

## **Literary Analysis of Women Oppression as reflected in O.K. Matsepe's *Kgorong ya Mošate: A Traditional Criticism***

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the oppression of women as observed in the Northern Sotho novel, *Kgorong ya Mošate* (1962). Though less scholarly writing has been done on the subject of women abuse, it has been reflected in the majority of Northern Sotho literary works. Northern Sotho authors, like global authors, are mirrored and shaped by the society in which they live. As a result, women's abuse is regarded as a societal problem. Women have always been and continue to be maltreated in most of the communities. Many African cultures and societies are patriarchal in their nature. That is to say, a society dominated by men resulting in the maltreatment of women has started in the days of yore. Therefore, authors as 'sensitive points' in their societies, have no viable option to deviate from this phenomenon in their literary works. Underpinned by a Traditional Criticism perspective, this article employs a qualitative research approach to enable a literary analysis of how women have traditionally been marginalised. Data that were collected from a deep reading of the purposively selected novel were textually analysed. This article contributes to the existing knowledge in such a way that it concludes by demonstrating how modern women resist abuse in comparison to those found in Matsepe's traditional narratives.

**Keywords:** Women Abuse, Society, Traditional Marginalisation, Patriarchal Society, Literature, Modern Women.

### **Introduction and Background**

Women have always been mistreated in the majority of communities. Their mistreatment consists of being treated in a variety of unfavourable ways. For instance, in some communities, they are regarded as a working source, whereas in others, they are regarded as a source of bearing children. However, it should be noted at this point that the purpose of this article is not to glorify such abuses, but rather endeavours to dispel such fallacy. The main purpose of this paper is rather to examine the Northern Sotho traditional novel *Kgorong ya Mošate* (1962), which reflects the dejection of women in traditional societies. The title of the book (Matsepe's *Kgorong ya Mošate*) already excludes the interests of women. The place, '*kgorong*', belongs to men only. A woman is not allowed to set her foot there. No wonder Matsepe sounds very obstinate in these words: *Mosadi ga gagwe ke ka lapeng, monna ga gagwe ke kua kgorong* (Matsepe, 1962:151).

'A woman belongs to the house; a man belongs to the *kgoro* (loosely meeting place)'.

Equivalently, Mothiba (2014:25) asserts that culturally a woman could not have independent thoughts, and she could appreciate it. To mitigate this viewpoint, women's thoughts were influenced by their husbands'. Mothiba's opinion is better supported by King James Bible, which has the following to say about women:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

Except in the context of a church, it has always been African tradition not to allow women to express themselves during traditional assembly. In many cases, their voices were suppressed. Their thinking was consciously avoided. Ademiluka (2018:351) adds that women play an insignificant role in African traditional community governance. Women's abuse can thus be traced back to this point. This is further emphasised by Masenya (2021:1) who submits, "Patriarchal history, though has taught female human beings that their individuality is almost always part of a collective with its legitimization of patriarchy."

Matsepe's view of women in this case is, of course, not one of dispiriting them. His aim was simply to reflect how his society treats women. Since his society has traditionally abused women, his characters are depicted in a way that reflects those attributes. Matsepe's entire body of work, like that of other historic literary writers, depicts the lives of his people and society. In support of this, Mogale (1998:79) notes that in their works, productive and established authors like O.K. Matsepe and E.M. Ramaila "portrayed women who complacently continued to fulfil the roles expected of them by their society and to accept the superiority of men". It is evident in this paper that women abuse is seemingly a phenomenon of yore undergounded by African traditional society and her culture. This is perhaps a comprehensible reason why Rafapa (2018) describes O.K. Matsepe as

“*dikwi tša setšhaba*” — that is, a sensitive point of the nation. It is simply because he (Matsepe) airs the realities of his society through writing. He thus serves as the product of his people.

**Some views on abuse**

Although there may be various types of abuse, they will not all be defined in relation to the nature of this work. Abuse is a broad term with many connotations. It has a lot to do with psychological attachment. Treating someone in a way that affects their psychological behaviour is regarded as abuse. According to Kelly (2004:385), psychological abuse is associated with an increased vulnerability to a variety of clinical issues. Kelly (ibid) reveals the consequences of psychological abuse. No wonder, in Matsepe's most narratives, we meet women who have health problems as a result of psychological abuse.

Mashao (2004:2) writes about various types of abuse, stating that they are societal ills rooted in historical tradition. Mashao places considerable emphasis on society and tradition. Abuse and society are thus inextricably linked, as they can never be separated. In terms of historical tradition, Mashao believes that abuse has been passed down from generation to generation.

Physical abuse is one of the most prevalent types of abuse. Mabletja (2013:19-20) provides an explanation for the beating with fists, a stick, a stone, or any other harm that may cause injury in order to serve as evidence in court. This type of abuse has always existed in traditional societies, though women were hesitant to report it to the kings. It is worth noting that, unlike in the past, women who are subjected to such abuse are now beginning to report them.

Mabletja (2013:26) goes on to discuss emotional abuse. She asserts that it includes intolerable words, insults, bad-mouthing, and starring, all of which cause one to devalue oneself. It is the most dangerous type of abuse because it affects the victim's mental state. It usually leads to an underestimation of oneself.

Mphiko (2016:6) recognises that women may face multiple oppressions, including racism, patriarchy, and capitalism. Since men are the only ones who dominate society in *Kgorong ya Mošate*, patriarchy is the focus and interest in this study. Patriarchy is defined as a situation in which women are considered "morally, intellectually, and physically inferior to men." (Ademiluka, 2018:341).

**Research Methodology**

Underpinned by a Traditional Criticism perspective, the article employed a qualitative research approach to enable a literary analysis of how women were traditionally marginalised. Traditional literary criticism is male-centred and considers women as inferior. A qualitative approach was thus employed to understand the rationale behind the traditional marginalisation of women. As Nieuwenhuis (2016:53) puts it, the heart of qualitative research lies in the extraction of meaning from data.

Out of Matsepe's nine novels, *Kgorong ya Mošate* was purposively selected in this research due to its relevancy to the topic under discussion. Though it is acknowledged that all of Matsepe's novels reflect women's oppression, a single novel was sampled because the nature of this study did not allow for discussion of nine novels. Textual analysis was performed on data collected through the document review method.

**Textual Analysis of Women Abuse in *Kgorong ya Mošate*(1962)**

O.K. Matsepe, like many other historic African authors, has written extensively about women abuse in his novels. As previously stated, women abuse has been prevalent in historical communities. Matsepe, as a historical writer from a traditional society, had no choice but to write about women abuse. His writings were informed, even influenced to some extent, by the society in which he lived. In light of this viewpoint, Mothiba (2014:94) adds that because a writer is a human being, he writes about people who live similarly to him. As a result, Matsepe's philosophical works are influenced by African traditions.

According to Ramushu and Mphahlele (1988:67), a bride should be taught that her mother-in-law and husband are the most respected people in her life. In this regard, Matsepe introduces an abusive man named Lekoloboto. Lekoloboto firstly beats wife because she has beaten his mother while he was away. Upon his arrival, his younger child tells him that the grandmother was crying. Through Tamoga's mouth, Matsepe narrates:

*Mokgekolo yola ke ge a di hlohlora ka moka, mme ke ge Lekoloboto a iša mosadi diatla. Moisa wa lešaeadi o ile kae banna. O ka re o itia mosadi wa mo thula ka hlogo wa mo thuma le ka matolo? Ke yona mekgwa ya go se hlalefe* (pg.70).

‘Lit. That old granny explained everything, then Lekoloboto beats the wife. Such an idiot man! How can you beat a wife by hitting her with a head and even kicking her with knees? That is immature behaviour’.

Furthermore, Lekoloboto is said to have killed his first wife as a result of adultery. Through King Letsaga's mouth, Matsepe comfortably elucidates how he killed her:

*Ee, ke nnete mošemane Lekoloboto o bolaila mosadi wa gagwe wa pele, gomme a mmolaela ditiro tša Modimo. Ba ile go nyalana, ba dula mmogo go fihlela ge Lekoloboto a thoma go tenwa ke go se bone mothwana a eba gona, phapang e thomile gona fao. Mola go bago bjalo, a thoma go lwantšha mosadi ka go mo diriša mediro ye e sa felego le go se boledišane nae ka tshwanelo, aowa, mosadi yoo a fihlola a lalela ka lepara. Seo a*

*mmolaetšego sona ke seo a se boditšwego ke mmagwe. Lekoloboto o ile a babja, mme a išwa go monna wa ngaka go yo alafiwa, ya re ge a bowa mmagwe a tla a mmotša ka mokgwa woo lapa la gagwe le šadilego le fetogile mantwaneng...* (pg.70-71).

‘Lit. Yes, it is true that the young man Lekoloboto killed his first wife as a result of God's acts. They lived together after they married until Lekoloboto became irritated because she could not have a baby. Following that, he began mistreating his wife by assigning her endless tasks and even miscommunicating with her; this woman was sjamboked every morning and evening. He killed her because of what his mother told him. When Lekoloboto became ill, he was taken to some male doctor for treatment. When he returned home, his mother informed him that his house was a play store for men...’

In the preceding narrative, there are a few instances of abuse. Lekoloboto initially despises his wife because he believes she is the cause of the family's infertility. This is perhaps best supported by Mothiba (2014:26), who states that a woman who bears children for her man is greatly admired. Lekoloboto begins mistreating his wife because she is unable to bear children. As a punishment, he assigns her to do endless and strenuous tasks that were designed for men. Similarly, Ramohlale et al. (2021:370) make the following observation:

Comparatively speaking, men did minimal work while their female counterparts were subjected to a lot of work. Further, the narrator is literary using the phrase “*mosadi yoo a fihlola a lalela ka lepara*” which simply means that the woman was beaten timeously. But a major reason why Lekoloboto killed his wife is revealed at the end of the latter narrative. The literal phrase “... *ya re ge a boa mmagwe a tla a mmotša ka mokgwa woo lapa la gagwe le šadilego le fetogile mantwaneng...*” implies that the wife was sleeping with different men while Lekoloboto was away for treatment. Since Lekoloboto is characterised as having a short temper, it is possible that he became so enraged that he killed her. It is widely held that if it is discovered that his wife has slept with another man, any man can commit any evil act. This is undoubtedly what drove Lekoloboto to murder his wife.

Another form of abuse is revealed in King Letšaga and King Thibama's deal. King Letšaga hands over his daughter to King Thibama as a present. Is it possible to give a woman as a gift? Is it morally and culturally acceptable to carry out such a heinous act? This is the epitome of abuse. When such acts are carried out, no consideration is given to the women's emotions.

Thibama begins abusing 'the present' after receiving it and having disagreements on numerous cases. Mošopšadi tells her friend the story:

*Ditaba tšona ke ditabataba, maabane ge letšatšana le le mo, ke gahlana le morwedi wa Letšaga wo a nyetšwego ke kgoši; aowa, re a dumedšana re botššana le maphelo re a feta. E ile ka lešifsana ra kwa lešata ka ga gagwe, mafelelong ra kwa mekgoši le sello sa ge a itiwa...* (pg.117).

‘Lit. News never ends: yesterday at midday, I met Letšaga's daughter, who is married to the king. We greeted each other and parted ways without any issues. We later in the evening heard noises at her house, and eventually screaming and cries when she was slapped...’

The two women further reveal to readers that it was not the first time that Thibama has beaten her. One of them says:

*Go ba gona kgoši a ka itia kgole e kaaka ruri? A ke re maloba ale le gona go thwe o mo iteile a mo raga le ka meletse.*

‘Lit. How can a king beat up such an elderly person? According to reports, he slapped and kicked her a few days ago.’

According to McGarry et al. (2011:5), the consequences of physical assault are health problems. It is at this point that we realise the slapped woman in Matsepe (1962) had a miscarriage. This is stated by a messenger who came to inform Mante of her daughter's actions. When asked if she has given birth, she responded:

*Go phuhlama o phuhlame eupša ga a tla le selo* (pg.119).

‘Lit. The truth is that she gave birth but miscarried.’

Polygamy is permitted in African culture, but it does not appear to be popular among modern women. Unlike in traditional societies, polygamous societies are now condemned. Serudu (2007:22) concurs with the latter viewpoint, stating that polygamy no longer has a place in the hearts and lives of African women. Thus, the proverb *monna ke selepe o lala a adimilwe* (Lit. a man is an axe that has been borrowed for the night) is strongly condemned by contemporary women. Through Nkabe's nameless wife, Matsepe expresses his displeasure with the possibility of polygamy. Nkabe's wife suspects him of having a concubine, so she decides not to prepare him food one day. Their conversation goes:

*Nkabe: “Mosadi, ge o sa ntirele mefago o gopotšeng?”*

*Mosadi: Anthe mmamoratwe o ile kae?*

*Nkabe: Mmamoratwe? Ke mang?*

*Mosadi: Yoo o mo seketšago ka nna. Nna nka se be wa meholo fela...”*

‘Lit. Nkabe: Wife, what are you thinking by not preparing my provision?

Wife: Where is the loved one?’

Nkabe: The loved one? Who is that?

Wife: The one you save by overworking me. I cannot only be useful when it comes to demanding tasks...'

What Nkabe's wife says is a woman's protest against polygamy. Nkabe, on the other hand, fails to defend himself in the argument. He eventually could not stand it any longer and beats his wife:

*Nkabe di ile ge di tšwela pele a betwa ke pelo a mo iša diatla, mosadi a tšhabela gagabo, ya re bosasa a išwa mošate*(pg.129).

'Lit. In the midst of argument, Nkabe filled with anger and beats her, she ran to her home and was escorted to king next morning'

It appears that Nkabe had a concubine on a real, which is why he could not bear the truth that his wife was revealing. Polygamy appears to cause spiritual abuse to women because it is practised by men by nature.

Marriage is a union of two families, that of a man and that of a woman. Some, however, see it as a form of women oppression. Masia (2016) believes that traditional marriage abuses women in such a way that women have less of a say in such marriages. One unnamed woman in *Kgorong ya Mošate* decries about the system of marriage:

*Hee, bana ba basetsana re topa tša fase gobane re fo ba tšhabo ye e bapatšwago* (pg.117).

'Hee, we girls are suffering because we are merely a product that has been advertised.'

According to an unnamed woman, marriage is systematically planned in order to sell females to other families, and she appears to be opposed to this idea. This is literary depicted through the word "*bapatšwago*", which implies that females are being advertised and later sold. The goal of advertising is to sell something. Matsepe, as a philosophical writer who grew up among old traditional women, was well aware of these women's dissatisfaction with the nature of marriage. Masenya (2021:6), a well-known feminist scholar, has differing views on the subject. She believes that *magadi*(lobola) has lost its traditional meaning and is now being used to commercialise females. Masenya goes on to say that this is why men will continue to have power in marriage. Montle (2020) shares the same sentiments by stating that *lobola* is one of the main perpetrators of women abuse. This phenomenon is central to this paper as alluded in discussions.

## Conclusion

This article discussed the placement of women in the traditional societies with special reference to O.K. Matsepe's *Kgorong ya Mošate*. Women abuse is a traditional custom, as noted and learned from this literary selected text. It is once again saddened to note that these abuses are still prevalent in our present life. Men like Lekoloboto, who kill their wives for infidelity, still exist. The slapping of women in families is always reported. Women are still being insulted and yelled at in their homes. Women today, however, have taken a notable action against all types of abuses by reporting evildoers to law enforcement agencies, in contrast to the past, when women were hesitant to report them to their rulers.

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