

MATA HARI—AN INDEPENDENT WOMAN IN PAULO COELHO'S *THE SPY*

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Abstract

This paper aims to concentrate on the struggle of an independent woman Mata Hari whose real name was Margaretha Gertrude Zelle and her ultimate end to a death sentence. The paper endeavors to inaugurate Mata Hari as an independent woman who passes through complications throughout her life in the novel. The inquiry focuses on different phases of Mata Hari's oppressions—sexual assault, domestic violence, powerlessness, harassment and her victimization in the wartime. The novel portrays the story of the encounter of the historical figure Mata Hari who became famous as glamorous dancer during the First World War. This lady was accused of being double espionage of Germany and France and finally found guilty by the judicial system of France and sentenced to death at fire squad shoot. However, it is a qualitative research where Paulo Coelho's *The Spy* is used as a primary source. Besides, the library resources along with the web materials have been used as the secondary source. The research paper investigates the life of Mata Hari to establish her as a symbol of independent woman from the feminist perspective in the novel.

Keywords: Mata Hari, independent, woman, struggle, espionage and death.

1. Introduction

Independency is the natural way that every human being wants to enjoy but some are very unfortunate to consume the taste of independency as the surroundings cannot tolerate it and accuses them to death sentence for being independent. An independent woman is a confident self-motivated woman who takes responsibility for her actions and never blames the rest of the world for her mistakes or her downfalls. Her pride doesn't get in the way if she ever needs

a helping hand. A woman, who is stubborn, rude, lonely and always saying that she is an independent woman, need to stop lying to herself and the people around her.

Various researches based on feminist perspective have been conducted research over *The Spy* by Paulo Coelho yet there is no direct indication of the struggle of an independent woman Mata Hari in the research articles of them. The writing of scholars never highlights her strong mentality, desire for fame and fighting spirit that makes her a combating independent woman in the novel. Raihan (2018) focuses on the delineation of women's oppression and recognizes the indicator of women's oppression. Giftsy Dorcas E. and Dr. Raichel M Sylus (2018) depicts the adolescent phase of the central characters highlighting the traits exhibited by women in their adolescent to describe the physical, psychological, cognitive and social developments in that period. The protagonist of the novel *The Spy*, Mata Hari, gets a little focus in that writing, only her adolescent period gets attention despite her fighting for independency for the life time. Dewi Rahayu, Ni Made Widisanti S. and Tetty Yukesti (2019) opines that female masculinity is described in the Main character is considered hegemonic masculinity, that is, the kind of masculinity formed through behavior, personal experience and cultural processes. Tjepkema, E. G depicts (2016) the four ways in which Mata Hari is represented in various media (research, literature, newspaper, movies and images) in the period 1880 till now, which shows the characterization she received in the media in the Netherlands and how this is connected to her representation within the national and regional canonical historical overviews. All the scholars focus on the protagonist Mata Hari about the oppression of her life in different phases but they sharply surpass her long cherished dream of becoming an independent woman that even leads her life to engender to eventual death.

2. Suppression of Mata Hari

Mata Hari is the name of a woman who dreams to lead her life in an unconventional way defying all institutions but ultimately accepts defeat with the charge of espionage. Actually the novel depicts the story of the encounter of Mata Hari whose real name was Margaretha Gertrude Zelle. We come to know about the First World War as the epilogue, the book shows a report of encounter of Mata Hari with the charge of espionage dated October 15, 1917. Mata Hari pays her life in struggling to achieve independency to become unconventional in the then society. She even knows it clearly what will happen to her indeed for being a free bird to become the queen of her own mind to take the responsibility of her own defying the world. She anticipates what can happen to her in farce trial which was going against her by the head of counter espionage Captain Ladoux. She utters –

“Unfortunately, I have no one else in whom to confide. We all know I won't be killed because of this stupid allegation of espionage, but because I decided to be who I always dreamed. And the price of a dream is always high (73).”

The life of Mata Hari can be divided in different phases which are full of struggle of an unconventional woman who dreams a free and independent life throughout the novel.

3. Her journey towards complexities and freedom

An ambitious woman like Mata Hari starts her journey towards independency at the very early stage of her life by changing her real name Margaretha Zelle to Mata Hari. The name Margaretha Zelle was given by her family- a traditional name given to most of the Dutch girls at that time. But she was not happy with that name as it was the name of a respected actress. Mata Hari says-“Margaretha- Margaretha Zelle- was my name, and I detested it. Countless girls had given the name Margaretha because of a famous and well-respected actress (18).”This confession of Mata Hari invariably asserts her desire to establish her recognition by her own effort rather than to become common as most of the girls of her time who were given the name Margaretha. Rather she wants to make her own identity in this world by her endeavor as she cherishes a dream of becoming an independent woman with her own name given by herself. The long cherished dream comes true when an official asks her name in France. She answers “Mata Hari”(44)- a name with the identity of her freedom. This incident for the first time brings confidence in her to consume the taste of freedom what she dreams that will happen someday and the moment comes to her life maidenly to give her own recognition towards independency.

3.1 Her atrocious adolescent

With a great zeal Mata Hari at her adolescent attends a new school to obtain the class of an independent woman by studying there in her upcoming days. But the school experience of Mata Hari is the bitterest experience of her life as she was raped by the ephrophile school principal who rapes most of the teenager girls in the school. That is why she asserts-“All the men I’ve known have given me joy, jewelry, or a place in society, and I’ve never regretted knowing them --- all except the first, the school principal, who raped me when I was sixteen (20).”This brutal incident to Mata Hari was a great shock to her what makes her afraid of telling the truth and breaks her long cherished dream of becoming an independent woman in the society and sex becomes mechanical to her as she says-“From that experience, I began to associate sex with something mechanical, something that had nothing to do with love (21).” Such a brutal experience of Mata Hari destroys the tender mind of her at her adolescent and somehow drives her to the darkness of fear to tell the truth. And the heavenly pleasure of sex becomes mechanical to her as she was being raped at tender days and that gives her the mechanical experience of sex which is fully void of love and affection that continues to the rest of her life. But ultimately nothing can stop her to fulfill her passion of becoming an independent woman and she carries the passion throughout her fighting against the brutal society which gives irremovable heinous mark on her mind.

3.2 Her futile married life

After the bitter experience of getting raped, Mata Hari changes her mind and marries a Dutch army officer named Rudolf MacLeod who was engaged in Indonesia. She takes the decision by herself and her family members do not oppose the decision. She firmly decides to transform herself to an ordinary woman to become a good wife, good mother by burying her long cherished dream of becoming an independent woman. But this marriage is also a futile as she gets an alcoholic husband who never respects woman as a human being where she was frequently insulted by her husband in various ways disregarding place, class, ranks etc. Besides, there is hardly any way of getting rid of that brutal relation and she becomes the mother of two children. She loses her son and the brutality gets picked and the situation becomes worse as Andreas's wife commits suicide. This incident changes her mind rapidly to decide to fulfill her dream of becoming an independent woman with a new identity. She herself confesses- "I had been baptized with the blood of Andreas's wife and, through that rite, I was freed forever, though neither of us knew how far this freedom would reach (36)." On a sudden she leaves all her past in Indonesia and starts a new journey towards her freedom to Paris in France. Actually in her married life she never got any attention from her aged husband rather than insult and cruelty, she was just dying in insecurity of life. And finally the suicide of Andreas's wife shakes her up and reminds her to the independent life what she always desires to have but never got. Now she is ready to untie all the bindings, leaving behind all the past, all the cruelty by her husband she tolerated to move toward her most desired city, Paris, to commence a new life-an independent life.

3.3 Her passion for independency

Mata Hari's new life begins in Paris to become an independent woman in true sense and changes her name to Mata Hari to start her new life as an exotic dancer. She asserts- After all, Paris was always my preferred destination (41). To her Paris is the place where she can make her dreams fulfill and this place is the most preferred to her to lead a life of a free bird. She continues dance performances to get herself established. Gradually she becomes familiar with the influential figures like politicians, army officers, and artists of that time and starts sharing bed with them. She is conscious about her beauty and uses that as she had no other weapon to use to taste the independency she yearns for years. She now knows what man wants and uses her physic to obtain whatever she desires to have in her life to become a free bird and this becomes the most discussed topic regardless of men and women. As she says- "All my life I've thought and acted like Mata Hari, the woman who has been and always will be the fascination of men and the envy of women (57)." She is highly concern of her own beauty and uses it to become famous and knows it quite well that even the women that society is highly jealous of her beauty. But she had no alternative to consume independency rendering her physic and she does it by defying all the conventional believes-unknowing that will lead her to great threat.

3.4 The taste of fame

Mata Hari gradually earns everything she wants to lead her life money, name, fame, property etc. but surprisingly she realizes that still she is not fully free and becomes an object in

the hand of dominant male figures of that time. But she is not a woman to easily give up rather she will strive to achieve her independency by any means. She asserts- "Money was not enough. I wanted more (58)!" To pursue that journey of independency some women help her in her early days to overcome her struggling days that leads her to obtain fame in future and she explicitly acknowledges that by saying- "But women are able to understand one another without exchanging a word (68)." The situation never remains the same as what we see and assume to happen. Time changes accordingly and Mata Hari has to pay for her dream of indecency in the male dominated society and she pays her life for becoming independent. She says-

"It's because I dream of being accepted and respected, though I don't owe anything to anyone. Why do I need that? I waste my time on worries, regrets, and darkness- a darkness that only enslaves me, chaining me to a rock where I'm served as food for birds of prey, a rock that I can no longer leave (80)."

Here comes her agony that shows how much she endeavors to become a free and independent woman but the society never allows being so and makes her only an object to be oppressed by them. It is freedom what she desires to obtain throughout her life but fails each and every time. The society always reminds her that she is nothing else than a piece of meat in dining table which one is very lucrative to look at but will be thrown away after the consumption. But she fights against these beliefs strongly to establish her independency in the society knowing what will happen to next. She is a true fighting lady who tries her best to secure her freedom defying all the established institutions.

4. Demise of a free bird

In the World War I, everything changes accordingly but she continues her journey in different places of Europe and is somehow bound to make connection with both power France and Germany. But in reality she was in the side of France to help France as she was free to travel even in wartime. Unfortunately she is accused of double spy by France without having sufficient proves and the trial of Mata Hari continues where she utterly repeats- "A prostitute, yes. A spy never (111)!" But nobody believes her as she dares to become an independent woman to lead her life accordingly to her will. The then authority never tolerates that and falsely accuses her and continues her trial to punish her of becoming a free bird in the name of espionage. Actually she never gets the justice anywhere; even loses her identity who she is? Mata Hari wants to know-

"Be who I am? How could I be true to myself if I didn't even know exactly who I was? The dancer who took Europe by storm? The housewife who humiliated herself in the Dutch East Indies? The lover of powerful men? The woman the press called a "vulgar artist," despite, just a short time before, admiring and idolizing her (113)?"

The answer is unknown and nobody tries to reply in favor of a prostitute and even denies her recognition as a human being rather accuses her of denying the society to be a free woman. Consequently her farce trial continues and she is accused of espionage by the court and sentences her death. Mata Hari's lawyer and lover Mr. Clumet in his later says about the counter espionage Captain Ladoux- "A man like that, dear Mata Hari, is like a bloodied beast who seeks revenge instead of justice (165)." Every effort made by the lawyer goes in vain, he only witnesses the farce trial of an innocent woman who is accused of espionage falsely and gets the punishment of death. He knows well Mata Hari's only crime was being an independent woman in a society where this tendency is strictly prohibited and that's why he wishes-"Perhaps one day history might also do justice to you, though I doubt it (173)." What Mata Hari dreams is to be a free and independent woman but she is adversely deprived of it pays her life to obtain it.

5. Conclusion

In *The Spy*, Coelho represents the historical figure of Mata Hari and her journey in the adverse situations in the patriarchal society. He firmly asserts that the way for a woman to achieve liberation and happiness in the traditional world is not very easy one. Nevertheless, a women's desire to achieve freedom in a society of conventional patriarchic phenomenon sometimes endangers her life to the death risk. And it is sharply akin to Mata Hari's life struggle and her ultimate death. Moreover, Mata Hari's struggle makes it obvious that a woman's choice of independency defying the prejudiced institutions and beliefs of patriarchy brings a perilous suffering to her that can even snatch away her life. Therefore, it is obvious that Mata Hari gets the punishment due to her strong desire of being an independent woman who struggles and defies the traditional value of the patriarchal society in the novel.

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