prepared where the girls would be trained in order to become eligible for that position. Now, very interestingly it is quite obvious that this particular feature of Quarry-Speech is a fantastic element that makes this book a fantasy fiction. Moreover, the development of the story, the incidental happening where Hale has introduced this Quarry-Speech as a tool of survival, urgency, resilience and identity of the mountain people as the core sensitivity. The plot represents the hidden urge of girl child about their own homely feelings, nativity, love, interests, affection, and dreams and so on. There are some evident arousals of some questions from the intention behind the setting of the plot. First, in the name of fantasy, why the author has put a low fantastic element if considered so, as this is not a groundbreaking phenomenon to some extent to have communication among people while not being present in person. In today's world, Telepathy, Telepsychics, a clinical theoretical concept given by Dr. Joseph Murphy, are not unknown to anyone in the field of parapsychology. Dr. Murphy says, "Everyone possesses the power of Telepsychics, which means constant communication with the various and marvelous powers of your mind" (Telepsychics vii). Why the author has not made some exclusive imagination by incorporating some otherworldly features which could make this fiction similar to Tolkien, Lewis Carroll or Rowling? Moreover, why she has compiled the fiction as a Young Adult narrative while playing with the serious issues like child marriage, education, protests, mutiny, university politics and so many universal perspectives? Furthermore, why the fantastic element involves the mountain stone Linder and the Mount Eskel itself instead of using Unicorns, Demigods, Human sharing half animal body parts and so on and so forth?

The answer can be sought in a very specific way of taking poststructuralist dimension in the study. First of all, in the time of 21st century, Shannon Hale has not probably wanted to borrow the age-old idea to consider fantasy, they way it has been taken in consideration in the past. Fantasy does have a stereotypical notion of producing improbable, intangible ideas and manifestations of elements. Starting from the beginning of the time the mediation of Greek, Roman mythological aspects, Indian Epics, folklores, folk adaptations of scriptures, stories like *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha*, *Vetal-Panchavimsati* to Rudyard Kipling's *Rikki-Tikki-Tavi*, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, Rowling's *Harry Potter* to Marvel Cinematic world in nowadays. Hale has not taken those elemental activities that produce some magical interventions that might dilute the intended meaning of the fiction. Structuralists' ideology has never

back the idea of coexistence, while poststructuralists' argued the essentiality of the binary oppositions and the meanings that derived from a given context. Once Michel Foucault said, "we must not imagine the world turns towards us a legible face which we would only have to decipher" (Foucault). If we take a closure examination of the text by Hale, she has mingled the factors but, essentially produces the idea of simultaneous progression. Besides, She has ensured the debunking of social narratives by taking a deconstructing attitude by incorporating education as a social and psychological pillar for a girl child while they are subject to be uprooted by any means in almost any given context that also gives us a system of social binary as a set of norms and maxims. A fantasy critic, Eric Primm says, "Fantasy is often judged by its world-building. Fair or not, the setting makes or breaks the story as much as the characters. The world of the story influences characters and plot by its very mechanics" (Putting the Fact in Fantasy 1). So, it is quite legitimate to say that, the idea of fantasy can also be understood according to the 'very mechanics' of the plot and therefore the character-buildings are also dependent on the given context. This notion is the foremost objective of this article to find out a possible amplification of poststructuralist dimension out of the social narratives. Hale has set a paradigm of simultaneous coexistence among the meaning and its application according to the reality perspective. An article entitled *Post-Structuralism* by Pallab Das, a renowned professor of English, Mankar College, is found very adequate in this context. He says, "post-structuralist studies often re-introduce the historical element to analyze descriptive, diachronic concepts. The re-introduction of the historical element serves to destabilize the fixed meanings applied by structuralist categories" (Das).

As an alternative theoretical framework of this subject, the study of this article has also borrowed the concept of 'Kyriarchy' given by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in 1992 in her book entitled, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. The term is derived from two Greek words, 'kyrios' (lord, master) and 'árcho' (lead, rule, govern). In terms of studying poststructuralist idea in 21st century, Kyriarchal concept can be very productive to be used as a tool to make an extensive substantiation. Hale has signified the plot in terms of many perspectives, but, the core integration is laid in the issues of domination of the society by its own narratives and surroundings. This is why, nowadays, in the feminist studies, the concept of 'Kyriarchy' can be an integral part to be amalgamated with. Kwok Pui-lan, a critic who published an article entitled, *Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Postcolonial Studies* in 2009. According to his words,

In feminist theory, kyriarchy is a social system or set of connecting social systems built around domination, oppression, and submission. The word was coined by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in 1992 to describe her theory of interconnected, interacting, and self-extending systems of domination and submission, in which a single individual might be oppressed in some relationships and privileged in others. It is an intersectional extension of the idea of patriarchy beyond gender. (Pui-lan)

The aim of this article is to posit these issues related to the poststructuralism and kyriarchal dimension. The concept of *Kyriarchy* is even more dangerous as the concerns of domination and oppression do not cast any specific boundary or narrative in order to set a discriminative procedure of functionality. In the field of society, feminist perspective is not totally capable enough to decode the mystification of one's individual oppressed state of being. Thus, this research has theoretically captured this idea of presenting an alternative pass to examine the boundaries of limitation in ambiguity of understanding. Shannon Hale's *Princess Academy* covers this area of study very inherently if observed.

***Princess Academy* as a narrative of patriarchy and a delusional grandeur:**

This section of the article focuses mainly on four parts of the trilogy. First, it takes on the formation of the Princess Academy and the migration of teenage Eskelite girls along with a spunky little fourteen years old girl Miri, the protagonist of the story. Princess Academy symbolizes not only as a mere institute to train the girl, but also it gives an array of opportunities for the girls like Miri, Esa and Britta to touch their dream and knowledge. The role of Tutor Olana is very significant mainly in the first book of the trilogy as she is appointed as the mentor by the royal priests to make the Eskelite girls learn about etiquettes, decorum, history, commerce, 'poise', 'curtsy', 'diplomacy', etc. Throughout the plot, Princess Academy plays a symbolic role, starting in the first book from Miri's journey, Tutor Olana's command, and Lady Sisela's past life in the second book, up to the three abandoned sisters Astrid, Felissa and Susanna in the last part of the trilogy. Secondly, Hale has cunningly incorporated the different psychological aspects of Miri and Britta by mingling them together in a bond of friendship and simultaneously also shown the greedy urge of being a potential princess by Katar and Bena, two other important characters in the plot. Britta's childhood past takes a major role in debunking the patriarchal hood that signifies the domestic trauma guided by the familial space and the resilience of a girl. The third aspect to look forward to examine the pivotal role of Lady

Sisela in *Palace of Stone*, who played as the exponent of 'Revolution' which also includes university politics in the plot. This part of the trilogy makes this a poststructuralist study where women play a significant role as a motivator and also as a commodity. The author has put that significant manifestation inherently throughout the story. Fourthly, Queen Sabet with her unscrupulous and insolent attitude as a queen and a wretched mother of being snatched of her three daughters Astrid, Felissa and Susanna to send them outstate in order to maintain a royal lineage by making her elder son coroneted as the prince and the future king. Above all these, Hale ensures the development of Miri's psychological and social role as a girl, as a friend, a lover and a potential tutor, who is supposed to be the disentangled figure of all odds.

Tutor Olana, Lady Sisela and Queen Sabet as the prey of patriarchal narrative:

In the first book of the trilogy, Tutor Olana's character mainly involved in this part as the appointed teacher of Princess Academy for the girls coming from the mountain. Her character is very interesting in both ways; first, she acts as the tool of the kingly state and intended objective for making girls potential in order to produce a princess in the birthday of Prince Steffan, the elder son of King Bjorn and Queen Sabet. Secondly, if closely observed, the outburst which is grown inside the mentality of the girls out of Olana's staunch operation and vigilance over girls' activities and progress, she herself is inherently responsible for that. Hale has stunningly incorporated the illustration by making Olana's character in these shades in two ways that might be taken into consideration as a true meaning of teacher.

In one occasion, Olana declares her supremacy and boldness by defying any possible softness in her conduct. Sometimes even she sounds very insulting for the mountain girls as they are not as advanced as her expectation. "I have heard about Danland's outlying territories – no towns, no marketplace, no noble families. Well. Once you pass these columns and enter this building, you're agreeing to obey me in all things. I must have absolute order in this academy if ever I am to turn uneducated girls into ladies. Is that understood?" (*Princess Academy* 39). It clearly defines the harshness of her conduct and her attitude towards the girls who might have some urge to acquire knowledge. Very significantly, Hale has set this narrative as a Young Adult fiction by probably having an idea to debunk the societal narrative that mutilates a girl at her very early age in an intention to not make her aware of understanding. Thus, it gradually makes a girl child uprooted from her very own belongings, her nativity, homely feelings, dreams, education, interests and

all that could encourage her for the further progression in life by her own.

On the other hand, Olana has not failed to agree to the potential demand made by Miri and the girls in terms of having permission to go home to their families. She has taught them Diplomacy and the girls have made an appropriate use of it against their own tutor. She is impressed by the systematic presentation of the argument with step by step procedure by Miri with association of the other girls, especially Britta. "I am impressed," said Olana. "I hadn't expected as much from mountain girls" (156). By this gesture and dialogue of Olana, Hale has shown a conspicuous attempt of presenting a true conscience of a teacher and an implied manifestation of poststructuralist narrative in the plot. Thus, Olana's role is very pertinent if considered for the potentiality of a woman in social sphere.

In the second book, *Palace of Stone*, Lady Sisela's character represents a self-reliant figure whose word postulate the idea of 'Revolution' guided by the Queen's Castle scholars, especially Timon Skarpson, with whom Miri develops an affectionate relationship during her stay in Asland as the lady of the princess. In this plot, Hale has introduced university politics, protests by a lower class community named 'shoeless' and the commoners against the atrocious King Bjorn. Sisela's character is a symbol of traumatic outburst against the phallogocentric domination which prevails in the society in the name of rules and norms. Her presence in the plot also signifies a role of a woman in the provocation of possible outrage with the association of students and political hands. Lady Sisela seemingly acts as a negative role in the plot on the basis. But, if considered deeply, her past life shows the hidden trauma and the grief-stricken persona that is grown out of the unscrupulous treatment of the royal manner. During a conversation with Miri, Sisela told, "I danced with King Bjorn when he was a prince, and waited to hear if he would choose me. He did not. At the time I was *heartbroken*" (*Palace of Stone* 77). It signifies her long delved affection of being a princess of Prince Bjorn which has never been fulfilled and went far long in her oppressed state of mind. Her outrage turned multiplied when she faced her most unfortunate moment when her husband was executed by the royal guards for rebuking against king's tributes. Thus, Lady Sisela's mentality and her grown up trauma have been cumulated as a shape of running the kingly state in the name of 'Revolution'. Here is the true success of an author if considered from the dimension as a poststructuralist. Hale has shown the unsuccessful outcome of Lady Sisela in the end by not having the intended result what Sisela and Timon planned for. Hale has never postulated any radicalized idea during the plot in an action, rather shown the failure of outrageous activities

in 'Rilamark Revolution' where people executed the queen and erupted in hellish mirth in the name of protest and after few days, they turned again clueless and famished for not having any proper plan to run the freedom. Hale has symbolically shown the execution of the Rilamark Queen as a symbol of chauvinistic vent and nothing else.

Queen Sabet's character represents two consciences hinged with insolence and wretchedness. How satirically, Hale has described a queen in the opening lines of chapter three in *Palace of Stone*:

*A queen there was in a place of bread
Sing blue, sing white, stay up all night
She nibbled the walls and gobbled her bed
Sing white, sing blue, sing ballyhoo*

*The folk begged crumbs from their robust queen
Sing blue, sing white, she ate all night
She shared not a thing until it turned green
So white, so blue, the mold it grew* (*Palace of Stone* 25)

These lines clearly signify the insolent attitude of a queen as it also criticized by the author and her way of description in order to show the hierarchal position of a woman but having nothing to do with the problems and plight of lives of the common people who come to an end to their day being famished. But, even being a queen, a supposed-to-be the motherly figure to the state, Sabet stays absolutely unperturbed amidst the petrified statesmen, women and hungry kids with their scanty hopes of lives. Shannon Hale has given a segment of Queen Sabet's inactive lifestyle by attributing her position of a high order. This is a true significance of a demonstration while it shows the heinous touch of royalty that makes a motherly life completely retarded even in the abundance of limitless wealth but, no humanity.

On the contrary, the same Queen Sabet has been presented with petrified heart and wretchedness having an oppressed soul for years for the abandonment of her three daughters Astrid, Felissa and Susanna to Lesser Alva, a swampy land under the rule of King Bjorn. In the last book of the trilogy, *The Forgotten Sisters*, Sabet's character is described tinged with this melancholic emotion whose emotion has been suppressed for a long time just by keeping her shouts unheard in the name of grandeur royalty that has not even spared the Queen's daughters' lives from being banished. Hale has described very conspicuously the falsehood of the royalty that maintains the lineage by practicing unimaginable acts by snatching girl children one by one from her own mother which does not even mercy a Queen, who is the highest ranked lady of

a society. This particular nuance is the true presentation of poststructuralist study and the meaning that cater unexpected narrative which goes undercurrent. In an occasion when Queen Sabet confronts them, she has not found anything to say except being ashamed. "At the door from the palace to the courtyard, Queen Sabet waited, her hands clutched before her, her eyes down" (The Forgotten Sisters 248).

How stoically, Hale has incorporated the scintillating force of womanhood as a powerhouse of every possible origin and on the contrary, how patriarchy uses all these as commodities and the source of fertile reproduction by ruling on it. If we take a short look on the character of Tutor Olana, she has respectably maintained her duty as a responsible teacher while goes against the girls and their will but, inherently it goes positive in the end. Lady Sisela's trajectory of life began as an innocent one being the same as the others who imagine their future in a dream-world. Later, she was petrified for having her husband executed by the royal guards that turned her life dismal. Though unsuccessful, but played a powerful role for the 'Revolution' that also signifies her potential presence. Queen Sabet is the symbol of utter oppression whose life seems floating on abundance but, suffocating repeatedly for maintaining the grandeur of falsehood.

Miri, Britta, Astrid, Felissa and Susanna as the symbols of resilience:

Miri and Britta's characterization produces ample motifs and dimensions throughout the plot. The author has deliberately posited these two girls' attitude towards the treatments of society, whether it concerns their familial background, love and affection or their educational urge in the path of escalation. If, Lady Sisela, Queen Sabet, Tutor Olana to some extent, is the subject to be carried away by the social captivation, these two characters are the true significance of resilience and retaliation due the whole discourse of the narrative. Miri is grown up having not so attractive vital specification comparing to the other mountain girls having tall and strong bodily features. It is because; Miri has never been allowed to work in the quarry for having a past history of her mom's accidental death. Therefore, it is quite beautifully illustrated by the author while Miri is grown up with extensive mental development and intuition that is pretty rare in the other girls, except Britta for innately belonging to the lowland. Hale has staunchly selected teenage girls character development tinged with emancipation, compassion, urge, retrospection and retaliation with having a probable idea to show the empowerment of women at her very young age. And, how the castration process is accessed by the society, especially for the excessive ill practices of chauvinism, the

author has conspicuously demonstrated the facts by showing the abduction of girl children's nativity by migrating them to the other land, only for becoming a potential princess. In the end of the second book, Britta gets betrothed to Prince Steffan, but the narrative is very deliberate and straightforward, that, Britta and Steffan have been known to each other from their childhood. It is the love, sheer affection between them which makes their bond successful in the end of the day. While, the glimmering charms, buzzing atmosphere, royal hierarchy snatch the other girls to the Princess Academy, especially observed in Liana, Katar and Bena's character, Miri goes for the ultimate urge for having the unknown to know. In the second book, *Palace of Stone*, Miri and the other girls are invited to the royal castle as the ladies of the princess, Britta. Hale has shown the staggering psychological dilemma of Miri while having some confusion between the choice of Timon Skarpson and Peder Doterson, who is the childhood friend and love interest of Miri and vice-versa. But, with the time being, as the plot goes through so many facets of understandings, Miri gets mingled with Peder at last. The same goes with Britta, as she and Steffan know each other from childhood and get betrothed while the meaning of the plot always triggers towards the hierarchal value of being the princess. But, the author has maintained a beautiful flow to show the alternative values in teenage sensitivity that often gets distressed by the intervention of the patriarchal fang. Hale has also shown the distressful past life of Britta as her life once tormented due to the ill domestic treatment at household. Britta's parents always wanted her to get chosen and married eventually by the royal blood, which signifies the impurity of social monolithic ideas in the name of caring nature. In a conversation between her and Miri, Britta says, "And my parents preferred to spend a great deal of time at court, attending plays and concerts. They said their house in Asland was too small to bring me along. It had ten bedrooms, but it was too small for a girl...like a mouse house, maybe" (Palace of Stone 212). Very interestingly, the research has observed the appropriation of entitling the second book, *Palace of Stone*. Human heart and the linder house have been compared in this plot while the mankind that is supposed to be the abode of compassion, but, lacking with no failing. On the contrary, the linder stone by which the mount Eskel is surrounded, the Princess Academy itself is made off, the palace is made off where the blue-bloods live, can be able to carry the message with proper rhythm what Hale has used as the fantastic element in this plot.

Astrid, Felissa and Susanna are the three abandoned sisters live together in Lesser Alva, a swampy land where Miri has been appointed as their tutor and ordered by King

Bjorn to prepare their house itself as another Princess Academy. Eventually, the house is also made of linder stone that can carry message through memory as Quarry-Speech. These three characters are introduced in the last part of the trilogy, *The Forgotten Sisters*. Hale has also shown the patriarchal necessity of the production and reproduction of women while it is urgent. Throughout the plot, it is ensured an inherent fallacy of the society to use the women as commodities, whether it is for the case of Tutor Olana, Lady Sisela, Queen Sabet or the three daughters of her and moreover, Miri in this particular book. While, Miri wanted to go back to her own land, Eskel, to her family, it is staunchly ordered by the King and the authority to make her the tutor in order to prepare the royal girls to be the potential material of princess for King Fader, the Storan king, who is about to invade the surrounding lands. The intention is to offer a potential teenage bride to a septuagenarian king in order to make Asland an alliance of Stora. Here, the heinous narrative of social culture is exposed by the author in a very straightforward way. Miri has been too specific and string in terms of her emotion but, for a while, being the prey of shabby practices. The universal issue of child marriage is targeted here and this time it is even more brutal, as the things are being negotiated among the social hierarchy. It is to be understood that, the violence, trauma and misogyny are not limitedly subjected to comparatively lower-class people. These are the social curse, rather the misogynistic domination that not even spares its own. "Self-esteem is a contributing factor when it comes to leadership qualities. Women's self-esteem is usually low compared to that of men. Poststructuralism can be used effectively to explain feminism" (ivypanda.com). These three girls are symbolized here as the enforcement of resilience, self-reliance and spirited nature. They did not know the exact identity of their parents while, they were brought up by a lady named Elin, whom they knew as their real mother who died long ago. Astrid, the elder among them, even older than Miri, has been caring her two sisters by nourishing, caring and giving nuance as a motherly figure. The three do not bother about the 'allowance' that is sent to them from the royal palace, though it is snatched by a merchant goon named Jeffers. They three collect their daily needs according to their own choices and needs. Moreover, the astounding fact is, they hunt caiman for meat by fighting and killing it by their own which shows their potential effort as empowered ladies. That is too astonishing fact to Miri as well, as she has not witnessed that kind of retaliating force and strength in her life except her father and elder men in Eskel. In this plot, Hale has even introduced 'a champion match' in chapter 23 between Astrid and a gigantic soldier of Stora named Sten. Astrid

with her tricks and strength knocked out the man on the floor that makes everyone awe. At last, with so many eventual happening and incidents, King Bjorn and Queen Sabet have found their true emancipation to accept the truth and their lost daughters. Steffan has finally met his three sisters, among whom Astrid is the elder of all. In a royal gathering Steffan announces the crown belongs to Astrid as she will be the Queen. "You will be exactly the ruler Danland needs. And I'll be here whenever you need me. We'll figure it out together. Besides, Pa is healthy as a horse. He'll live for years" (*The Forgotten Sisters* 315). It seems the real change that is brought by the narrative produced by Shannon Hale. This can be considered as the way of revelation which shows the openness, fight for the right and true voice of women empowerment. The true meaning of princess is illustrated as a beautiful scene in the last page of the last chapter of the book. "Miri leaned back against the throne of the hill and opened her book. The goats bleated over the new green grass. Above her, the sun burned against the snowy top of Mount Eskel. The golden light blazed around Miri's head like a crown" (322).

CONCLUSION

This article has taken societal issues like, education, child marriage, trauma, grief, greed, surge for true emancipation and sacrifices, and so on and so forth, as the subjects to produce a potential study on the basis of two sole objectives. The first one is the women's role in a society through diversity and inclusion, and the second one entails the deconstructing the patriarchal narratives and concept of liberation. Princess Academy as a symbol is described with the various perspectives in this article. Moreover, the binary opposition is presented through the specific description of the characters of Tutor Olana, Lady Sisela and Queen Sabet's vulnerability and on the other hand, Miri, Britta and the three sisters' resilience. Hale has additionally included an epilogue in the last part of the trilogy *The Forgotten Sisters*, where she has incorporated a major change by showing an academy prepared, but this time it is meant for the potential princes coming and joining from different strata and will be taught by Tutor Olana once again. Thus, this trilogy makes a potential description of studying poststructuralist idea to derive meaning of unconventional existence, which shows the ultimate liberation of women's voice. The coexistence in the plurality prevails.

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