

Compare 'a stench of kerosene' and 'the withered arm' essay



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The two stories 'The Withered Arm' and 'Stench of Kerosene' is set in different cultures and at different times which have some similarities. 'Withered Arm' was written by a man called Thomas Hardy in 1888, and is set in Wessex, England. While 'Stench of Kerosene' was written nearly 100 years later in the 1950s by a woman called Amrita Pritam, which is set in rural India. The setting of the both stories took place in a simple farming village community. The culture and social context of 'Stench of Kerosene' is very similar to 'Withered Arm'.

Although it happened in India, there are traditional different relationships which exist between the two sexes. Both stories look at the tragedy of damaged relationships. The story of 'Stench of Kerosene' is about a woman called Guleri, who lives with her husband Manak and her parents-in-laws, (Manak's mother is disappointed with Guleri for not having a grandchild, but she does not show Guleri that she is upset). Guleri and Manak have been married for seven years and have no children of their own, but there is a deep love between them.

Guleri's parents lived in Chamba. A few miles from her husband's village Lakarmandi which is high on ground, the road curved and descended steeply down-hill. From this point one could see Chamba lying a long way away at one's feet. Whenever Guleri was homesick she would take her husband Manak and go up to this point. This is how much she misses her parents, by seeing sight of her parents' village her heart fills with happiness. Once in every year at the time of harvest fair, Guleri is allowed to spend some time with her family and friends.

She counts the days of harvest fair every year, as it is the only time she could go home and share her happiness and sorrows with her friends who also come home for the harvest celebration. Every year Guleri's father sends a man to Lakarmandi to bring Guleri back home. But this year something is about to happen in Guleri's life, which her mother-in-law planned for a while. As a consequence of her mother-in-law's action Guleri kills herself. Just before Guleri is about to leave for Chamba, Manak asked her not to go, without elaborating any reason why he does not want her to go.

Guleri stubbornly (childishly) asked Manak ? if your mother is not stopping me then why are you?. Manak did not reply Guleri back. Guleri then took her leave from her parents-in-law. They pattered her head and blessed her. The moment Guleri left for Chamba, Manak's mother started to (abuse) bully him, For example she said to Manak ? why do you croak like an old woman, you are a woman why don't you cry like one?. Manak's mother was waiting for Guleri to go to Chamba for her annual visit. As this would give her the opportunity to bring the new wife home, to whom she paid 500 rupees to marry her son.

Because Manak could not say no to his mother and to the custom Manak accepted the new wife but his heart was dead within him. When Guleri heard of Manak's second marriage, she soaked her clothes in kerosene and set fire on her. When Manak heard about Guleri's death from a friend called Bhavani, he felt his own life burned out. As months pass by Manak's second wife started to complain about their relationship and said ? I am not your wife, I am just someone you happened to marry?. Soon Manak's second wife became pregnant, his mother was very pleased with her new daughter-in-law and told Manak about the good news .

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It was as if Manak did not understand what his mother told him, or he is not to the world. Soon a baby boy was born, Manak wife and his mother rejoiced with happiness, They put the baby on Manak lap. He looked at the baby for a while, All of a sudden Manak began to scream and hysterically started to say take him away. take him away, he stinks of Kerosene. While the story of ' Withered Arm' centres on two women. They are linked in so many ways that each one's life is profoundly influenced by the other. Rhoda Brook, Who Farmer Lodge had an affair with, and had a child with.

Farmer Lodge abandon Rhoda when she was pregnant with his child, and Gertude Farmer Lodge's new wife. Rhoda Brook was mere 18 when she had a relationship with Farmer Lodge, What had attracted him to her then was a tall, dark, young women with handsome dark eyes. But one who has ' milkers hand' a farmer would not marry a milkmaid. She is now a ? thin fading women of thirty ?. When she lights fire for cooking, ? the radiance lit her pale cheek, and made her dark eyes, that had once been handsome, seem handsome anew ?. These words gives readers a description of Rhoda's appearance, as if she has evil look.

Gertude Lodge is years younger then her husband Farmer Lodge, Her relationship is secure with her husband. She is different from the working girls (milkmaids). ? Her face too was fresh in colour, but it was of a totally different quality, soft and evanescent, like the light under a heap of rose-petals?. Rhoda's boy saw Gertude as a ? lady complete? , She has light hair, her face ? as comely as a live doll's? , her red mouth, and significantly, her white teeth when she smiles. Rhoda is so curious about Gertude, and finds it difficult accept her as Farmer Lodges new wife.

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She forgets that she 's got nothing to do with Farmer Lodge anymore as their relationship were well over years ago. By listening to the gossips from other milkmaids, and her son's description about Gertude's beauty. Rhoda's jealousy started to arouse by the choice of wife by the man who fathers her son. Rhoda without seeing Gertude starts to make mental images of her in her mind. The tensions of jealousy and sympathy, affection and rejection are at the heart of the story The setting of ' Stench of Keroscne' took place in a rural village of India. Where people do farming and fielding for living.

People in this community frequently meet together and being connected to each other in lot of different ways. This is because village is a small place, the same number of people live and work together. People keep meeting each other as they take on different roles and relationship to each other. People have close knit of social networks. In other word one friend knows each other as well as oneself. For example when Manak tried to avoid Bhavani the day after the fair in the field, Manak looked deliberately other way pretending he did not see Bhavani, but Bhavani came round the other side and set down in front of him.

This is how well one knows their way round the village, one can not avoid nother even if they wanted to. Everyone in the village would knows everyone's personal business, family history, and how much wealth they have. This is because for example, a persons family could be living in a community for few generation, so every one in the village would know about their good side as well as their down side. The setting of ' Withered Arm' took place in an English rural community in (Casterbridge) Dorchester.

Where people at that time believed in superstitions and conjurors (one believed to possess magical powers for healing, and spell-casting). It is not far from the border of Egdon Heath (Egdon Heath has largest tract of heath that stretches between Dorchester and Bournemouth. Parts of which can still be seen between the enlarged villages and town). The story takes place in a community, which has distinct social classes. For example in the story the milkmaids are the working class and Farmer Lodge represents the middle class.

The setting of the story took place in a dairy farm, of eighty cows, and its surrounding countryside. Where Farmer Lodge employs temporary short time milkmaids to milk the cows. Every opportunity the milkmaids get to talk to the other milkmaids as they milk the cows, they start gossiping and making comments about Farmer Lodge's new wife who they have not yet met, but only heard from others. For example they describe Farmer Lodge's his new wife as 'rosy cheeked, tisty-tosty little body, in other words she is confident about her self?.'

The reason the milkmaids talk about Farmer Lodge and his new wife is because it is a hot news of the time, As each milkmaid talk to one another, they let one another know what they knew or heard about Farmer Lodge's new wife. They then make assumptions putting everyone's ideas, thoughts and comments (point of view together) together in building an image of Farmer Lodge's new wife. Because they live in a close knit community, they live and work with each other, (they know one another well) they know anything they say to one another it would stay among their selves, and it won't go to

Farmer Lodge's ear.

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In the ' Stench of Kerosene' Guleri looks forward for her annual visit to her parents. Because this gives her and her friends who also comes home for the harvest celebration, the opportunity to wear new clothes specially made for this occasion. They would dye their dupattas with starched and sprinkled with mica to make them glisten, wear glass bangles with silver earrings. Then they would go out about in the streets together and enjoy the day. It is like a day freedom, one can do what ever please them. People from neighbouring villages will also comes and take part in the fair.

In 19th century ideas about black magic and superstition existed in England, and people used to believe that there are some illnesses caused by hatred and jealousy. For example in 'Withered Arm' Rhoda's jealousy and hatred turned into a curse for Gertrude. a spell put on Gertude). When medicine were not healing her wound. Gertrude started to believe that she has been cursed. As a result of her wound, from a happy marriage her marriage started to face the rock, her husband started to loss interest in her for couple of reasons.

Because she has a disfigured in her left limb, she could not brought him a child, and most of all he thought he would be the last of a family who has occupied the valley for some two hundred years. He then even thought about adopt Rhoda's son (after all its his own flesh of blood). Who could be his next of keen after him. She became desperate to find a way for her cure, and thought if she could find a cure, she can win her husbands heart back by regaining some of her beauty. The change in Gertude after six years of marriage are described in the following words.

The once blithe-hearted and enlightened changed into an irritable, superstitious women, whose whole time was given to experimenting upon her ailment with every quack remedy she came across Gertude then went to see Conjuror Trendle for her cure. (at that time people used to believed that conjuror's has magical powers for healing spell and witchcraft's). Gertude felt helpless and thought her wound brought all this problem between her and her husband, if her wound heals her marriage will come back to the track. She believed that the conjuror will find cure for her illness.

At that time medical science did not make so much progress as it has done today, that is why people used to consult conjurors instead of doctors.

Women at that time did not have a place in the society, For example all Gertude thought about when she has the wound was how to win Farmer's heart back, because he has gone off her, how to please him, how to look beautiful as she as before the wound. While in ' Stench of Kerosene' age played an important factor, for example Manak's mother is older then Guleri and being Manak's mother, she can control their lives and even Manak is unable to stand up to her.

In that society wife occupies a lower position than a men and his mother, and they have no right to protest, fight against her husbands decision. Both of the story has one thing in common which is to have a child. For example in ' Stench of Kerosene' Manak's mother remarried her son again, as his first wife could not have a child, while in ' withered Arm' Farmer Lodge bandon his son, when his mother Rhoda was pregnant , As years passed by when Farmer saw his new wife could not provide him with a child, he then thought about adopting his son. ho could be the next of keen o f the valley.

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In other words both stories were about having a heir to keep the family name and tittle going. A ' Stench of Kerosene' is written in plain simple English which is easy to follow and easy to understand. The story is written in a such way, as if the author was present at the time of writing, because the way author explained Guleri omesickness, and how she counts the day for the harvest fair, touches readers heart because this is how one feels anxious, if they misses their loved ones or have not seen them for awhile.

There were many clues given by the author that the story is Asian. For example the author describes monsoon clouds (which I know it only occurs in Asia). The names of the characters sounded Asian, for example Manak, Guleri and Bhavani. Also the author mentions that Guleri has a daily routine task, which was to ' fed the cattle, clean the house and cook food for her parent in-laws' (only Asian families live in a extended family tie). This sounded to me as the tradition of Asian culture.

In the second page of the story Guleri said to Manak ? f you want me go and ask my father for my hand?. Among Manak's kinsmen, it was customary to settle the bride price before the wedding' Apart from that the author uses some Hindi words for example dupatta, a shawal like cloth worn top of blouse by Indian sub - continental women's. Rupees which is the current currency of India, and Charpoy which convinced me that it is an Indian story. They also used object such as hookah, which is a pipe used for smoking tobacco and a chillam, a clay made pipe for tobacco.

Indian words such as dupatta, hookah and chillam are explained with brief description at the bottom of the page, for those readers who do not knows

the meaning of the words. There are very few difficult words, for example duly, which means correct way. Some part of the story is written in a great detail, for example Guleri's homesickness and what she does to overcome that, while they is hardly any mentioned about Guleri's relationship between her parents in- laws, which made her mother in - law to arrange a marriage for her husband Manak.

Also there is very little said about Guleri's death and the relationship between Manak and his new wife. The story rises many questions which readers like me will always wonder. For example if Manak loved his wife Guleri, why he did not tell Guleri that his mother is planning to get him married again. So she would not have gone to Chamba for her annual visits? Also why did Manak got married when his mother asked him, why didn't he stand up himself. or was it that he want it to get married and have a child and didn't care enough for his action, which as a result killed Guleri ?

The story is written in short sentences, there isn't any separate paragraphs nor any subheadings. There are some hrases used in the story which is very difficult to understand, (especially for readers like my self if I do not understand the meaning) for example when Manak said to Guleri when they met for the second time alone before they were married you are like unripe corn- full of milk. the story also gave negative sides of mother in- laws to their daughter in- laws. For example how nicely Manak's mother blessed Guleri before she left for Chamba.

The moment she left, she forced Manak into marrying again. This is how mow much power mother in-law had over their son. Overall the story is short

and sharp compared with 'The Withered Arm'. It is interesting and exiting to read and it has a cliff-hanger at the end of the story, for example tragic reaction. As one would want to find out what would happen next. While 'Withered Arm' is written using old fashioned English words, which are not in use anymore. The story is very long, making it difficult for readers to keep up with the flow.

The author uses difficult vocabulary for example lorn, Milchers etc. , The meaning of these words are then explained at the bottom of the page like in A Stench of Kerosene. Also the author uses subheading with a picture explaining the particular event taking place . For example a lorn milkmaid (milking a cow apart from the rest of the milkmaids), the young wife (picture of a beautiful young women dressed in fine clothes), vision (Rhoda's vision of the dream) etc. Also the story uses many paragraphs. In 'Withered Arm' Thomas Hardy introduces the concepts of loneliness.

He gave a bad impression of Rhoda. He makes out Rhoda is extremely jealous of Gertude, which she is, but also she is just curious of Farmers new wife. She just wanted to find out Farmers taste of new women. If she is ugly or beautiful then her. The author wanted readers to feel how superstition a society it was. Where unjustly and unfairly women were treated. Men had all the power and did what they liked. While women had no powers. Women like Gertude who had no control over their lives looked up to magic to help them with their situation, and seeked help from conjuror.

Society was very cruel towards women who made a mistake but men were not punished as much for their action.. Thomas Hardy made an important

point at the end of the story , for example a man who mis-treats a women and neglects his own child, in the end he has to pay a price for it. But in ' Withered Arm' Farmer Lodge should have offered more than Rhoda and Gertude. Some question arises in ' Withered Arm' like, is Thomas Hardy trying to tell men were superior and could do no wrong? Or if they did wrong, could they pay for it. For example when Mr Lodge offered money for a school for boys at the end.

However, would this pay for all the grief, suffering, emotion he caused Rhoda and Gertude? ' Withered Arm' has complex cultured values and superstition. There are strong divisions between the classes. For example Gertude is from middle class and Rhoda is from lower class. while ' Stench of Kerosene' has a simple plot and there is no superstition. There is a strong love between man and woman, which is interfered by the mother in- law. The main characters of ' A Stench of Kerosene' are Guleri, Manak and his mother. Manak's second wife hardly has any part. Manak's mother has a major part in the story .

The reason for being is that just because she wanted a grandchild she wont let Manak and Guleris eight year of marriage pass without having a grandchild. As result of her action four life get reined. Guleri dies, her son Manak lives like a half dead person, Manak's second wife complains about her relationship. For example she said to Manak ? I not your wife, I am just someone you happen to marry?. Which clearly shows readers that there is (a rejection) no love between Manak and his second wife. Also Manak wont accept his child. For example toward the end of the story Manak said historically ?

Take him away (baby) take him away he stinks of kerosene?. Manak's mother always favoured Manak's second wife, for example when Manak's second wife got fed up with Manak's upsetting moods, she would encourage her new daughter-in-law to bear with her husband's moods for a while and will show her hope (like) when the baby is born and placed in Manak's palm he would change totally for good. In other words Manak's mother is showing that she understands (being sympathetic) what her daughter-in-law is going through, and advised her what to do to win Manak's love back. She acts like a respectable elder of the family.

All this favouritism, sympathetic and being nice from Manak's mother to her new daughter-in-law is because she could get her a grandchild. Manak's mother never showed this much of gratitude toward Guleri, this is because Guleri couldn't get her a grandchild. Instead Manak's mother plans to get Guleri out of the way (for example when she goes to Chamba) and then get a new wife for her son. Just before Guleri was leaving for Chamba, she took leave from Manak's parents. They patted her head and blessed her. They didn't show her any indication that they were planning to get someone in her absence, they acted normal.

Otherwise if Guleri had known what her mother-in-law were going to do in her absence she wouldn't have gone to Chamba, at all. Which would have put water in her plan. Even though Manak knew what his mother was planning to do in Guleri's absence, but he didn't tell Guleri, for example Manak requested Guleri not to go to Chamba but did not elaborate to her why he does not want her to go. If only Manak had told Guleri about his mother's plan she wouldn't have gone to Chamba. This is because no one wants to  
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destroy their own marriage. As Manak is the only child of his mother he listens to everything they say.

Manak mother forced him into marrying again. He doesn't have the strength to stand up for him self and say no to his mothers that he loves Guleri and doesn't want to marry again. When Guleri left for Chamba, Manak mother started to abuse and bully him. For example she said to him ' why do you crook like an old women, why don't you cry like a women for a change but Manak kept silent nd didn't say a thing because either he is scared of his mother or that he respect her as a elder. It was hard for me to believe that Guleri would die burning in Keroscne for her husband action or the shame it caused her.

Without asking Manak why he has done this to her. This is because Guleri did show some childish, stubbornness at the beginning of the story . For example she asked Manak ' if your mother said nothing to stop me from going to Chamba, so why are you standing in the way'. Manak did not reply back to Guleri. On the other hand it could also be that, Guleri felt that Manak was with her all along and now she feels less strong as e rejected her by marrying again, she know feels worthless, and thought dying is the only away to overcome this shameness.

The main characters of ' Withered Arm' are Rhoda Brook, Gertude Lodge and Farmer Lodge. Rhoda is a poor woman, never re-married again after the affair she had with Farmer Lodge. She falls in love with a rich man, gets pregnant and has a son. And he abandons her because she is from a lower social class. Rhoda could not protest or fight against Farmer Lodge, as he

has all the powers. Society rejected her because she has a illegitimate child, and Farmer Lodge did not wanted to know anything about her or his son. Rhoda slowly became lonely, and she had to work hard for living as a milkmaid to support herself and her son.

People slowly started to disassociate with her. For example in the milking shed Rhoda does not interact with the rest of the community, she milks somewhat apart from the rest, she does not take part in the general gossip about Farmers new wife. The other milkmaids make comments about her but not to her. They suggest that she knows where to find conjurer, as if she herself were a sorceress, At home Rhoda is pre-occupied with her own thoughts, to the extent that she does not notice her son inattention. With each piece of information he brings her about Gertude she adds more questions.

She was indignant that her son spoke to Gertude, as he had been forbidden to communicate with anyone in the farm. Rhoda feels grief stricken, devastated and extremely jealous of Gertude. Her jealousy and grief became so strong that it consumed her body and her mind. Rhoda's first reaction to Gertude is of horror and fear. In her dream, she sees Gertude as a figure ? with features shockingly distorted and wrinkled as by age? and this figure in a suffocating embrace, shows Rhoda the hated wedding ring on its left hand. Rhoda in a freenzy of fear, grasps the left arm and flings the night sprit away from her.

Rhoda is not a bad woman, she fells she has been treated unfairly rather that Gertrude. Gertrude becomes hers victim. Although Gertrude is not to blame

for what has happened. Rhoda never showed any sign of anger towards Mr Lodge for what he has done to her. Instead of blaming Farmer Lodge for his action, she blames Gertrude. This shows reader that she is still in love with Mr Lodge. The characters that I felt sorry for in ' Withered Arm is, Rhoda Brook and Gertude Lodge. This is because they both been treated unfairly in their way by farmer Lodge.

For example Gertude is rejected at the end of the story by Farmer Lodge, as she no longer looks beautiful (which show readers that Farmer Lodge were only after beauty, when their beauty runs out he rejects them ). If Gertude has not met Rhoda she would have a happy life. If she hadn't married Farmer Lodge she would have had a normal life and it would have probably been another young lady in her place. The character's that I felt sorry for in ' Stench of Keroscne' is Guleri. This is because Guleri died because her husband remarried again as she can not have a child.

The story that I liked most is ' Stench of Keroscne'. This is because the story is better structured, short, easy to follow, and it is written in a simple English. Also the story lives the readers in a cliff-hanger (as a tragic reaction). It lives the reader wondering what will happen next. While ' Withered Arm' is long and complex. By adding superstition the story became even longer and more boring. I think the story of the ' Withered Arm' is much sadder than ' Stench of Kerosene'. This is because in the ' Withered Arm' two women and a boy died for one man action. However, ' Stench of Kerosene' is also a sad story.

Because Guleri's husband and his mother rejected he, as a result she killed herself. The story which I think is more sexist is ' Withered Arm'. This is



because two women became victims and suffered as a result of Farmer Lodge's action. However the author made fairly good remark about Farmer Lodge at the end of the story by saying ' he has given some money to a school'. Which tell readers that there is no one left Farmer Lodge could share his wealth with, As all the people who were close to him died as result of his action. which also shows readers that he realised that he had destroyed three lives.