



Social Justice Towards Women in Hemingway's Novels

JARNAIL SINGH, Research Scholar PhD English

NIILM UNIVERSITY, KAITHAL (HARYANA)

Abstract:

Ernest Hemingway's novels have been widely analyzed for their portrayal of masculinity, war, and existential themes. However, his depiction of women and their roles in society also offers rich material for examining social justice issues. This paper explores Hemingway's treatment of women within his works, with a focus on the broader implications of social justice. Through close readings of major novels such as *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), we examine how Hemingway's female characters negotiate social, economic, and gendered oppression. In doing so, we consider whether Hemingway's literature perpetuates patriarchal norms or provides a critical commentary on the status of women in the early 20th century.

Introduction:

Social justice, as it pertains to gender equality, is a vital lens through which to analyze literary works. Ernest Hemingway, known for his terse prose and focus on male-centered narratives, has often been criticized for his portrayal of women. Many critics view his female characters as passive, submissive, or objectified. However, a deeper examination of these characters reveals nuanced portrayals that reflect the complexities of women's lives within patriarchal systems. By looking at how women navigate the rigid social structures of their time, Hemingway's novels offer insight into the struggles for autonomy, equity, and justice.



In this research, I analyze the portrayal of women in three of Hemingway's major novels: *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. By focusing on key female characters in these works, I explore whether Hemingway's narratives advance social justice for women or reinforce oppressive norms.

Hemingway's Female Characters and Gender Roles:

Hemingway's female characters often operate within rigid societal expectations that reflect the historical context of the early 20th century. Women were subject to limited social mobility, a lack of political rights, and gender roles that prioritized domesticity and submission. In his novels, Hemingway reflects these constraints while offering glimpses of women's resistance to them.

- **Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises*:**

Brett Ashley is one of Hemingway's most iconic female characters, and she embodies a complexity that resists simple categorization. At first glance, Brett's independence, sexual freedom, and assertiveness seem to defy the gender norms of her time. She refuses to conform to traditional roles of wife or mother, which makes her both a liberated and tragic figure. However, Brett's character is also trapped within the limitations imposed by her society. Despite her freedom, she is never fully autonomous; her relationships with men, especially her unfulfilled romance with Jake Barnes, highlight the ways in which women were dependent on men for social status and identity.

Brett's character illustrates the tension between independence and societal oppression, making her a figure through which we can examine the early feminist struggle for social justice. Critics such as Lisa Tyler argue that Brett represents a critique of the objectification and marginalization of women in a patriarchal world (Tyler, 2001). Yet, Hemingway does not provide her with a resolution to her struggles, leaving her in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction.

- **Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*:**

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Catherine Barkley is often interpreted as a passive figure who subordinates her identity to the male protagonist, Frederic Henry. Her overwhelming love for Henry and her ultimate death during childbirth have led some critics to dismiss her as a symbol of feminine self-sacrifice. However, a closer reading reveals that Catherine, like Brett, is navigating a deeply patriarchal world. She finds her own way to exert agency by choosing to love and by attempting to carve out a space for herself and Henry outside of the chaos of war.

Catherine's decision to engage in a romantic relationship, despite the risks, can be seen as an act of defiance against the impersonal violence of World War I. Moreover, her refusal to adhere to traditional gender roles, such as her open expressions of sexuality and her desire to live life on her own terms, positions her as a woman seeking a form of social justice, albeit within constrained circumstances. Scholars like Sandra Whipple Spanier argue that Catherine's character, while flawed, resists easy categorization as merely submissive (Spanier, 1990).

- **Maria in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*:**

Maria, the central female character in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, is also a figure who reflects the intersection of personal and political struggles. Maria's backstory is one of trauma; she is a survivor of sexual violence during the Spanish Civil War. Hemingway's portrayal of Maria has been criticized for reducing her to a romantic ideal, whose primary function is to support the male protagonist, Robert Jordan. Yet, her survival and her relationship with Jordan suggest more than mere submission.

Maria's character can be seen as a symbol of resilience. Her willingness to love again, despite the violence she has endured, represents a form of resistance to the dehumanizing effects of war and oppression. Hemingway's depiction of Maria as both



victim and survivor allows for an exploration of how women in wartime are subjected to unique forms of violence but are also capable of enduring and overcoming these challenges.

Social Justice for Women in Hemingway's Novels

Ernest Hemingway is a powerful American novelist. The present paper is about social Justice Towards Women in Hemingway's Novels. Hemingway's women are superb and powerful. Hemingway has delineated Themes of Violence, Horror, and Death in his fiction. The Hemingway heroes are Nick Adams, Frederic Henry and Santiago, Robert Jordan.

It often addresses the roles of women in society particularly as regarding status, privilege, and power – and generally portrays the consequences to women, men, families, communities, and societies as undesirable.

Hemingway embraced the full spectrum of emotion, from ecstasy to suicidal despair, and the people closest to him sometimes paid dearly for loving him. What Hemingway think about women, it is found when we study his female protagonist. Individually, probably sometimes; as a category, though, no. He was both a product and an observer of his world, perceiving its flaws, subtly depicting them in relationships between characters. He was a Modernist, often showing only glimpses of people in crisis from which readers may deduce their truth. For every moral failing by a female character, and these are exceptionally rare, there are a dozen male characters whose failings are ten times worse. The moral compasses in his stories are almost always female; if they waver, look to the males for what's causing it. In his early works, his female characters are drawn from his own emotional, if not physical, experiences.

His characters illustrate humanity's tragic flaw: that people become who they think they have to be, forced into artificial roles by culture and circumstance. As he passed middle-age, love outside civilization's artifice became his impossible holy grail. In his late works, he reaches for it in ways culturally forbidden: between an aging man and a young woman; between a gender-fluid wife and a husband who wants to go there with

her, but outside the bedroom, decides he can't. "The world breaks everyone," Hemingway writes, not because of who they are, but because that's how the world is— with entrenched binaries and encoded boundaries around gender, sex, and sexuality.

Hemingway projects a male dominated world in his fiction. Love as a notion appeals to Hemingway. Roger Whitlow says , some of Hemingway's " best friends" were women and his best friends are Carlos Baker, A. E. Hotchner, Mary Hemingway.

Hemingway's women characters are differently delineated in his novels. Their traits are also different. Some women characters are meek, womanly in their behaviour, while some are villain-like figures. Some heroines are like Bitches. In the delineation of woman, Hemingway was dictated by what happened when war ceased, he was followed by disillusionment in true love. The unfavourable portrait of Mrs. Macomber who killed her husband for having obstructed in her affairs with a guide is simple, an illustration of the frustration which the novelist experienced in his times. Major critics objection that the female characterizations are weak ,that the women are " too thin " , some of the more passive women as sexual pawns for Hemingway's heroes . John Killinger says," that The Indian girls, Marie, Morgan, Catherine, Maria and Renata receive sympathetic treatment ...like Marjorie, Macomber and Drothy Bridges are the women whom men can live without."¹

His American flings enjoy having sex. Hemingway's career began with the publication of *The Sun Also Rises (1926)*. The novel paints a bleak picture of Europe in its aftermath. Philip Young has said that Hemingway's wasteland can be found in *The Sun Also Rises*. The hero has made it big time, but his once fertile land is now barren. Whereas Hemingway's Paris is the epicentre of the spiritual life in general and Jakes Sexual Adventures in particular, it has been argued that Hemingway treats his fictional characters as insignificant sideshows and that his stories are skewed towards male protagonists.

Character of Catherine is taken from real Agnes Von Karnowski. According to Philip Young: "Death is a subject which by his own admission has obsessed Hemingway for a

long time". Samuel Shaw points out: "The smell of death is expressed in most of his work." Hemingway's point is clear: man was not meant to lose. The worst possible outcome is to lose. A man may be annihilated, but never defeated. Even when confronted with death and failure, Hemingway's protagonists keep their honour.

The novel ends with the tragic death of its protagonist, Catherine. She bravely stares death in the face. At the conclusion of *A Farewell to Arms*, Henry, too, has come to terms with the fact that death is permanent and cannot be avoided. When Catherine Barkley died, he knew it was tragic and accepted it. During his time at the front, he developed a philosophical bent. "Man is trapped socially and biologically, life is an unfair game, and the only inescapable fact he has is death," as Holger Klein puts it, "seems to be spot on." -16

Hemingway's Prose Style is Colloquial, non-literary, lean and striped language , Simple diction and sentence structure, the dialogue and style and the content - A terse and spare, the characters and situations, The quality of his words, correctness, truth, physical sensation which makes Hemingway a literary craftsman.

Minor characters in " *A Farewell to Arms*" are Rinaldi a talkative man, his sense of humour, comic touches, depressed by war, and The Priest gives advice to Henry, his affection to Henry, his interest in Henry and his symbolic significant in novel, Miss Helen Ferguson - Her deep friendship with Catherine and her rebuke to Henry is a moralist, Dr. Valentin is a skilful, talkative a good hearted person, a unique but perfectly convincing character, Mr. And Mrs. Meyers.

Actions that undermine the concept of right and evil are destructive to morality. This occurred during the First World War. The moral decay of today's society is a product not only of the lost generation but also of the pervasiveness of vices like alcoholism and dishonesty at the time. Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* is an excellent example of this type of his writing since it depicts the horrors of World War I, the disastrous effects of sex and alcoholism, and the agony of death, illness, and paralysis. Loneliness, dread, aimlessness, hopelessness, despair, discontent, sadness, anxiety, and depression are all

results of psychological damage. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway depicts the moral collapse of the time and its inhabitants.

Brett exclaimed, "Oh, Jake, we could have had such a damn good time together." The thought that my life is passing me by as I sleep makes me sick.

-The Sun Also Rises

Ernest Hemingway loved the hunt. He Caught a Marlin at the coasts of Cuba, Ernest Hemingway considers life as a losing battle. The image of struggle between two figures alone in the great "beyond" certainly conjures and air of monumental conflict. Santiago ends these reflections by thinking," Perhaps I should not have been a fisherman... But that was the thing I was born for" (P.50). To catch the fish Santiago says, "Fish... I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you before this day ends." (P.54)

"Fish... I'll stay with you until I am dead." (P.52)

Marlin is treated as the main Character.

"You are killing me, fish, and the old man," Santiago yells. Still, you absolutely can. I don't think I've ever met anything greater, more lovely, more serene, or more noble than you, Brother. Kill me already. Whoever murders who is fine with me. (P.56) The Old Man and the Sea.

Literature is the foundation of life. It is the journey of the writer on pages. Literature provides a gateway to teach man about life. Life is a tough road. Literature gives us direction to lead a good life. But it depends on man what kind of road he selects. Literature is beneficial for society. Writer has power to change life. There are few authors in the same league as Hemingway. Good authors teach us valuable lessons. A play, poem, story and novel convey a moral lesson. Hemingway is known for morality and heroism. Good writing stands on its feet. Kindness, honesty, integrity, patience, loyal, generous, kind, mercy, these are moral values and literature is full of these values. William Shakespeare, Alexander Pope, Ernest Miller Hemingway have done good service. Their work has moral values. Their philosophy helps to man to live a good life.



Hemingway's work has morality and heroism, war and Violence. *A Farewell to Arms* is a sexually explicit tale. This book is a masterpiece of writing and design. There is tragedy in *A Farewell to Arms*. The couple is portrayed as helpless. The novel *A Farewell to Arms* was described as "a Romeo and Juliet" by the author. Catherine Barkley is best idealized characters in this novel. It can be said that *A Farewell to Arms* is an autobiographical novel. It tells Ernest Hemingway's experience of war. Hemingway's has shown the theme of love and war in *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway's Female are best drawn in *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway's heroine is a realistic portrayed of loving, understanding, and mature girl. Setwart Sanderson praises the character of Renata . Renata is, says the critic," Venus reborn from the waves of Venice- she is also youth and innocence.² In the end it can be said that the the delineation of female characters in Hemingway's fiction is best drawn.

To conclude Hemingway has done social Justice Towards Women in his novels. He has presented women in a good way. The female are superb and well characterized. They help the male hero . Catherine is docile and submissive. Maria brings comfort in Jordan's life. Brett is a modern woman. Hemingway has done justice in the portrayal of Women.

The Question of Social Justice in Hemingway's Works:

Hemingway's portrayal of women raises important questions about social justice. On one hand, his female characters are often confined by the expectations of their society, and their fates reflect the difficulties faced by women in patriarchal systems. On the other hand, Hemingway imbues these characters with a degree of complexity and agency that challenges the reader to consider their struggles in a more nuanced way.

Social justice, in this context, refers to the struggle for gender equality, autonomy, and fairness in both public and private spheres. Hemingway's novels provide a lens through which we can examine the gendered power dynamics of the early 20th century, particularly the ways in which women resist or conform to these structures. While



Hemingway's works may not offer a direct call for social justice, they open a space for the exploration of women's autonomy and oppression.

Conclusion:

Ernest Hemingway's portrayal of women in his novels is deeply intertwined with the social norms and gender roles of the early 20th century. While his female characters often face significant oppression, they are also complex figures who navigate their worlds with varying degrees of resistance and autonomy. Through characters like Brett Ashley, Catherine Barkley, and Maria, Hemingway provides a multifaceted view of women's struggles for social justice.

Although Hemingway's works do not explicitly champion gender equality, they offer valuable insights into the ways women both conform to and resist patriarchal constraints. In this way, his novels remain relevant to discussions of social justice in literature, prompting readers to consider the historical and ongoing struggles of women for equity and autonomy.

References:

1. John Killinger , *Hemingway and the Dead God's: A Study in Existentialism* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press,1960), p.89
2. *Hemingway*, p.108
3. Spanier, S. W. (1990). *Hemingway's Unknown Soldier: Catherine Barkley, the Critics, and the Great War. Twentieth Century Literature*, 36(2), 247-260. <https://doi.org/10.2307/441817>
4. Tyler, L. (2001). *Brett Ashley: The End of Desire. The Hemingway Review*, 20(2), 44-58. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hem.2001.0001>