

# Cultured Experience: Resonating Identity Struggle

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 1

Month: October

Year: 2025

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

Nancy, Marie Antoinette, G. (2025). Cultured Experience: Resonating Identity Struggle. *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, 13(S1), 169–173.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v13iS1-Oct.9871>

**Dr. G. Marie Antoinette Nancy**

*Assistant Professor (STC), Department of English, BGCW*

## Abstract

*Gender inequality, a battle constantly fought world-wide from the past to the present times, is a trap, from which women are unable to wade their way completely. The main reason behind this trap being the tension that prevails between the so-called tradition/ culture and assertion of the selfhood. The Culture Trap, a collection of poems by Vidhi Bubna is an exploration of the experiences of women in the Marwari community in Rajasthan. Bubna visits Marwari women's homes to explore her heritage. However, her visits establish her more as a voice echoing the cultural trap of the 200 Marwari women who have shared their lived experiences. As we read the wide range of poems, we understand how cultural expectations and patriarchal norms go hand-in-hand in suppressing the array of emotions that women radiate. While some poems speak of the varied scars, some speak frankly of hopes and desires, and a few on contempt and acts of rebellion. Bubna rightly highlights the reality of the state through her courageous poetic rendition on aspects such as sexual violence, domestic abuse, female infanticide, marital rape, child marriage, gay relationships, transwoman experience etc. This paper will take up a few poems (the poems do not have a title) for study considering cultural studies theory proposed by the theorist Gramsci in seeing how culture is most often equated to a system of control and conformity; but that women need to break their silence and be out of the trap to survive and assert themselves.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Trap, Lived Experiences, Marwari Women, Poetry

The book taken up for study is a collection of poems. Poetry as we know is a powerful weapon to express one's emotions and especially an excellent medium for women who are shaped by cultural restrictions to voice out their unspoken emotions in an implicit way. By expressing themselves through poetry writing, women thus find courage, empowerment, a chance to resist and find the entire process therapeutic.

The poems taken up for study in this paper will deal with gender and chance of existence, gender and honour, women forgetting the assertion of self being caught in tradition, patriarchal normalization of male violence towards female, women conditioned culturally, women and internalized oppression, assertion of self against cultural hegemony, resistance against patriarchal culture and financial dependence.

Gender studies, Cultural studies and Feminist theories are all linked to each other in that they all deal with shaping of identities, the role of power and how social structures are framed by the Patriarchal society. Put together, these theories help to understand the cultural and structural forces that shape gendered lives and acts as a powerful tool to study how society works. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler have talked about gender as a cultural construct; Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, Bell Hooks, Gayatri Spivak have focussed on power discourse and oppression in terms of gender, body, media, race and class, history etc.

While many a times, the poems expose how women are made to devoutly carry out their roles as daughters, mothers, wives, sister, considering their performances as natural way of life, we also find women murmuring in silence, because otherwise it would look deviant from the cultural norm. This is what the famous Cultural theorist Gramsci points out that hegemony is all powerful because it looks and feels so natural. But Gramsci also talks of Resistance – as to how culture can be contested by self-awareness.

Let us analyse a few poems considering Cultural studies especially the theory of Cultural hegemony framed by Antonio Gramsci. We can understand that the one who rules (the male) plays with power in such a way that it does not look like power politics by force but by making the ‘Other’(female) feel it as ‘common sense’. By creating this sense of consent in the ‘Other’ and making them internalize the dominant ideology unconsciously, patriarchy wins laying the trap for the ‘Other’.

### Analysis

ma says to console me  
atleast he did not hit you  
until now  
despite you raising your voice  
if it were my brother  
he would have slapped me  
you should be grateful  
your brother respects you (CT :4)

These disturbing lines expose how patriarchy has made the women trapped in culture to feel that brutality and aggressiveness by male towards the female is normal and bound to happen without any intervention. In these lines we can see how the mother has internalized patriarchal norms so well that she tells her daughter that thank goodness the brother tolerated her and has showed mercy towards her by not hitting her unlike her brother who would have slapped her and pushed her to the streets. The mother is happy that violence is not meted out to the daughter by the son despite seeing her sobbing after an argument between the two. The mother fails to realize that words can also hurt, hurt internally though not seen externally. To the mother, the degree to which the son has spared the daughter from physical violence is what counts, since she has been taught to internalize that hurt caused by words is indeed a way to be disciplined, which is yet again a patriarchal mechanism.

These lines uncover the hidden reality, as Gramsci rightly points out that culture constructs and makes seem the power relationship between man and woman natural.

i am ten  
my mother tells me a brutal story  
about how her mother  
was going to kill her at birth  
because she was a girl child  
and they did not need any more  
you are lucky  
she says  
like staying alive  
naturally  
after being born  
is not a basic human right (CT: 34)

Gender bias is a non-stop patriarchal existent. Bias is felt by women in almost all spheres of life. But survival, the very act of being born into this world seems to be biased. The statement made by the mother in this poem that the daughter is ‘lucky’ that she is alive despite being born a girl, shocks the readers that does

survival and being born into this world despite being a girl is a great privilege. The basic right for a child in the womb to come out into this world is decided by the dominant one in the gender dynamics and terms the woman as the ‘other’ as if the female gender is an alien in this world. The beginning lines with the word ‘brutal’ kindles emotions of suffering and sympathy in us as the mother recounts how biased her mother itself was/ inherently trained so, and therefore decided to kill her at birth; but at the same time when she tells her daughter that she is lucky enough to have survived, we are inquisitive to question if the mother too like the grandmother was brutal and accepted injustice in the form of gender-bias as normalized behaviour.

These lines show how culture makes women to internalize the concept of gender bias as a normal standard way of life, and further exposes how such psychological oppression is enacted by a woman of one generation on another without an iota of guilt, since she is conditioned so by the patriarchal society.

I still don’t understand  
why my brother’s success  
is celebrated  
and encouraged  
while mine is  
looked down upon (CT:78)

Culture frames men as hard-workers and therefore gets them the name breadwinner of the family. The success of the family depends on the success of the man and therefore the men in the family are celebrated and given preference. This is precisely the scenario in the poem from which the above lines are taken. The girl in the poem complains and cries her heart out that when her brother’s success is celebrated why not hers? Power politics is enacted even within closely connected bonds. A family is supposed to be a place which nurtures and encourages children of either gender alike, but here we find that the girl feels that she is an unworthy entity. Success is celebrated based on gender.

These lines awaken the readers that even family is a hegemonic site and that patriarchal values silently take upper hand even in simple practices such as celebrating one’s labour and success.

i am eleven  
my great grandmother  
gave birth to exactly  
the same number of children  
eleven  
each girl child  
a greater burden than  
the previous one  
my grandfather was loved  
the most  
because he restored  
her honour  
as a woman  
in the family (CT:136)

Patriarchal society most often equates woman’s honour with family’s honour, silencing individual female identity/honour. The lines show how a woman’s identity is defined and validated by man. Man is seen as one who is in authority and bearing a male in a female womb makes others feel it as building the family’s reputation. The woman doesn’t seem to gain any value for the very act of child-bearing but because she bears a male, it seems to increase her value in the family and the society. While women are confined by the concept of family honour, men are looked at as figures who build the morality of the family. These lines convey the message that in the name of culture, patriarchal power frames woman identity.

i am seven  
i watch my father slap my mother  
now six months pregnant  
yes they asked the doctor the gender  
willing to drop the baby if it was a second girl (CT:140)

The child in this poem witnesses the physical violence meted out by the father towards the mother asking her not to have the baby if it's going to be a girl baby again. The father can be viewed as the decision-maker to the extent that the decision to have the child or to abort is left in his hands. He seems to control his wife's reproductive system unmindful of her reproductive desires. The child at the tender age of seven witnesses this gender-power politics wherein cultural acceptance of such gendered violence is treated as normal.

this is my life  
i am a miracle  
my life is my choice  
i can carve it into whatever i like  
paint it with my favourite colours  
mould it into my favourite shape  
compose it into an individual melody (CT: 70)

These lines are in stark contrast to the lines that we have previously analysed in that the speaker of the poem, the woman breaks through the so-called cultural constructs. She does not want to conform herself to the prevalent dominant hegemonic set-up. She claims freedom and the right to frame her destiny the way she wants and not be dictated by patriarchal ideologies. She wants to define herself. The words 'carve', 'paint', 'mould', 'compose' convey the message that the woman wants to write her own script for her life. The woman of this poem says that 'she is a miracle' because she has awoken/risen from her oppressed state to a self-creating state, wanting to perform as an individual liberated from all social and cultural ties.

i think  
my mother  
grandmother  
sister  
best friend  
and many other women  
would have  
significantly different lives  
if they were  
financially independent (CT: 97)

Cultural norms and Patriarchal ideologies have survived immensely in our society due to women's dependence on men for money to satisfy even their basic needs. Lack of economic independence is in fact a strategy played upon women by men quite often restricting the role of the 'other' to mother who is supposedly to keep the hearth burning. But the woman of this poem has come to realization that women too can be providers, that they can earn and be independent unlike the previous generations of women in her circle had been. The woman of this poem equates financial independence to cultural independence.

Having analysed these poems, makes us understand that in the name of culture women are indeed put in a trap, a cage, yet women are also trying to break free from this confinement, in Gramsci's words becoming anti-hegemonic, resisting and most importantly redefining themselves specially through such things as speech (as do the Marwari women in these poems), education and financial independence. In all, let patriarchy understand that the 'Angel in the House' can be 'The New Woman' too.

## **Works Cited**

### **Primary Source**

1. Bubna, Vidhi. *The Culture Trap (CT)*. India: Om Books International, 2024. Print.

### **Secondary Source**

2. “Gramsci on Hegemony: The Politics of Power and Consent”. [www.spcmc.ac.in](http://www.spcmc.ac.in)
3. “The Female Voice through Poetry”. [www.glasgowuniversitymagazine.co.uk](http://www.glasgowuniversitymagazine.co.uk)
4. “Feminist listening and becoming : voice poems as a method of working with young women’s stories of domestic abuse in childhood”. *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol.24. No.1, 2022, pp:56-71