

Sexual Motivation as a Tool to Incriminate Women in the Story of: The Scheming of Women and Their Snare Is Mighty, in a Thousand and one Nights

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Abstract

Human narratives often address the sexual motivation of women in different variants relying on conflicting intellectual, cultural and human systems. When we try to approach this sexual motivation we can ask whether this motivation is a positive tool to portray women or otherwise. This study raises the hypothesis that sexual motivation was a tool to incriminate women as in the story of the Scheming of Women and Their Snare is Mighty from “A Thousand and One Nights” trying to highlight the social and cultural aspects of the details in these stories. The female body, in these stories, is robbed of its natural right of sending thoughtful signals and is confined solely to a body which carries signals of lust. This hypothesis is portrayed in the story of: “The Scheming of Women and Their Snare Is Mighty” which includes a collection of internally multiplying stories created inside that story during the nights extending from night (574) till night (608).

Entering the world of sexual taboo: women’s lust is an irreparable loss.

In the story of “The Scheming of Women and Their Snare is Mighty “we find that a man gets a Divine Islamic gift when he realised Laylat al Qadr (7). He sees the angels and the doors of heaven open and everything is prostrating to God. He asks God to fulfil three wishes for him. He seeks the advice of his wife in this regard and she suggests that he asks God to enlarge his male organ. That wish was fulfilled and his male organ becomes as big as a big marrow. His wife runs away from him in fear of bedding him so she asks him to ask God to rid him of this male organ, then his male organ disappears and he finds that he has no male organ (4) then he gives away his last wish by asking God to restore his male organ and by doing that the man loses all his wishes because of his wife’s lust without benefiting from these wishes and God’s grace in this life or the life to come.

The story concludes as it mentions clearly in the end of the story “this happens because of the miscalculation of women” (5). The woman is the main culprit for the loss in this story, for if it wasn’t for her lust and her running after sexual pleasure and her insistence on using the wishes to double her sexual pleasure without a careful study of the situation, her husband wouldn’t have lost all these wishes without even obtaining the sexual pleasure they sought. For this reason she is the culprit for this irreparable loss because in this story she is portrayed as someone with no brain, understanding or will but merely as a foolish body looking for fulfilling its sexual desires at all costs. This story enforces this kind of written thinking about women’s body. (7)

What’s worth noting in this story is that the husband is a Muslim cleric, and this will give us the opportunity to look at the situation from a different perspective. We find that the narrator has failed to exonerate the man from the accusation that he surrendered to his sexual desires which he wants to attribute skilfully to women. The prevalent behaviour in both Eastern and Western societies in the middle Ages is that, clerics indulge in pleasure and that’s why sex has infiltrated the structure of the story. So as Collin Wilson says: “The physical part of sex is easy to learn while the mental part is much deeper and more complicated” for this reason we find the game of sex, body and incrimination in the story starts from the notion of a lustful woman to become an incrimination for the whole society which is mired in corruption and sexual pleasures.

Deceit as a tool to evade sexual incrimination

Interestingly, deceit, betrayal and scheming are some of these qualities which are found in abundance in the story of “The Scheming of Women and Their Snare is Mighty” and this aspect is very clear especially in the folk literature (9) this leads us to the legitimate question about the cause of such phenomenon and at that time in particular.

In this story we find other economic and social determinants which lead us to a specific society with its own environment, the main character in the story is a big dealer and his wife lives in a conservative society where the norm is men and women don't mix together. (10) But the woman allows a young man to come into her house and bed her after she fell for him and loved him, but her affair is disclosed by the talking bird (A parrot) which was used by her husband to spy on her. The name of the bird is “Addorra”. She decides to get out of her dilemma by outfoxing her husband. So she waited till her husband got out of the house then she took a piece of cloth and covered the birds head with it then she started to spray some water and blew some air on the bird by using a fan and she moved the lamp close to the bird so that it looks like lightning and she started to turn the grinding stone till the morning. (11) “Addorra” thought that rain has fallen in the area. When her husband asked the bird about what he saw, the bird said that he saw nothing because of the rain, the wind and thunder. Her husband thought that the bird was lying and he wouldn't believe him any more so he killed the bird as punishment for his lies. That was done upon the request of his wife who didn't want to forgive her husband unless he kills the bird, in this way she can get away with her betrayal by using this trick.

Insisting on ruse to be the woman's way out from her predicament in this story is an extension of the negative stereotyping of the relationship between men and women. While men are portrayed in a positive manner like courage, prowess, generosity and truthfulness, women are portrayed as being resourceful, moody, evasive, envious and emotional in a way to associate them with negative deeds as if these shortcomings are an imperative of the nature of women. The scientific fact is that the society is responsible for giving these attributes as well as other attributes to the individual. Insisting on associating women with these attributes is a form of the patriarchal superiority towards women. The strange thing is although all the human societies are managed by men which is something accepted by most women and some men (12) yet men are still determined to portray women in a negative and destructive manner although they are their partners in the human construction whether they agree or not.

Counter action and partnership in sexual offences

Narrative in this story tends to use the counter action from the perspective that incriminating women is a violent act against them, that's why “there is no violence that merits counter violence” (14) in an attempt to make the man a main accomplice of the woman in the sexual offence which is a crime that leads women to all sorts of sins and excesses. This inclination equates, in a narrative and logical manner, between the natural partners in the sexual act, and they are the man and the woman (15). In night (589) from the stories of “A thousand and One Nights” we find a belle with exceptional beauty falls in love with the son of a merchant despite being married to another man. Their affair is disrupted when her lover goes to jail because someone made a complaint against him. She decides to help him. She goes to the governor of the city asking him to release her lover from jail because she claimed that he is her brother and she doesn't have any provider other than him. But the governor's lust moves towards her and he refuses to help her unless he beds her. Then she tries to take her complaint to the country's judge and the minister and the king but they all incite her to commit adultery with them so they would release her lover. Then she tries to implicate them in a plot by bringing them to her house with the carpenter who makes her wooden wardrobes and imprison them all by using a trick. After she gets them to take off their expensive clothes, she obtains from them an official order to release her lover, she leaves them as prisoners inside the wooden wardrobes then she leaves the city with her lover. Thus she inverts the criminal act to make the men accomplices in the crime. (16) She is not the only one infidel and adulterer but they are all -I mean men – implicated in this deed, they are accomplices and instigators but blatantly get involved in sexual exploitation of that woman by virtue of their influence and their positions.

In this story we can assume that the events had taken place in an Arabic city during the Middle Ages from the description of the political and economic scene because the characters in the story who come mainly from the dominant wealthy middle class and governors, judges, ministers and kings. These positions didn't exist in any era other than the Middle Ages, besides some special social details of this cultural structure where we see people reading the Quran when they are in a situation of fear like the judge who started to read the Quran in the wardrobe where he was imprisoned so people won't think that he was a jinn. (17) We also find the male characters in the story wearing Arabic dresses consist of the Abaya (Arabic robe) and the turban.

Power struggle and triumph to those who are stronger sexually or physically

Danmaa wins in "A Thousand and One Nights (Nights 594 -597) against Bahram the son of the Persian king by virtue of her beauty and not by the virtue of her chivalry as she tried previously. This prince enters the battle ring fighting against her, when she realised that he is about to beat her she took the veil off to show her beautiful face, he lost his mind and his concentration then she triumphs and defeats him badly in front of everyone and refuses to marry him. That way she beats him by the virtue of her sexual might which was her beauty which stimulates his senses and his hidden desires. Then he decides to beat her by using the same weapon she used to beat him which is sexual might so he tricks her till he rapes her and deflowers her so she had no way out of the scandal other than bowing to him and marrying him.

This story is burdened with social and cultural symbols which belong to its special place and time. We find Princess Danmaa wearing a veil like most Moslem women at that time, she is a virgin and tried hard to not be deflowered unless that was done by a husband as it is prevalent in the Arabic culture, add to that Prince Bahram was the son of a Persian king and a Persian is any person who is not an Arab and this is a common expression with the Arabs in the Middle Ages, but it is replaced now by the word foreigner. We also find in the story that the prince and the princess own maids and slaves which were a part of the society and they existed in abundance at that time.

No wonder that we find women in that era began to assume positions of power by using their beauty. As women - especially in the Islamic world – were denied being in a direct position of power so they resorted to strategies which are considered by men -who don't lack direct authority- as deceitful and crafty.(18) By this logic we can say that women are crafty by nature as long as they represent human weakness against male dominance, this view extended to accept Machiavellian famous saying "Humans are cunning by nature" as long they are in a position of weakness and beggary in order to get what they desire, power is one of the things they desire.

Insistence of the "Scheming of Women and their Snare is mighty" to incriminate women sexually

The strange thing about the story of "Scheming of Women and Their Snare is Mighty" is that it insists on incriminating women sexually even if the story is an evidence of her chastity and honour and fidelity to her husband. (19). She says "No" even to the mighty autocratic king. In one of the nights of the main story, in night (574) the king propositioned the maid of his minister but she evades the situation by using a trick. She cooked the king ninety dishes of food, all having the same taste so that she can say to the king that all women however they differ in looks have the same taste and she gave him a book full of sermons which deter people from adultery and scare people of its consequences. The king was deterred and was ashamed of his deed and he leaves the maid's house without touching her. (20).

This story promotes the cultural concepts which tend to interpret the behaviour of women and alter it forcibly into a malicious criminal act even if the details point to the contrary. (21) We can understand from this insistence on incrimination in the light of inherited human concepts which links incrimination and the feeling of guilt with the body which is sex while linking the concept of purity and spiritual elevation to be as far as possible from the body which they see as unfiled. For this reason the story implicates women in a sexual behaviour in order to make them guilty in every situation.

Temporal and spatial environment for incrimination

If the temporal and spatial environment can accommodate the criteria for knowledge, communication, creation and formation then we can say that its horizon vary in the thoughtful tales, which often tend to be the custodian to the act of incriminating women through their sexual behaviour within boundaries which often tend not to be restricted to a time or place. It resorts to flexibility in defining them.

In the story of Omneyat (Wishes) we can't find a specific place for the events, we never know the name of the place where the events in the story took place but we know that they took place at a time when the wish was realised. We know that the Muslim man's wish was realised at Laylat Al Qudr but we don't know when that happened. Perhaps the absence of the precise time and place intensifies the incrimination of women. The story put the emphasis on the ugliness of the behaviour and the enormity of the error which begins with the women's mistake by following their non-stop sexual desires.

The same thing is repeated in the merchant who owned "Addorra" bird. We don't know where the events took place but we stop at the details of the woman's infidelity and her ugly deceit to get away with her infidelity by deceiving her husband using her wicked mind so the bird "Addorra" pays a high price as a result of her wickedness. This act ensures the incrimination of women.

But in the story of the enamoured woman who was propositioned by men in "One Thousand and One Nights" in order to release her lover from jail, we can't precisely locate the place where the events took place, but we are certain that it was the capital of one of the urban areas of the Islamic state because it would be the only place where governors, judges, ministers, kings and the business men can be found, but we are not able to identify the king with certainty or find the name of that place bar the belief that the events took place in the Middle Ages of the Islamic history where political plots would exist.

In the tale of Princess Danmaa in "One thousand and One Nights" we can conclude from the cultural signs such as the king of Arabs, the king of Persians, maids, slaves, emancipation, swords, spears, arrows and veils, that we deal with an urban city of the urban Arabic state in the Middle Ages without being able to specify that with certainty. The same thing is repeated in the story of the maid who managed to get rid of the seduction of the king through the trick of the ninety dishes of food which have similar flavour. We find the same spatial and temporal environment as in the previous story like the repetition of words as king, maid, minister, mistress, royal palaces and the military judge to indicate the same environment.

The narrative structure of the stories

We can say that the stories generated by the main story "Scheming of Women's and Their Snare is Mighty" is worded in a style which is modest in eloquence and very close to everyday language so it is far from the linguistic style which puts emphasis on eloquence. Like: "The man has always wished in his life" (23) and "Say! God enlarge my male organ" (24) or "The man said to her: What to do?" (25). The narrative style in these stories tends to accelerate the course of events through the use of the techniques of pithiness, short cuts and jumping over times to intensify the narrative in the smallest space of sentences, so the events cascade rapidly in the narrative to accelerate it.

The stories always end with a sentence summarising the narrator's opinion of the stories he had told. In the story of the man with three wishes in night (592) of "A Thousand and One Nights" for example the story ends with the sentence "Your majesty, that was because of the misjudgement of women and I only said that to prove how dupe, absurd and bad manager they are" (26) The dangerous thing in these sentences which summarise the stories is that it starts with individual cases to generalise that to all situations especially when they involve women. We find the narrator blank-labels women as running after their physical enjoyment regardless of the cost. (27). He always assigns the task of persuasion of that generalisation to a character with a point of view in the story. In this way we tend to believe in everything that character says or believes. We may refer to things around that character as facts without tangible explanation (28)

The stories in "A Thousand and One Nights" are reproduced from one main story. They stem from the female narrative where there is bias, reproduction and generation from the female person (29), there is no doubt that this reproductive style in the story is a winning card in the hand of the narrator "Scheherazade". That helps to stretch the story and keep it going (30). The main story in this tale I mean the tale of "Scheming of Women and Their Snare is Mighty" is the story of the king and the maid who falsely claimed that the king's son has propositioned her on the other hand we find that all the tales in A Thousand and One Nights are told by the main narrator in the tales which is Scheherazade who starts to narrate all tales every night with that famous sentence "I have been told O happy king with wise judgement that" while leaving the internal narrative for the nights to the characters of the tales. Finally she ends every night with the obligatory sentence which is: "Scheherazade was caught up with the morning, so she stopped the permissible talk".

Repetition of the crises happens very often in the stories of this study from *A Thousand and One Nights* because some of the stories repeat the same event as we find in the story of the enamoured woman who was propositioned by the governor, the judge, the minister, the king and the carpenter but she outfoxes them five times, she ends each story of the amorous men by saying: "While they were talking a slapper knocked at the door, he asked her: who is that? She said: my husband. He asked: what to do? She said: get up and enter that wardrobe till I send him away and come back to you, don't worry." (31)

What's worth mentioning in this regard is talking about the narrative style in the stories. This study aims to point to the fact that all stories without exception relied on the narrative technique in a horizontal conventional way without using the other narrative techniques like flash back or outlook because that type of narrative suits the oral conveying of the stories which is usually the main conveyor of this kind of stories.

The dilemma of interpreting and the meaning in the story of "Scheming of Women and Their Snare is mighty"

The main stories and the stories which were reproduced from them are based basically on the story of the king and the maid who alleged falsely that the King's son has propositioned her and started to tell stories to prove his son's guilt and incite him to punish his son while the king's loyal ministers were narrating stories which confirm that women do lie and that their snare is mighty in order to save the prince from this plot. This tale based on the verse from the holy Quran: "When he saw that his shirt was torn at the back he said: it is a snare from you women! Truly, mighty is your snare!" (32) She uses it unfairly relying on an interpretation which delves on the deliberate error of generalising an individual case on the whole gender. This holy verse when refers to the mighty snare it describes the conduct of Aziz's wife who wanted to retaliate against Prophet Yusuf who rejected her advances and does not apply to all women, but traditional text such as *A Thousand and One Nights* and many other sayings tend to generalise this theme quoting this verse from the wholly Quran out of its context and give it an exclusive interpretation forced on it from outside the text while we find Muslim thinkers believe that the snare is limited only in this verse to Aziz's wife and not to all women (33).

It is a tendency which grows in an intellectual environment which detains the meaning in narrow classifications of interpretation. This is what we find in the interpretation of the verses which refer to women in the holy Quran as many Muslims are determined, as well as other non Muslims, to interpret these verses in a way to promote the patriarchal thinking in oriental societies. In the verse about polygamy in Islam "Then marry women of your choice, two or three or four but if you fear that you might not be able to deal justly (With them), then marry just one or that your right hand possess. That will be the more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice)" (34). Islam allows polygamy on the condition that the wives are treated equally in all aspects, something almost impossible to achieve. In this way it implicitly prohibits polygamy as long as the condition of fairness is not met and can't be otherwise. Still some people insist on making this verse their passport to the world of enjoyment, gratification and women's bodies using the institution of marriage as a smokescreen. (35)

The problem of interpretation is repeated in the Almighty God saying in the Quran regarding testimony: "If they are not two men, then one man and two women whom you accept as witnesses in case one of the two women errs then the other woman will remind her". Some believe this verse indicates that women are irrational and that Islam has treated them as semi human which is not true. Muslim scholars say that this verse is only related to bearing responsibility for being a witness and not being a witness, which means that for bearing responsibility for being a witness two women are needed because of the possibility of forgetfulness in women, because they often forget, but when it comes to being a witness one woman will do. The presence of another woman is to safeguard against suspicion, but when there is no suspicion and there is no omission and the witness is alert and attentive to the details which the court needs and the court questions her about these details then her testimony will be enough.

In the verse "God directs you as regarding your children's inheritance, to make the males portion equal to that of two females" (37). The bigger part of inheritance will go to the man is not because he is better than the woman but the man is always the one who supports the woman in Islam, for this reason he is allocated a bigger financial share so that he can carry his full responsibility towards her. (38).

Accordingly we find that the title of the story: "Scheming of Women and Their snare is Mighty" tends from the beginning, to incriminate women even before viewing the evidence which supports that. It gives in advanced an absolute ruling, with no chance for appeal, which is, women are criminals.

Deficiency in women's sexual perception in the story "Scheming of Women and Their Snare is Mighty"

Women in all the stories of "Scheming of Women and Their Snare is Mighty" suffer from deficiency of understanding the sexual concept. Sex for them deviates from its humanitarian, communicative, interactive and developmental aspects which are at the essence of its existence (39) to become a tool of evil which symbolizes women's ignorance and their presumed instinctive tendency for corruption. For them sex is a tool which they use for revenge, power, wealth or physical pleasure which is far from any system of ethical rules or social boundaries. This leads us to the assumption that this story like other "A thousand and One Nights" stories reflects a collective perception of the image of women in the Arab and Islamic worlds. (40). During that era which they chronicle, it is a picture which combines all the details of the lives of people, circumstances and the image of women who sex for them boils down to physical pleasure and realising personal ends away from any social ethics which promote virtue, even at the formal level, is one the most important features of this picture.

This collective perception of women is held by a big section of the society which was indulging in lust and sexual desires. It does not portray in any way the real perception of sex in Islam which doesn't see it as abomination of the Satan or dirty or impure but legitimate and an obligation of satisfaction through a legitimate (Halal) way which is marriage. What's confusing in this story is that it always portrays women as a synonym of sin, because they are a symbol of sex and sensuality. Therefore they own a sin even if they are faithful to their husbands and refuse to betray them. Therefore they can't according to this perception be pure and innocent unless they disown their body which means disowning their nature. (42)

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