

14<sup>th</sup> ICLICE Seoul 2019 014-008 Vishaalenny A/P Subramaniam

**Male Gaze in K.S.Maniam's 'The Rock Melon' and 'The Loved Flaw'**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study will be based upon content analysis, in a general sense considers sexual presentation outline through male gaze on K.S.Maniam's imaginative work through Laura Mulvey's hypothesis. The target of the study is to first gaze male gazing and what the gazing is showed in these academic works. This study also will in like course set to discuss the like hoods of male gazing and set to give impact into the effect of the male gaze on both man and woman. Set in a typical Indian culture, works of K.S.Maniam show what the take after, the likelihood of gazing and being gazed, fills in as a system of empowering and disempowering. The center of this review is to show what the gaze could be both strength and weakness being the subject or the trial of a look. The study will correspondingly explore the use of gaze as a tool by both male and female character in the literary work. The study will further asses how the gaze of objectification is used by those who look with a particular fixation to overpower and dominate the others regard their gender. This study in like way will be made to perceive how both male and female could be a subject of male gaze in certain condition. I will in like way explore extra enlightenments for the use of the gaze by both male and female character, particularly in its utilization by "manly" female and "feminized" male characters.

*Keywords:* Male-gazing, empowering and disempowering, objectification

**Introduction**

**Feminism**

Feminism simply demand social equality for women and men, in opposition to patriarchy and sexism. The first wave of feminism began in the 1840's as women opposed to slavery. Feminism views the personal experiences of women and men through the lens of gender. Feminism opposes laws and cultural norms that limits the education, income and jobs opportunity for women. Feminist argues that cultural conceptions of gender divide the full range of human qualities into two opposing and limiting spheres: the female world of emotions and cooperation and the male world off rationality and competition.

Feminist scholars emphasis that gender is a crucial category of analysis and any research that ignore that modes of knowledge are incomplete and one sided. Feminism seeks to question and transform androcentric systems of thought which posit the male as the norm. In practice this means not only revealing and critiquing androcentric biases, but also attempting to examine beliefs and practices from the viewpoint of the "other," treating women and other marginalized groups as subjects, not merely objects.

Feminist has acknowledged and accepted political dimension, as opposed to the hidden political dimension of scholarship that claims to be "neutral" and "objective." The political goal of feminist work is to broader than simply a stronger emphasis on women, though that is an important part of it; the goal is to revise our way of considering history,

society, literature, so that neither male nor female is taken as normative, but both are seen as equally conditioned by the gender constructions of their culture.

As Judith Fetterley puts it, "Feminist criticism is a political demonstration whose point isn't just to decipher the world however to transform it by changing the awareness of the individuals who read and their connection to what they read. . . The first demonstration of a feminist critic commentator is to turn into an opposing instead of a consenting pursuer and, by this refusal to consent, to start the way toward exorcizing the male personality that has been embedded in us." (Judith Fetterley, 2003) In simple words, the readers rejects idea of generalizations and looks at female as a topic in literary works.

Comprehensively, feminist criticism analysis looks at the manners by which writing and other social preparations strengthens or undermines the financial, political, social, and mental oppression of female. Be that as it may, similarly as the professionals of every single basic hypothesis do, feminist critics hold a wide range of assessments on the majority of the issues their control analyzes. On the topical dimension, the feminist criticism readers ought to relate to female characters and their worries. The article is to give an evaluate of phallogocentric suspicions and an investigation of man centric dreams or philosophies recorded in a writing that is male-focused and male-dominated. Feminist critics generally agree that their goals are to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices, to promote discovery and re-evaluation of literature by women, and to examine social, cultural, and psychosexual contexts of literature and literary criticism (Guerin, 1999)

#### Male's gaze

Gazing refers to look steadily, intently, and with fixed attention. In literary term, to gaze is more than to look at. It represent the gaze a psychological relation of power, in where the gazer is the predator towards the prey, the object of gaze. However, male gaze refers to the way visual arts are structured around a masculine viewer. Laura Mulvey introduced the second-wave feminist concept of "male gaze" as a feature of gender power asymmetry in film in her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. It describes the tendency in visual culture to depict the world and women from a masculine point of view and in terms of men's attitudes.

Mulvey explained that visual may be viewed in "three different looks". Camera is the first aspect as it capture the actual events of the film, the second portrays the about voyeuristic demonstration of the crowd as one participates in watching the film itself, and the third alludes to the characters that communicate with each other all through the film. Through her composition, Mulvey expressed that "looking" is for the most part observed as a male job, while being "took a gander at" is the uninvolved job of female.

#### **Methodology**

"Eyes are the door to soul" is an old saying compact with meaning. Eyes hold power to observe, to make statement, to intimidate, to empower and to desire another person. The power of the gaze could manifest the purpose if used with intention and care.

In "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey argues that the physical absence of the penis from women's bodies creates castration anxiety in the men that gaze upon them, and that this gaze is the embodiment of two forms of escapism for the male unconscious: "preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery)" or "complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (Mulvey, *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema.*, 1992). In simple words, the male gaze acts as a defense mechanism

against woman who are similar to them and it also allow male to access and dominate female by making them submit to desire and pleasure.

Mulvey's article of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', uses a psychoanalytic framework to discover how the attraction to film and cinema reinforces internal patterns of fascination, and her focus is on pleasure in seeing. Her article draws on the Freudian concept of scopophilia whereby people are objectified and subjected to a "controlling and curious gaze". The gaze in Mulvey's article is predominantly a male gaze, where females are objectified and the pleasure of looking belongs to the man. Her view on the male gaze is supported by John Berger who in his book *Ways of Seeing* sees the male gaze as "... active [and] dynamic. It controls woman, but also desires woman ..." (Jay, 2012)

Mulvey's conceptualisation of male gaze which is the relationship between the pleasure of viewing and the act of forming an identity could be categories into 'Scopophilia' that arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight, and 'Narcissism', the constitution of the ego comes from identification with the images seen (Mulvey, *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*, 1989)

In her writing, Mulvey concept revolves around the complete destruction of the idea of pleasure and the role play by both male and female in society. Mulvey point out that, woman has been subjected to the male gaze that has prevented her from creating her own identity outside of the male fantasy. Mulvey (1989) contests, "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (p. 15). Mulvey in fact, gives the female no agency at all in regards to the pleasure in looking. (Mulvey, *Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*, 1989)

### **Literature Review**

In order to understand K.S.Maniam's work involves male gaze, psychoanalytic reading of K.S. Maniam's play "The Sandpit: Womensis" by Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya gave clear view through Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. The paper points out that woman have been mostly show cased as an object rather than a subject to both male and female gaze. Researcher able to conceptualize how the female characters in the play enter a discourse in the male position and how do they occupy this constructed space 'docilely'. It also emphasis how the women are able to expose the oppressive representation of the female body as ideological, but are unable to affirm a more adequate one.

Mulvey's theory, which argues that the visual pleasures of Hollywood cinema are based on voyeuristic and fetishistic forms of looking which produce unified and masculinized spectators, is applicable to the reading of Maniam's 'The Sandpit: Womensis' because scopophilia, fetishism, and narcissism are as actively at work in this play as they are in traditional film. "The Sandpit: Womensis" may be seen as an attempt to portray conflicting representations of the female body in Malaysian Indian society as a site of social control and also as one of resistance against the patriarchal norm. The researcher explains how did the play developed through a gradual process of revelation that may be associated with Freud's psychoanalysis, in which the secrets of the patients' past are slowly and painfully unveiled. In this sense, researcher concluded that the gaze of the female protagonists goes back and forth in their reminiscences of past and present events. (Wan Yahya, 2005)

This play consists of forty monologues of unequal length delivered by the two female characters. They do not converse with each other but rather pour out their thoughts and emotions about their life in relation to their husband, who never appears. Although the audience sees only the two women, they are able to assess the absent character because the

play revolves around him; the women's speeches give him an equal presence. Both women are waiting for their husband to come to them. This situation invites the audience to perceive the stage as representative of the two women's psyches and the battle for linguistic authority occurring there as reflective of the struggle taking place within the women's minds.

The researcher believed that, although the two women appear on stage, they do not speak for themselves their knowledge comes only from Maniam and through his male perspective. They are not on the stage, but male representations of and conjectures about them are, and they as subjects do not take the stage, do not occupy their place. A psychoanalytic reading of Maniam's play provides us with a sophisticated understanding of woman's present cultural condition, but it also seems to confine her forever to the status of one who is seen, spoken about, and analysed. At first glance, Maniam's purpose in presenting the women through monologues seems to be to give a space to the struggle of female subjectivity. However, when the text is read psychoanalytically and using Mulvey's paradigm, the researcher confirms that there is evidence of an oedipal struggle and the fetishisation of the female body.

Apart from that, "Gendered Glances: The Male Gaze(S) In Victorian English Literature" by Christine A. Sweeney detach the gaze from the notion of masculine dominance and therefore uncover possibilities for alternative forms of the gaze. The studies explore how the social politics of gender contribute to the execution of the gaze by different sexes. . She have argued that, in Victorian England, gaze's sole reputation as a tool of dominance was complicated by the industrial revolution; and further, that its use ceased to be limited to men as women came to understand the power of the gaze. She had categorized the gaze into two types; the traditional gaze and the future gaze, the way these gazes can be manipulated are numerous.

In her studies, Christine explain the separation of gazes into two conflicting facets: superiority of the self over the other and identification of the self with the other, into two different types of men creates the possibility for some to succeed and others to fail, as only those who embrace identification with the "other" will survive to create the future of England in the face of imperialism. The gaze that looks to understand succeeds and the gaze that looks to ruthlessly impose fails in an imperial society

Christine points out that the gaze of objectification is only applicable to those who gaze in order to dominate; however, even this effect of the traditional male gaze seems to have varying causes. While some characters gaze to dominate the woman who embodies the threat of castration, others gaze to dominate the man who gazes to understand without eliminating. A man who uses this new, understanding gaze is a threat to the dominance of the complete (or non-castrated) male, and often appears to create a resurgence of the aforementioned typical male gaze. The gaze that desires to understand, but without the intention of dominance, is typically characterized as a feminized masculinity in its emotional and sympathetic view towards "the other." Complications concerning the gendering of the gaze arise here, when the traditional male gaze is a reaction to another male's nontraditional gaze in the sense that it is seeking, but not to dominate.

Through her research reading, she portray manipulation of gaze in numerous way in the form of a man communicating with a man of a different gaze through a fetishized woman; a man internally conflicted as he embodies both the traditional and future gazes; further, as a woman dominating a man and a woman through use of a dominant gaze; a man in both a dominant and submissive role, and a woman who is able to grow from a role of subjugation to power as she learns to understand both how to use the gazes herself and also how to read the gazes which she falls subject to and which she observes others experiencing.

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In order to conceptualise male gaze in depth, the research by Camilla Irene Fauskanger Davidsen, illustrate how gaze is a powerful tool. In her thesis entitle "The Power of the Gaze: Seeing and Being Seen in Nineteen Eighty-Four and The Handmaid's Tale", Camila provides important insight into visual studies. The objective of this analysis is to show how the gaze can both empower and disempower the protagonists within the futuristic totalitarian regimes they are bound to live in. The thesis discuss in length about how power, specifically desiring power as a theme can be taught to students. The discussion covers the knowledge about societal issues that might affect pupils' everyday life.

In both novels, Camila explain how the gaze, the notion of seeing and being seen, alternately works as a method of empowering and disempowering. The power of the gaze manifests itself in different ways within a totalitarian regime designed to supervise and monitor the citizens' behavior. She concluded the gaze is inexorably connected to the experience of power; the power of seeing and being seen works in different ways. The power of the gaze manifests itself in different ways in the two novels and it is associated with the working of supervision, the expression of desire and the establishment of hierarchical stratification.

Camilia concluded her writing with a statement that, the gaze is a site of power and control is found in both stories she studied. Both stories in detail experience the gaze which leaves them lacking control over their own lives. The desiring gaze in the two novels offers different interpretations. The desiring gaze can be disempowering when it is objectifying its target and when the object of the gaze holds a passive gaze herself.

In conclusion, all the researcher did well in conceptualizing their understanding of male gaze with different source.

### Analysis

The focal point of this analysis is to show how the gaze can empower and to analysis the short story, "The Rock Melon" by K.S.Maniam. From the first words of the first page of story, Maniam clearly designates looking as a crucial component of the novel. From the first line, "*My first thought is to expose her. But what is there to say?*" the reader is forced to view Viji, the main female character, through another's eyes. Readers participate in this gaze in a direct manner, as we could conclude that this is a man gazing at a woman due to the deliberate elimination of pronouns (apart from "her" as the object of the gaze), the gaze through which readers are viewing Viji may belong to a man. The questions that follow seem as though the subject of the gaze is attempting to understand its object on a level that is more than skin-deep.

The first look that could interpret male gaze as person behind the camera, always gives priority towards male as active character while female become passive character. The emphasis of gender role always gives male a position as rational, strong, protective, and decisive while they cast women as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive (Tyson, 2014). The belief that men are superior to women has been used to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions. This shows man emerges as the dominant power within the created fantasy. It shows the male dominance in the scene or story. This perspective, usually displayed women as an erotic object for both the character within the film, as the view focus on how a male looked at a female.

One of the ways in which the gaze elicits power is through male desire. The emotion of desire can be defined as a charged motivation towards a certain object, activity or person associated with pleasure. This motivates behavior, according to the intensity of the felt desire (Dillen, 2012). In "The Rock Melon", writer used a male desire as a main key in the flow of the story. Throughout the story, the reader could identify how the writer

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maximized the males' desire by using associating with forbidden pleasure. In the line, *"Take, for instance, the breakfast table. The wife ate there, the children scrambled all over it before going off to school. Then that very table becomes something else between Viji and me. The children spilled tea and chutney on smooth surface. Viji and I spilled ourself across the breadth and width of its yielding regions wood; when our bodies met and flesh slid into rhythm the table didn't exist."*

In this content, the breakfast table becomes the center of desire and pleasure for both the male and also female. The act of projecting pleasure and lust using the breakfast table captivate the desire runs through males. It also shows their dominance in the way they carried out the dangerous act. The male in the story could have just use their bedroom or the Viji's room if they were to sexually involve. Instead the male seek pleasure by using the breakfast table in the middle of the house, in the open space that anyone could caught them to fulfill their desire. It not only shows the power the male possessed, it shows the strong hold of erotic desire of the male. (Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996)

Moving on, 'The Rock Melon' also experienced an objectification through a male gaze, which is both disempowering and empowering. As discussed above, Mulvey argues that the gaze is male and the object of this gaze is the woman. This position is supported by John Berger in his book *Ways of Seeing* (1974): "Women are depicted in a quite different way from men – not because the feminine is different from the masculine – but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him" (Berger 64). Berger argues that the male gaze is active and dynamic while it also controls and desires women (Irene Visser 282).

The male in the story, sees the female as an object of lust when he describe his wife, *"I think of the rock melon I mentioned earlier. She was carved out of nature in that way, solid and filled with sap, the dusky, outer peel needing no further exploration to tell me that the pulp and juices were intact, inside."* He could have simply described his wife as an innocent and pure female instead of giving her an erotic image from his description. The text shows proves that, a female is being objectify of nature with something far more exaggerating that leave a huge impact and imagination for the audience.

Take for instead the text, *"She has a husky, caressing voice that touches you in unexpected places, like money."* In these lines, the male view a female as something as powerful and destructive as money. There are many contradictions in the bible regarding money. One saying is, "money is the root of all evil". However another says "Wine maketh merry but money answereth all things". Therefore, in religious terms it can be regarded as a gift from God or a servant of the devil. Hypocrisy is one of the main characteristics of money's influence and I believe K.S.Maniam done well in portraying a female as both tempting and dangerous that always be wanted by anyone with unseen danger.

Moreover, in accordance with Mulvey's ideas, Viji, the female protagonist is the object of fetishisation in "The Rock Melon" and "The Loved Flaw". Mulvey define fetishism from her *Fetishism and Curiosity*, as "fetishism is born out of a refusal to see, a refusal to accept the difference the female body represents for the male. These complex series of turnings away, of covering over, not of the eyes but of understanding, of fixating on a substitute object to hold the gaze, leave the female body as an enigma and threat, condemned to return as a symbol of anxiety while simultaneously being transformed into its own screen in representation." (Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996)

Throughout the story, Viji's image is build up in relation to sexuality and attraction towards male. Viji's character has been developed as the 'assertive style' of the

heterosexual woman, always tempting and inviting masculine consumption. The desire or drive propelling the narrative is partly a fear of her sexually dangerous nature, which cannot be contained and hence is a threat; but there is also a desire to know about her and to solve the riddle of her femininity. The writer conquered this idea in between lines such as *"She thinks she can own me. I know how her mind works."* and *"She says only I can read her mind. That's the only consolation in the whole mess I've made of my life. I know she can't go beyond the limits I set for her."* (K.S.Maniam, 1994)

These lines deliberately showed the mindset of the male who knew and understand the plan worked by the female. Even though he is aware of the initial trap, he still continues his activity to test the female capability in the story. The male is also well aware of his strong hold and the power wield by him in the line, *"She will wait for the night to come to me."* The male in the story shows confident and power in himself and belief he could overpower the female with it.

Further, I will discuss the second concept of Mulvey's theory about how a female looked at herself. A consequence of the dominant male gaze, Berger argues, is that women's self-perception is refracted through a male gaze: "The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight" (Berger 47).

Adding on based on my reading, I also could find the use of 'feminized masculinity' in the story "The Loved Flaw" by K.S.Maniam that shows us the same story from female perspective. A complication to the problematic "feminized masculinity" is the "masculine" female, or the women in Victorian literature who also use elements of the male gaze to attempt to dominate or, adversely, who desire to be gazed at because they understand the power of the gaze, and find strength in their role as a desired object by realizing that the male role of dominance is only effective with their subjugation.

The female in the story is aware of her power on the male and utilize it to fulfill her desire and wants through it. In the line, *"I know how his mind works. Always keeping women separate, lives separate. That's the way the system works. Good system. It works for him. It works for me."* In this line, as a reader we could understand that, Viji is well aware of her attitude and the effect it had on the male. She even acknowledged her hold on the male because it benefits her as much as it benefits him. The lines proof that she is utilizing her power, the hold she had on the male desire to trap him in her plan.

*"A young man working in a nearby port, used to come to the house. He had his eye on me from the first time he came, half-tipsy. I'd just come out from the bathroom, after washing some clothes. A leg and some bit of thighs were on show. Chandran, that was his name, noticed the signals. It was carefully thought out by me. He came alone to the house on some excuse. I allowed him to touch me, a bachelor's life may do strange things to head."* (K.S.Maniam, 1994)

Another line that proofs the power of Viji's knowledge about her asserts which refers to her body. From reading, Viji is from an Indian culture background which forbids female to expose themselves to society especially to eye of males. She is very aware of the effect and consequence of displaying her body in front of another male. As in lines, she is trying to tempt the man, Chandran with her body to identify the effect it had on a male. By showcasing her body, she attracts attention that she is so eager about and she succeeds in her plan when the male give in into his desire and approached her with excuse to touch her. It is a clear that she is dominant who utilize the power of gaze.

At last but not least, I will also discuss about the final concept of male gaze about how a female looks at another female with male gaze. Mulvey also believes that in order to enjoy a film as a woman, or any gender other than male, we must learn to identify with the male protagonist. At the core of the male gaze theory is the idea of a power relation

created in the social order in which one individual is dominated by another through visual culture even from the same sex. This situation usually trigger readers to be aware of the struggle and battle take place within the women's mind for authority and power.

K.S.Maniam shows the male gaze through the character of Viji and her sister. Viji's sister, who is lawfully the wife of the male in the story, attempt to keep Viji within the space that been provided to her. From the line, ""they are not your things," my wife said, "that's why you break them"", we can clearly understand that Viji's sister remind Viji that she is not the resident of the house, in fact she is just an intruder. In this scene, Viji's sister try to show her authority as the head female of the house and her power over Viji who is younger and no one compare to her.

Apart from that, Viji also reflect male scopophilia through her action to seek power and authority. In line, "This is your house as well as mine" Viji claim the right to be called equal as her sister even though she couldn't because she is no one with position in the household. Viji might be considered feminine masculine protagonist expressing fetishisation on her sister through her gaze is not by desire but by jealousy and anger. Viji was at first content with her life and its flow. However, as time pass, she wanted recognition and authority within the household that make her keep coming for more. (Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996)

Viji even started to frame her sister, who took her in and provide her a place to stay and consider her as part of family after her failed marriage. She complain and accuse her sister for treating her like slave and even create story that no one is invited to the house because she despite everyone expect for her own family. The line, "what have you done to Viji? My mother in law asked in hollow voice between sobs", proof the strong character of Viji who influence the relations around her to believe in the story she told them. Viji made her sister villain because of her own jealousy and desire to more than she could.

In conclusion, K.S.Manian successfully conceptualized Mulvey's male gaze through his story 'The Rock Melon' and 'The Loved Flaw'. The demand and struggle of desire and power is overwhelming in the story that might bring forth different opinion from different readers based on their understanding of the background of the story and concepts.

### **Conclusion**

In nutshell, I believe that K.S.Maniam did a great job in conceptualizing Mulvey's Male gaze in his story "The Rock Melon" and "The Loved Flaw". The representation of male view, female body and female characters in the story is through the masculine gaze which belongs to male. So, the consumer is placed within a conflicting visual framework. Male gaze theory is constructed with the idea of pleasure in viewing with objectification occurring in order to uphold dominant with in social order of patriarchy which gives one gender the power rather than both. I believe from my reading I understand that, identifying the 'male character' of the story is important in order to understand the theory better and a female also can be the 'male' in the story.

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