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Patricia McCormick's 'Sold' as a Masterpiece of Cultural Literature

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Abstract:

This novel deals with the study of the horrific realities of child trafficking across the Indo-Nepal border. The novel has effectively blended the conceptual framework of cultural literature. It is the story of a young, observant, and self-reflexive girl-child, Lakshmi. The stepfather of the protagonist, Lakshmi, sold her into the nexus of the sex trade. As a survivor narrative, this novel is written in vignettes and it focuses on the apathy, greed for money, and inhuman nature of those who promote child trafficking for commercial sex. The trajectory of survivor narratives has empowered the victims to voice their agony and register their experiences; these narratives bring peripheral issues to the public domain. Valuable inputs from scholars, social activists, critics, and theorists such as Judith Herman, Fredrich Engles, and Siddharth Sarkar have been duly incorporated to support the study.

Keywords: Prostitution, sex trafficking, triumph over adversity, poverty.

Patricia McCormick was born in a Catholic family in Pennsylvania on May 23, 1956. The environment at her home was always serious, and her family observed severe limitations. McCormick spends most of her time writing stories in an old copybook while hiding in a deserted corner of her garage. She wrote stories for most of her early childhood. Growing up, she had to get past several challenges.

After completing her journalism course, she eventually worked as a journalist at a daily newspaper in New Jersey. She was drawn to a career in journalism because it provided a forum for the voiceless to be heard and brought an enormous amount of information under

one roof. Her writings are packed with facts and gruesome information concerning the plight of those who suffer worldwide; therefore, they cannot be classified as fiction. Her writings are truthful, practical, and full of facts.

McCormick makes it clear that real stories inspire her novels. Her writings demonstrate her continual fight for social equality and fundamental human rights. She writes on crucial issues that need to be addressed immediately by everyone in society. She writes to explore her inner self, gain insight into her perspective on many issues, and give voice to situations that are either ignored or suppressed. She is one of the most recognized and promising modern-day writers due to her straightforward style and acute understanding of various cultures.

Sold (2006), one of her most complex and captivating works tackles the serious issue of human sex trafficking between India and Nepal. The narrative is told from the perspective of Lakshmi, a thirteen-year-old girl who is forced by her stepfather into prostitution as a domestic help. The book is gloomy and troubling, making readers consider important issues like child protection, the adverse effects of broken families, and the scarcity of fundamental resources and education. To learn about the actual conditions of these establishments and the reasons why young girls often end up as prostitutes; McCormick visited several brothels in India. Her works delve into the catastrophic natural disasters that affect the people of Nepal, as well as the lack of resources, poverty, lack of education, and gender stereotypes that drive families to sell their girls. She gives an insight into the dark and secretive life of a young girl, Lakshmi, whose confidence is often betrayed by people around her. The novel's intense suffering describes the horrible conditions of a brothel, including the abuse and exploitation of young girls.

The main motive of McCormick's book '*Sold*' is to teach young girls about the intricate and quickly expanding web of human trafficking. She wrote this book in short segments, to provide readers a brief respite from the horrifying and terrible facts of sexual captivity. In her little world of idealism and ignorance, Lakshmi is portrayed as a normal young girl adversely affected by poverty. Despite facing the typical challenges and hardships, she finds happiness in her world in the hills. Instead of using harsh language, McCormick chooses to tell the tale from the perspective of a thirteen-year-old girl. McCormick is firmly opposed to sex trafficking and child prostitution, and she appeals

to the government to take action to abolish these customs. She portrays Lakshmi as a desperate girl who never gives up her desire to return to her home, but she also describes her as a powerless and miserable character. She portrays Lakshmi as a survivor rather than a victim, and this is the most significant and appealing feature of her work. She emphasizes her ability to resist those who have abused her rather than blaming her for her naivety. Sexual assault against children and women is committed in many different ways all around the world.

The Indian subcontinent has a long history of enslaving women through the flesh trade and human trafficking. The poor teenage boys and girls are trafficked and illegally sold in the cities by a web of cunning middlemen and traffickers, as a subject to domestic slavery by the ultramodern metropolitan class of society. Often, the poor tribal families from Jharkhand and other impoverished areas of India and Nepal sell their daughters as domestic labor. These girls fear financial loss and physical punishment from their masters and owners, domestic abuse against them frequently goes unreported. In many parts of the country, women are pushed into commercial sex by their family members. The profession they are forced to pursue remains undisclosed since, for the most part, women don't speak out about their condition. Impoverished families consider the sex trade as the simplest and only source of livelihood.

The horrific experiences of Lakshmi, who is pushed into sex labor by her stepfather, are resonated in the novel. "*Can she ever be free?*" is the question that the novel raises, pointing out the way forward and implying that there is no definitive answer to this question.

This novel focuses not only on sex slavery but also gives glimpses of other facets of Lakshmi's life. This survivor tale is exceptional because of Lakshmi's passionate love for learning and her genuine attempts to struggle for existence. The author transforms the tale of a little girl imprisoned in dangerous circumstances into a tale of emancipation. The author makes it quite evident that the commercialization of the sex trade is not something that should be legalized. This is business, not a profession, which forces women to sell their bodies for small amounts of money, to fulfill their family needs. The girls caught in the clutches of their owners are severely abused and humiliated. The young girls and adult women caught in these horrible situations have no way to flee, and the people who are the consumers, don't realize how their actions affect society. The supply increases in line

with the demand. To eradicate this repressive industry, society must be made aware of prostitution and sex trafficking. This profession does not guarantee freedom, dignity, and financial independence to women. In contrast, this profession deprives women of the little freedom they have, humiliates them, drives them into poverty, and frequently leaves them mentally and physically broken. Due to sexually transmitted diseases, many get tragic ends. This research examines *Sold* with the intention of not only revealing the unfamiliar facts about prostitution and sex trafficking but also demonstrating a strong desire to envision a society, free of prostitution. A society in which women are not forced to engage in whoredom to survive, and an environment in which males do not get in the flesh trade. A society free from illicit sexual activity will serve as a shelter for those from lower socio-economic status.

In the novel, the victim experiences extreme psychological suffering but also physical violence. Their hopes for a better life, financial independence, and respect are crushed making them helpless and reliant. Their owners subject them to atrocities and permanently damage their conscience by taking away their self-respect and trading their bodies. They start to feel weak, alone in society, and hopeless. The majority of them are left to their owners' mercy after being given up by their relatives. Some other tragic tales of sex trafficking, abuse, and exploitation are Rachel Lloyd's *Girls Like Us*, Mary Frances Bowley's *The White Umbrella*, Somaly Mam's *The Road of Lost Innocence*, Victor Malarek's *The Natashas*, and Corban Addison's *A Walk Across the Sun*. More courageous initiatives like the *Bachpan Bachao Andolan* are needed in our nation to put an end to child trafficking and prostitution.

Sold presents a provocative compilation of atrocities of life. Deprivation and economic reliance are two of the most important causes of women's oppression. Lakshmi suffers from extreme poverty in addition to being a victim of sex trafficking. Her only crime is that she is a girl from a poor family. Poverty and socio-economic instability make the sex trade grow and flourish. Poverty is seen as a denial of human rights, and women are disproportionately affected by this denial. Lakshmi talks about how difficult it is for her family to survive the summer's intense heat and the torrential rain that submerged the house in murky water because they don't have a tin roof. Lakshmi condemns her stepfather for losing the meager assets possessed by the family, in gambling. As she describes her mother

observing the neighbor's house, which has a tin roof, she illustrates her mother's helplessness by saying”

She is looking down the mountain at the rice terraces that descend, step by step, to the village below, at the neighbors' tin roofs winking cruelly back at her. A tin roof means that the family has a father who doesn't gamble away the landlord's money playing cards in the tea shop. A tin roof means that the family has a son working at the brick kiln in the city. A tin roof means that when the rains come, the fire stays lit and the baby stays healthy (7)

Due to the lack of resources, women living in rural areas are sometimes burdened with numerous tasks for the survival of their families. Their growth is interrupted by poverty, illiteracy, and gender discrimination.

In this regard, J.S. Mill states that:

It is a political law of nature that those who are under any power of ancient origin, never begin by complaining of the power itself, but only of its oppressive exercise. There is never any want of women who complain of ill-usage by their husbands. There would be infinitely more if complaints were not the greatest of all provocative to a repetition and increase of the ill-usage.

Patricia McCormick depicts the life of oppressed women, as well as the challenging tasks they perform all of their lives without receiving acknowledgment. Poverty, illiteracy, and patriarchal restrictions imposed only on women have deteriorated their lives. Before the feminist movement, women were seen to be nothing more than objects. Being a man, Lakshmi's father has the right to his will. He gets dressed, plays cards, and has tea with other old men of the locality. He is always willing to spend the family's earnings on unnecessary selfish items for himself. Even though the majority of the men in the village leave their homes for months in search of employment in the city, Lakshmi's stepfather asks her to leave home and take a job to support her family. Her mother has always taught her to regard her stepfather as God. As she says,

Ama says we are lucky we have a man at all. She says I am to honor and praise him, respect and thank him for taking us in after my father died (14)

McCormick uses realistic and natural components to sculpt Lakshmi's persona. She has the same dreams and visions of a tidy, serene, and lovely life as any other girl, but when it comes to overcoming obstacles, she has the courage of a superhero. Lakshmi chooses to control her fate rather than give up on her aspirations. She wants to meet and talk to Krishna, but she complies quietly, when Auntie says, "No sense looking back" (62). Lakshmi, who views her mother as a goddess, fiercely suppresses her joy at being able to cross the mountain and feels proud of herself for being able to assist her. She being confused says:

I am too shy to tell her I won't run off, too timid to tell her how proud and nervous and excited I am to be the first person in my family to leave the mountain (63).

Siddhartha Sarkar in his research '*Trafficking of Women and Girls for Sex Trade from Nepal to India*', points out that several people are involved in the trafficking network; they bewitch victims and their families to fulfill their goal. In context with this, he says:

It also operates through unregistered brokers who may or may not be strangers to the locality. In terms of trafficking, neither source is risk-free. Women and girls are reportedly attracted by reports of wealth and fun in the city and are easily duped into trusting the mediator. Likewise, some women are deceived into false marriages with the broker and are subsequently sold into the sex industry (Sarkar 439)

Conclusion:

McCormick uses Lakshmi's narrative to add credibility to the global anti-trafficking efforts. Society must adopt a more inclusive perspective and provide impoverished women with an environment free from pressure to engage in unlawful work. Social disapproval blocks the spread of knowledge about sex trafficking. Society's intolerance puts many barriers for marginalized women. The horrifying living conditions of the underprivileged must be shown to the people and for this, the urbanized population has to come out of their

comfort zone. During an interview, Jeffrey D. Brown, the director of the movie *Sold* (an adaptation of the novel) discussed the challenges faced by young girls entangled in sex trafficking. They are saved, but they are rarely given the chance to rehabilitate. Because of the horrible experiences they endure, it takes quite a while for these victims to get back to their normal lives. If they are not treated with kindness and decency, their terrible experiences leave them with haunting memories of being tortured, humiliated, and confined. McCormick's literary works present social, cultural, and political queries to highlight the problems surrounding the victims in the world. As McCormick writes, "If you look hard enough, chaos turns into order the way letters turn into words" (74). This provides readers with an overview of the author's intention, which is to transform the chaos around them into a natural solidarity for better understanding.

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