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**Reading Between the Lines: Narratological Analysis of Book of Ruth from the
Postcolonial Feminist Perspective**

Hari Prasad Pathak

Supervisor

Professor Dr. Kristin Joachimsen

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the dynamics of characterization accompanied by conflicts of interest and state of ambivalence by reading between the lines of the Book of Ruth.¹ It interrogates the pre-established ideal of female companionship by focusing on the effects of power structures in the formulation of a character relationship by applying postcolonial feminist narratology. It critically examines postcolonial tropes like identity, subjectivity, representation, hybridity, and mimicry and shows how they are relevant to the experiences of female protagonists of the Book of Ruth. Through the analysis of characters of Book of Ruth, it explores how the intersection of gender, class, race, culture, religion, etc. affects the character's identity and subjectivity and representation in the narrative. It deconstructs the essentialist androcentric or gynocentric worldviews by emphasizing the polyphonic nature of the text that gives equal focus on both male-female voices.

Key Terms: Postcolonial feminist narratology, Characterization, Power Structure, Conflict of interest, Ambivalence, Identity, Subjectivity, Representation, Hybridity, Mimicry, Intersection.

¹ The thesis uses New International Version of OT to analyze the character of Book of Ruth

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CHAPTER: I

1. Introduction

1.1. Objective and Motivation

The Book of Ruth is a unique book in terms of Characterization. Its following characteristics has enticed my interest in writing this thesis on it. Firstly, it's a short and simplistic presentation of the plot — secondly its unique position in the Old Testament canon — thirdly the portrayal of female companionship and, — fourthly Biblical feminist scholars' broad interest in it. Kirsten Nielsen quotes Hermann Gunkel who has given the classical definition of the book as a *novelle*, a short story, more specifically an idyll. By idyll, he means to stress the poetic and the literary qualities of the short story.² It is believed to be a story that celebrated the daring undertakings of independent women who, in threatening situations, seized the initiative to find a solution.³ Such representation of the female protagonists in the Biblical narrative is scarce. That makes Naomi and Ruth two strongest female in the entire scripture.

Each female character carries a particular theme in the Biblical stories. But leaving some exceptions these women play minor or secondary and subordinate roles in the Biblical stories. But their contribution cannot be undermined because they are some of the best-remembered actors in the Biblical story. For example, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Naomi, and Ruth are some famous Biblical female characters.⁴ But among these characters, Naomi and Ruth have got central attention from Biblical feminist due to their representation as major protagonists.

² Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*. (London: SCM Press, 1997), 5.

³ Claus Westermann, "Structure and Intention of the Book of Ruth," in *World & World* no. 3. (1999), 285.

⁴ Phyllis Ann Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 53.

From the theological perspective, the Book of Ruth seems a carrier of spirituality, faithfulness, loyalty, and redemption. But this thesis deviates from such views because it asserts that each character has a specific voice that emphasizes the struggle between gynocentrism and androcentrism in ancient society. Additionally, these characters seem entangled in a complicated relationship accompanied by the conflict of interest, and state of ambivalence that makes the story unique in terms of characterization.

The Ruth narrative reveals an intricate pattern of social relationship in ancient Israel.⁵ Hence, postcolonial feminist narratology is a suitable approach to study such complex social as well as gender relationship in the story. The thesis examines various textual elements such as a plot of the narrative, speech acts, and utterances of characters and show that beyond gender dynamics the representation of male in society is highly influenced by the intersection of socio-cultural, religious-economic, and political factors in ancient Israel society. By applying Post-colonial Feminist narratology, I aim to expose the underlying pattern of the power structure in *Ruth* narrative.

1.2. A Summary of the Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth opens with a scene of family migration where three male members Elimelech, his two sons Mahlon and Chilion along with Naomi leave Bethlehem to escape the deadly famine. Mahlon and Chilion married two Moabite women Ruth and Orpah. Unfortunately, their happiness didn't last for long; destiny brings severe misfortune to them Elimelech dies, and after sometimes Mahlon and Chilion also died leaving three widows in tragic destitute. Naomi hears that Yahweh has blessed Israel with plenty of food and fertility, so she decides to return to Bethlehem. She wants to send her daughters-in-law to their mother's home to avoid further complication due to their Moabite origin. The scene of separation sharpens further complication between and among the female protagonists.

⁵ André LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition*. (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 101.

After reaching Bethlehem, Naomi introduces herself as ‘Mara’ to the neighbors. Since it was harvesting time, Ruth asks Naomi’s permission to go to the gleaning field to get something to eat. In gleaning field, Ruth is influenced by the kindness and generosity of Boaz. Naomi is overwhelmed to hear about Boaz who is one of the relatives of her late husband. Naomi, with the hope of redemption, makes a secret plan and sends Ruth to Boaz’s threshing floor at night. Finally, Boaz makes proper redeemer withdraw and marries Ruth with the help of levirate law. Ruth delivers Obed, and he is called Naomi’s son. The concluding genealogy includes a patrilineal family lineage from Boaz to David.

The narratological structure of the Book of Ruth revolves around two journeys. First, the journey from Bethlehem to Moab in which Naomi follows her husband. The second journey is her journey back to Bethlehem accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth. I interpret these journeys as outer or physical as well as inner or spiritual; the outer or physical journey refers to their journey from two different geographical locations from Bethlehem to Moab and then back to Bethlehem from Moab. The inner or spiritual journey refers to the journey toward spirituality, devotion, faithfulness, and fidelity.

1.3. Biblical Feminist Criticism and Analysis of Book of Ruth

The art of reading and interpreting Biblical text has come through a long historical process. The Biblical critics have shifted their concern from traditional historical criticism, form criticism and redaction criticism to a new trend in reading and interpreting the Old Testament narrative.⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *The Women’s Bible* published in 1898 is considered the first feminist reading of the Book of Ruth.⁷ Notably, the interest in the Biblical women

⁶ John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study*. (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1984),

⁷ Jennifer L. Koosed, *Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives* (Columbia: The University of S.C. Press, 2011), 4.

characters, women's history and gender issues got a focus after the second wave of feminism that broke in America in the 1960s."⁸

I present various critics' and scholars' views on Biblical feminist exegesis and their interpretation of the Book of Ruth as a dialogue partner in this thesis. I discuss the diverse viewpoints of these scholars and show how my thesis departs from their arguments. Among many Biblical Feminist scholars, I use Saxegaard's *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (2010) as a leading dialogue partner in this thesis.

Saxegaard has made a subtle analysis of characters of the Ruth narrative by using narratology as a methodology. She seems primarily concerned about the complexity of Old Testament characters; exemplified by the characters of the Book of Ruth.⁹ Saxegaard makes an analysis of different types of characters traits and virtues that makes each character distinct from the other. Importantly, she manifests how the customs, rituals, and practices of ancient Israel nurtures complexities in the characters. Her focus on characterization in the Book of Ruth reveals many underlying facts about the relationship of the characters that has immense significance in my thesis. Saxegaard argues when analyzing the characters and comparing their presentation in the narrative with their actions in the plot, we find that each character has a specific voice that focuses on the different topic in the story; Naomi proclaims her bitterness, Boaz is the merry, Ruth is a Foreigner and Yahweh is silent. Saxegaards Analysis of the character generates theological themes in the narrative.¹⁰

Kirsten Nielsen differs from Saxegaard in terms of her methodology, but both of them appreciate it for the unique characterization of female protagonists. In her study Ruth, she incorporates an inter-textual approach and makes a comparative study of the Book of Ruth with other OT narratives primarily *Judah* and *Tamar*. Nielsen emphasizes how the female

⁸ John Lee Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

⁹ Kristin Moen Saxegaards, *High Fidelity and Character complexity in the book of Ruth* (Oslo: MF Norwegian School of Theology, 2008) back cover page.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

protagonists of the Book of Ruth go through various hardships in their life and how they overcome all these difficulties with the male assistance and finally become victorious at the end.

Carol Meyer's article "Returning Home: Ruth 1:8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth," appreciates the Book of Ruth for its representation of women in ancient Israelite society. Meyer argues that Ruth is almost entirely a women's tale.¹¹ Nevertheless, she further remarks, though it is the incredible traditional story, it ignores that the dominant androcentricity of scripture is interrupted or challenged by the gynocentricity of Ruth."¹² according to Meyer, though Ruth remains silent in the narrative, her physical presence dismantles the androcentrism of the scriptures. But, Meyer undermines that despite her dominant presence in the story Ruth fails to subvert the politics of androcentrism. Ruth's subservience to Naomi (especially in Ruth 3:5) visualizes her dependence on patriarchy.

For Meyer, the technique of naming a book under a female protagonist is a strategy to foreground the theme of feminism. She argues, Book of Ruth is one out of the two OT narrative bearing a woman's name. Thus it has attracted considerable attention from feminist Biblical scholars and also from the women seeking to reclaim their forefathers."¹³ Here, Meyer argues that the title of the book itself makes a significant contribution to delineate woman in the OT narrative. But, I like to deconstruct such argument by exploring the problematic and politics behind the title of the book. In my opinion, we shouldn't forget the fact that the story nowhere mentions the title of the book, and the question of who named it under Ruth's name is still a matter of debate without resolution. But Biblical critics believe that its title might be the result of the age-long tradition of oral storytelling that handed the story from one generation to another.

¹¹ Carol Meyers, "Returning Home: Ruth 1.8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth," in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield:Sheffield Academic Press,1993), 85.

¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 85.

Meyer problematizes the earlier studies on the Book of Ruth when she says, “to the best of my knowledge, a systematic study of Ruth in terms of the differences between female and male texts has not yet been attempted.”¹⁴ Here, at least Meyer admits that the writings on the Book of Ruth so far have failed to maintain a balance in the relationship between male and female. Hence, in this thesis, I am very close to Meyer in my approach because I believe that to derive a more balanced picture of social relationship in Ruth narrative we should maintain a balance in both male and female voices.

Besides feminist reading of the Book of Ruth, we should also consider another viewpoint that defines the Book of Ruth as ‘a female text,’ ‘a collective creation of women's culture’¹⁵ or ‘expression of women's culture and women's concerns.’¹⁶ One thing is clear; there is no consensus among critics to define Ruth either as a female, feminine or feminist text. Athalya Brenner argues that; the first gynocritical step involves the definition of a text as a female text.¹⁷ However, in my opinion, not every text can be approached from gynocritical lens because every text has its unique features that need a unique approach. Later Brenner herself admits that it is difficult to approach every book from gynocritical lens because of the various theoretical difficulties.¹⁸ Though Brenner defines Ruth as a female text, she doesn’t explain the requirements for a female text.

Similarly, Irmtraud Fischer in her article ‘The Book of *Ruth*: A ‘Feminist’ commentary to Torah?’ reads the Book of Ruth as a women’s book. She emphasizes that it is a book that contains the issue of female companionship, cooperation and age-free processes of learning.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid., 90.

¹⁵ F. van Dijk-Hemmes, “Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture?,” in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 139.

¹⁶ Athalya Brenner, “Naomi and Ruth: Further Reflections,” in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 143.

¹⁷ Athalya Brenner, “Introduction,” in *A Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 14.

¹⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁹ Irmtraud Fischer, “The book of Ruth: A ‘Feminist’ commentary to Torah?,” in *Ruth and Esther: Feminist Companion to the Bible. 2nd series*. ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 25.

Being based on the representation of characters and female bonding Fischer defines the Book of Ruth as a female text. In my opinion, such characteristics are not enough to identify a text as a female text. Instead, we should focus on the social context, customs, and practices depicted in the text to examine the implied ideology of the book.

Yet another Biblical feminist, Ilona Rashkow in her article “Ruth: The Discourse of Power and The Power of Discourse” reads the Book of Ruth from Foucauldian discourse analysis. She claims that in patriarchal societies power is generated through the help of discourses. She argues, “the Biblical sources itself is largely a product of patriarchal societies in which men dominated if not monopolized public discourses and the civil and religious bureaucracies.”²⁰

Through the critical discourse analysis, Rashkow highlights how the men at power create self/other; center/margin binaries by formulating various discourses where females are placed at the margin. She exclaims the discourse theory is useful to study the relationship between the gender, language and social structure in the narrative.”²¹ Not only that Rashkow opines that recently developed discourse theory has a considerable impact on in various disciplines including feminist studies as well. I agree with Rashkow to some extent because female subjectivity, identity, and representation are some of the issues my thesis deals.

Before going to further discussion, I want to show how my argument differs from the critics mentioned above. I observed Saxegaard and Nielsen differ in terms of methodology, but they are equally concerned about the narrativity of the text. Saxegaard makes a narratological study of its characters whereas Nielsen makes an interdisciplinary and comparative study of the book of Ruth. On the contrary, Meyer, Brenner, Fischer, and Rashkow have quasi-consensus on the feminist reading of the Book of Ruth because they seek for female worldview in the text. In my opinion, these critics have focused on a single dimension of the story. Thus, I realize the need for the multidisciplinary reading of the Book of Ruth from postcolonial feminist narratology.

²⁰ Ilona Rashkow “Ruth: The Discourse of Power and The Power of Discourse,” in *Ruth and Esther: Feminist Companion to Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 26.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

The second group of critics I discussed above are slightly different in their theoretical orientation, but they have quasi-consensus that the Book of Ruth as a women's story.^{22 23} In my opinion, the purpose behind the feminist reading of Biblical narrative and reading it as 'female text' should be to empower female but not just to present a description of patriarchal values. In that context, I find Jack Allison's opinion worthwhile to mention;

Of course, there is no such thing as a definitive feminist reading of any text, but it may be possible to identify some key features of readings from feminist perspectives. A common assumption is that the text of the Bible, in common with many other texts, is a product of a patriarchal culture and shares the profoundly androcentric prejudices of its time.²⁴

In the above remark, Alison argues that a complete feminist reading of any text is not possible. I partly agree with Alison's claim, and I believe that feminist critics should not restrict themselves to male-female dichotomies only. I think that besides labeling male and female as disconnected forms of binary opposition, we should look at other various factors that are responsible for creating complications in the relationship.

Biblical feminists have differing views concerning the experiences of women in the Hebrew Bible. They often pictured male as an oppressor and the female as oppressed. In my opinion, such a representation of male and female as an oppressor and oppressed undermines the roles of various other socio-cultural factors as well as female themselves in the disempowerment and marginalization of women. For instance, Naomi and Orpah's role and Ruth's unawareness do not contribute to the empowerment of women; instead, it empowers patriarchal discourse.

²² Carol Meyer, "Returning Home: Ruth 1.8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth," in *Feminist Companion to Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 84.

²³ Athalya Brenner, "Naomi and Ruth" in *Ruth and Esther: Feminist Companion to Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 70.

²⁴ Alison M. Jack, *The Bible and Literature*, (London: SCM Press, 2012), 108.

Susan Brooks Thistlewaite comes up with constructive ideas concerning the interpretation of Biblical narratives. She argues that the objective of the Biblical feminist exegesis should not only be to explore the oppression of patriarchy; instead, it should be finding a solution within the Biblical narrative. She reinforces, it could be possible by critically analyzing and interpreting the Biblical text through a feminist perspective. She argues, by deeply analyzing the Biblical text feminist Biblical exegesis helps to heal the bruises and wounds of patriarchy. She further contends that Biblical feminist should take the Bible as their source of encouragement for female empowerment. In her own words, she asserts that,

The ultimate goal of feminist Biblical interpretation is healing. For women: whose religious beliefs include extremely literal interpretations of the Bible as the norm, no authority except that of the Bible itself can challenge the image contained in these texts of woman as silent, subordinate, bearing her children in pain, and subject to the absolute authority of her husband.²⁵ She suggests feminist scholars should read the Biblical story more rationally to deconstruct the stereotypes about women that are mentioned in the Biblical narratives by reading against the grain.

I find Jennie Ebeling's opinion worth mentioning here. She admits that the Biblical feminists have been unable to maintain a balanced relationship between males and females in the Biblical exegesis. Ebeling further says "Despite several decades of work by feminist Biblical scholars and others to create a more balanced picture of women's lives in ancient Israel, the popular misconception that women's activities were mainly restricted to domestic chores and childcare persist."²⁶ Ebeling's concern lies in the experiences of female only, but she is silent about the experiences of a male in the Biblical narrative. I think to maintain a balance between male and female in the Biblical story especially in the Book of Ruth even the experiences of male characters should be analyzed. Thus, this thesis presents how the male characters except Boaz get a victim of patriarchal power play in society.

²⁵ Susan Brooks Thistlewaite, "Every Two Minutes: Battered Women and Feminist Interpretation" In *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), 100.

²⁶ Jennie Ebeling, "Engendering the Israelite Harvests," *Near Eastern Archaeology*, vol. 79, no. 3. (2016), 186.

Concerning the Book of Ruth, Orit Avnery offers a synthesis of opposing opinions and advocates for a neutral perspective to approach it. She is not in favor of a traditional essentialist approach that reads a text either as a female text or a patriarchal narrative because she claims that, the book is neither feminist nor patriarchal instead it is polyphonic, speaking in more than a single voice.²⁷

As Biblical feminist critics are concerned with the study of gender, Biblical Marxist critics are concerned about the class struggle in the Biblical narrative. The feminist and Marxist approach of Biblical narrative differs in terms of their ideological stand. Feminist critics highlight love, courtship, seduction, female subjectivity, the new home and the birth of the child as dominant features of the text²⁸ whereas Marxist critics are concerned about the class struggle, means and modes of production in the Book of Ruth. Marxist criticism of the Bible is a neglected area because of their extreme views toward religion. Marxist thinkers define religion as opium to hallucinate the mass. They have propounded a perspective called ‘Dialectical Materialism’ to describe the socio-cultural phenomenon. In addition to that, these critics divide society into two super and base structures, and religion for them belongs to the superstructure of society.

Roland Boer in his text *Marxist Criticism of the Bible* argues that the in Ruth narrative, Ruth and Boaz can be taken as the representative of two opposing classes of ancient Israelite society; where Boaz represents higher class bourgeois and Ruth belongs to the lower class proletariat, while Naomi seems in-between these two conflicting classes. Boer further argues that “Naomi is then most like Boaz in this story, for Naomi also does not work instead she controls Ruth actions, instructs her to go out and glean in the harvesting field, go to the threshing floor at night, seduce a man and bear a child. She is the one who doesn’t work and lives her life from the surplus value of those who work”.²⁹ For Boer, if Boaz and Ruth are

²⁷Orit Avnery, “Who is In and Who is Out” *Harvuta* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2010), 76.

²⁸ Pui-lan Kwok, “Finding a Home for Ruth: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Otherness” *In New Paradigms for Bible study: the Bible in the Third Millennium*, ed. Fowler, Robert M., (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 104.

²⁹ Roland Boer, *Marxist Criticism of the Bible* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd. 2003), 80

representative of two opposing classes in society, then Naomi functions as a bridge between these two classes. Therefore, Naomi belongs to the emerging middle class who benefits herself playing her role in between two conflicting classes.

The experiences of female protagonists of the Ruth narrative is distinct in itself, and it differs from modern women, they have internalized patriarchal social norms as an essential part of their life because these female characters lack awareness about their subjectivity and autonomy in the society. Therefore, I acknowledge that the distinct position of Ruth narrative in Feminist Exegesis requires a different approach. In such condition, Postcolonial Feminist Narratology is an appropriate tool to study the female protagonists of Ruth narrative.

The critics mentioned above have their distinct perspective on the Book of Ruth. But, they all agree about the theoretical significance of the book of Ruth in Biblical feminist exegesis. Thus, this thesis explores the problematic in the characters relationship, conflict of interest and states of ambivalence in the Ruth narrative.

1.4. Research Question

The primary concern of this research is the analysis of characters of the Book of Ruth from postcolonial feminist narratology. But apart from mere character analysis, the thesis makes exploration of unexplored and underlying facets of the narrative. Thus by reading between the lines of Ruth narrative, the thesis explores the various complication underlying the characterization of Book of Ruth. With the help of character analysis, it will examine the problematics in the relationship, conflict of interest and states of ambivalence in characterization as well as in the narrative level. By applying postcolonial feminist narratology, it interrogates traditionally believed the ideal, harmonious and selfless relationship between its female protagonists in particular and other characters in general. Besides, it also examines how the intersection between gender, class, race, and religion affects the social relationship in the narrative.

1.5. Thesis structure/Overview

The thesis consists of six chapters. In chapter one, I have introduced this thesis along with its objective. Then I have provided a summary of the Book of Ruth. Next, I have presented a discussion on Biblical feminist exegesis of the Book of Ruth as well as my point of departure from previous writing on the Book of Ruth. After showing my divergence, I have given 'Research Question' of my thesis. Next, it consists 'Thesis Overview and Structure,' which provides a brief synopsis of the structure of the argument and its chapter division. In chapter 2, I present 'Theoretical Framework,' where I first deal with the relevance of postmodernism with postcolonialism and feminism. Then, I have discussed the historical background to postcolonialism and feminism accompanied by postcolonial feminism and its connection to my thesis. Then, I put lights on the Intersectionality followed by postcolonial tropes Identity, Subjectivity, and Representation. The final, part theoretical framework consists of discussion on Cultural Hybridity, Mimicry and ambivalence.

Chapter 3, offers methodology of this thesis. As narratology is the method of my research, I discuss the significance of Narratology in the study of the Book of Ruth. Here, I describe how I combine narratology with postcolonial feminism. Besides that, I show the difference between Narrative point of view and perspective, problematics of female authorship and title, and ambivalence in the book narrative. Chapter 4, of this thesis, is focused on the significance of character analysis and character classification in Biblical narratology. Next, it discusses the naming of the female characters with implied meaning and their loss and gain in the narrative. In chapter 5, I offer a character analysis of female characters Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah. Chapter 6, deals with the analysis major male character Boaz along with other minor male characters Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion and some other unnamed characters. Finally, Chapter 7, provides a conclusion of my thesis.

CHAPTER: II

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Intersection of Postmodern, Postcolonial and Feminist Theories

In this chapter, I discuss the intersection between Postmodern, Postcolonial and feminist theory and its relevance to my thesis. The emergence of Post-modernism after the Second World War brought heavy influence on reading, writing and thinking pattern worldwide including the postcolonial and feminist discourses. Postmodernism introduced the intertextual and interdisciplinary approach in reading literary as well as Biblical texts.

Lyotard defined postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives.”³⁰ By metanarrative, he refers to the totalizing narratives about history that help to legitimize knowledge and cultural practices in human society.³¹ The primary characteristic of postmodernism is the skepticism about the claims of any sort of overall, totalizing explanation.³² They argued that there is no final interpretation of any text; every interpretation is the subject of interpretation.

Traditional methods of Biblical criticism like historical form criticism, new criticism, and formalist theories believe a text as a self-referential and autonomous entity.³³ Postmodernist thinkers like Fredrick Nietzsche, Jacques Derrida, Mitchell Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard rejected the modernist notion of ‘objectivity of truth and advocated for the subjectivity of truth. Derrida’s ‘deconstruction’ and Foucault’s ‘Discourse Analysis’ highly influenced postcolonial and feminist thinkers.

³⁰ Jean Francois Lyotard, *Post Modern Condition A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), xxiv.

³¹ Ashley Woodward, “Jean-François Lyotard,” In Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
<http://iep.utm.edu/lyotard>

³² Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 15.

Foucault's discourse theory and the poststructuralist method of analysis influenced feminist studies.³⁴ Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" appreciates Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction as an appropriate analytical tool to study contexts outside the first world.³⁵ By referring to the context outside the first world, she indicates toward the issues of race, gender, culture, religion and other various socio-cultural aspects of the third world that has been excluded from the mainstream western metaphysics.

2.1. Historical Background to Postcolonialism and Feminism

In the previous section, I discussed how postmodernism influenced postcolonial and feminist discourses. In the following parts, I am going to present a brief historical background of these discourses. Since both theories are 20th-century resistance theories, they have some commonalities, but they fundamentally differ in terms of their theoretical inclination.

Originally, postcolonialism appeared as a literary tool or critical approach to study the literature written in the formerly colonized third world countries. But at present, it is neither limited to any geographical location, nor the experiences and issues of previously colonized people. Instead, it has become a broader discipline that resists political, racist, sexist, and other various oppressions in human society. In this sense, postcolonialism appears very close to feminism in its objectives.

Melissa Jackson argues, "Both feminism and postcolonialism moved to the forefront of scholarly work in the 1960s as the perspective through which to engage politically and socially and to critique culture and the products of culture."³⁶ According to R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Postcolonialism is not monolithic, but it is diversified; it has become a

³⁴Helen Crowley, and Susan Himmelweit, *Knowing Women Feminism and Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 65.

³⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. 1988 Reprint. (London: Routledge, 1988), 104.

³⁶ Melissa Jackson, "Reading Jezebel from the 'Other' Side: Feminist Critique, Postcolonialism, and Comedy," In *Review & Expositor*, vol. 112, no. 2, (2015), 240

theoretical tool to understand the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts in which domestication takes place.”³⁷Feminism has a similar concern; bell hooks remarks that the feminist movement is aimed to end the sexist oppression. Its goal is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all over lives.”³⁸

Both Postcolonial and feminist discourses go against the dominant power structures and focus on the voices of marginalized and oppressed.³⁹ Feminist thinkers also pay high focus to the working of power and how it defines some people as inferior, or as ‘other’ and some as superior and ‘self.’⁴⁰ Though both of these discourses are concerned about the functioning of power relations and power centers in society; their fundamental orientation differs in terms of their ideological stand. One of the prime concerns of the feminist movement is to resist patriarchal oppression by questioning the power relationship between male and female that formulates distinct social roles for women.

On the other hand, Postcolonialism aims to subvert the dehumanizing agency of colonization. It aims to study “the relationship between center and margin, metropolis and periphery, on a global political scale—the imperial and the colonial.”⁴¹ Postcolonialism is concerned with the political empowerment of formally colonized subjects by explicating the residues of colonial mechanism. Its advocacy for the reversal of the self/other and center/margin dichotomies has influenced feminist thinkers as well. Many postcolonial thinkers regard Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1987) as the founding principle of Postcolonialism.

³⁷ R.S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 7

³⁸ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 15

³⁹ Melissa Jackson, “Reading Jezebel from the ‘Other’ Side: Feminist Critique, Postcolonialism, and Comedy,” In *Review & Expositor*, vol. 112, no. 2, (2015), 241

⁴⁰ Helen Crowley, and Susan Himmelweit, *Knowing Women Feminism and Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 287.

⁴¹ Fernando F. Segovia, “Postcolonial and Diasporic Criticism in Biblical Criticism: Focus, Parameters, Relevance,” in *Studies in World Christianity* no 5 (1999), 180

The concept of feminism got more recognition in western academia during the late 18th century especially after the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's text *A Vindication of the Right of Woman* in 1792. This text is considered the first official document to initiate the modern feminist movement. Spivak praises Said's *Orientalism* and says that Orientalism has started a discourse in the study of the margin and periphery. In other words, it has given voice to the voiceless, and it has become an essential part of the postcolonial discipline now.⁴² According to Peter Barry *Orientalism* exposed the Eurocentric universalism which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or Western and the inferiority of what is not. Therefore, Said identifies a European cultural tradition of 'Orientalism,' which is a particular and long-standing way of identifying the East as 'other' and inferior to the West.⁴³

During 19th and 20th century feminist movement got categorized into three waves. The first wave feminism was primarily concerned with political equality, voting rights, and participation. It raised the issues of women suffrage, working condition, and equal wages and educational rights for women and girls. But it was less focused on the problems of racial discrimination so it got criticized by the third world women and women of color. Early women's rights movements are often seen as exclusively about the membership, concerns, and struggles of white women alone⁴⁴ The second-wave feminism came with changes during 1960s-1980s. These female activists focused on the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequalities and the role of women in society.

In this thesis, my focus lies on the 'third-wave feminism' that emerged during the 1990s in the Western world. It is the continuation of the second wave as well as a response to its failures. These feminists are thankful to the first and second wave feminist, but they look far

⁴² Spivak G. C. 1993, 56

⁴³ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 193.

⁴⁴ Fixmer-Oraiz, and Natalie wood, and Julia T. Wood, *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, And Culture.* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning. 2015), 60

beyond what the previous waves of feminisms avoided.⁴⁵ The primary contribution of this feminism is that they vehemently reacted and rejected the stereotypical images of women as submissive, passive, weak, virginal, and faithful. Instead, they represented them as powerful, assertive, and in control of their sexuality.⁴⁶

My intention behind discussing third wave feminism is to show its connection with Postcolonial feminism. Both postcolonial feminist and third-wave feminist seem critical to the postcolonialism, and they charge it for excluding the concerns of the female. Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* suffer the attack of the postcolonial feminist.⁴⁷ Because Postcolonial thinkers argue that these postcolonialism and Feminism do not only undermined the role of the female in the independence struggle but also misrepresent them in the nationalist discourses.

2.2. Reading Book of Ruth as a Subaltern Story

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's text, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1988) includes her groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak borrows Italian Marxist Gramsci's term 'Subalternity' to show the condition of double colonization and double marginalization of the people of color, caste, and race under colonialism. The term subaltern is taken from the military field that refers to the soldiers of lower rank. But Gramscian concept of subalternity applies to those groups in society who are lacking autonomous political power.⁴⁸ Spivak's idea of subalternity and Said's *Orientalism* have got wide recognition as analytical tools in postcolonial as well as in the feminist discourses. As a

⁴⁵ Gaby Weiner (2006), a feminist educationist, provides an excellent and succinct articulation of 'third-wave feminism.'

⁴⁶ Elinor Burket and Laura Brunel "Feminism" in *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Last edited Feb 2019. See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/feminism/The-third-wave-of-feminism>.

⁴⁷ Dr. Ritu Tyagi, "Understanding Postcolonial Feminism in relation with Postcolonial and Feminist Theories," *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* Vol. 1, No. 2. (2014), 45

⁴⁸ Smith Kylie, "Gramsci at the Margins: Subjectivity and Subalternity in a theory of Hegemony," *International Gramsci Journal* No. vol.1 issue.9. (2010), 39

representative of the third world women, Spivak valorizes the experiences of women who are excluded from the mainstream postcolonial and feminist discourses.

According to Spivak, subaltern refers to the group of people living at the margin or periphery or who are made inferior in terms of class, race, ethnicity or gender in society it is further helpful to understand the condition of people or community who are excluded from the power structure of society.⁴⁹ My aim behind discussing the concept of subalternity here is to show its relevance to the condition of major protagonist Ruth. Condition of Ruth matches with the Spivak's criteria of subaltern because she is excluded from the power structure of the Israelite community that is proved by her silence in the story. (Ruth chapter 4.) Recently, feminist, scholars from the nonwestern origin have shown their concern in subaltern studies. Therefore, I find Spivak's concept of subaltern studies applicable to study the experiences of female protagonists in the Book of Ruth.

2.3. Postcolonial Feminism and its Relevance to the Analysis of the Book of Ruth

After a brief discussion of Postcolonialism and Feminism in above section 2.2, I discuss what these theories lacked in common, and why the critics and scholars felt the necessity of a new discipline called postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminism emerged as a critical discourse after the feminist scholars from formerly colonized third world countries realized that the postcolonial and mainstream feminism could not address the experiences and issues of women residing in former colonies, correctly.⁵⁰ They charged postcolonialism as patriarchal discourse whereas they accused western feminism of its totalizing and overgeneralizing attitude. The postcolonial feminist scholars from the third world countries argue that the experiences of women from previously colonized countries cannot be

⁴⁹ Melissa Jackson, "Reading Jezebel from the 'Other' Side: Feminist Critique, Postcolonialism, and Comedy," In *Review & Expositor*, vol. 112, no. 2, (2015),241

⁵⁰ Raj Kumar Mishra, "Postcolonial Feminism: Looking into the within-beyond-to difference," *International Journal of English and Literature*, Vol. 4(4), (2013), 129

homogenized under mainstream feminism.⁵¹ Therefore, the feminists from colonized territories should come forward and make differences visible and acceptable across cultures; otherwise, get ready to take on colonized garbs of identity.⁵²

As a resistance theory, I find postcolonial feminism an appropriate tool to study Ruth narrative. I find the experiences of female protagonists of the Book of Ruth resembles the experiences of the women in the third world in many aspects. Thus, postcolonial feminist narratology is a suitable approach to examine such experiences and issues of ancient Israelite women. One striking difference between postcolonialism and postcolonial feminism is that it deviates itself from the political ideology of postcolonialism and tries to link racial oppression to patriarchal oppression. According to Robert Young,

Postcolonial feminism involves challenges to patriarchal authority and power by third world women; to power structures that undermine women; and to the values that are held by men, women and other feminists based on Eurocentric or racist beliefs. Postcolonial feminism starts from the perception that postcolonial politics have been framed ‘by the active policies of colonialism, by the institutional infrastructures that were handed over by the colonial powers to elite groups or appropriated by later elites’⁵³

Postcolonial feminism is an interdisciplinary approach, and its primary concern is to deal with the problematic, and challenges faced by non-western women. Patriarchy is a complex system, and it is legitimized through various socio-political institutions that function on behalf of colonialism as well. And such a system of patriarchy has been psychologically internalized by women. Such internalization is the result of power relationship and hierarchy between male and female in society.

⁵¹ Razi Aziz, “Feminism and the Challenge of Racism: Deviance or Difference” in , *Knowing Women Feminism and Knowledge*, ed. Helen Crowley, and Susan Himmelweit, *Knowing Women Feminism and Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 291.

⁵² Ibid.,

⁵³ Robert Yough, “Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10

Postcolonial feminism treats patriarchal oppression and colonial oppression with the same parameters because they believe colonialism and patriarchy are interwoven discourses and one helps the other to exist. In a patriarchal society, a male is a protector who ensures socio-economic security of female. Similarly, colonialism controls its subject by its political means. In both discourses, power and authority are allocated at the top of the social hierarchy.

Postcolonial feminism believes that colonial discourse is based on power relation that creates center/margin, self/other, subject/object and mind/body dichotomy. It is argued that colonialist ideology functions in the same way patriarchal ideology does concerning the oppression of the racial other and women, respectively.⁵⁴The power relationship is one of the bases of these discourses where males are often at the center of such power relation. Thus men not only control woman physically they even control women's production, reproduction, and sexuality which is exemplified through Boaz in the Book of Ruth as well.

The center/margin dichotomy exists in every human society, and ancient Israelite society was not an exception. Boaz defines levirate law, for his benefits because he is at the center in the patriarchal society while Ruth despite sacrificing everything remains at the margin. Thus, Postcolonial Feminists like to deconstruct such a power relationship between center and margin in the society. Boaz and Naomi act like a patron, and they are presented as a center in the community. Boaz has the economic resources and social position, whereas Naomi has at least the social connection. In contrast, Ruth has nothing to offer but her availability.⁵⁵

2.4. Postcolonial feminism and Intersectionality

⁵⁴ Shadi Neimneh, "Postcolonial Feminism: Silence and Storytelling in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*," *Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 5, no. 2, (2014), 49

⁵⁵ Tong Sin Lung, "The Key to Successful Migration: Rereading Ruth's Confession (1:16-17) Through the Lens of Bhava's Mimicry" in *Reading Ruth in Asia* ed. Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 40.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, an American critical legal race scholar, coined the term intersectionality in 1989.⁵⁶It attracted the concern of feminist scholars in recent decades and has been promptly used to describe a system of oppression. Crenshaw credits movement of black, Chicana, and Latina woman, and another woman of color for conceptualizing the concept of Intersectionality. ⁵⁷According to Crenshaw, it is the condition where gender, race, and class are intertwined mutually often resulting in a complex system of oppression. Anna Carastathis in her article “The concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory” asserts that

It has become commonplace within the feminist theory to claim that women’s lives are constructed by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression. This insight—that oppression is not a singular process or a binary political relation, but is better understood as constituted by multiple, converging or interwoven systems—originates in antiracist feminist critiques of the claim that women’s oppression could be captured through an analysis of gender alone. ⁵⁸

Though the concept of intersectionality is applied mainly in the feminist discourse, it also equally useful to study the similar experiences of the males in the society, so it is inclusive of all gender. But one thing is quite clear that it is one of the ‘most important contributions that women’s study has made so far.’⁵⁹Therefore, Intersectionality has been a key element in the study of contemporary Feminism. Kathy Davis in her article synthesizes that, “Intersectionality is offered as a theoretical and political remedy to what is perhaps ‘the most pressing problem facing contemporary feminism—the long and painful legacy of its exclusions.’”⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Olena Hankivsky, *Intersectionality 101*. (SFU, 2014), 2.

⁵⁷ Crenshaw quoted in Michele Tracy Berger and Guidroz Kathleen, eds. *Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy Through Race, Class, and Gender*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 65.

⁵⁸ Anna Carastathis, “The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory,” *Philosophy Compass*, vol. 9, no. 5, (2014), 304.

⁵⁹ Leslie McCall, ‘The Complexity of Intersectionality,’ *Signs* 30.3 (2005), 771.

⁶⁰ Kathy Davis, “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful,” *Feminist Theory* 9.1 (2008), 70.

Intersectionality is a recent critical discourse that aims to combine Postcolonialism and Feminism by filling what they lack in common. It examines women's identities and narratives in more strategic and inclusive manners.⁶¹ In reading Book of Ruth, the interdisciplinary approach of intersectionality is useful to observe how the socio-cultural, religious and economic factors intersect to each other and create a unique circumstance of the female protagonists. Kwok Pui-Lan states that;

The stories of Ruth the Moabite, the Syrophoenician woman (Matt.15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30) and Rahab the Canaanite prostitute (Josh.2) have captured the attention of postcolonial feminist critics because they illustrate the intersection among gender, class, race, and ethnicity, and sexuality in cultural contacts and border crossings.⁶²

2.5. Female Identity, Subjectivity, and Representation

Foucault argues that our subjectivity, our identity, and our sexuality are intimately linked; they do not exist outside of or before language and representation.⁶³ Representation of female in a male-dominated society is often the subject of high concern for feminist scholars. It is because female are often represented stereotypically in such a culture. One of the dominant similarities between patriarchal and colonial discourse is their formulation of stereotypes. The people or group of people who are at the power center creates stereotypes that legitimize the misrepresentation of those who are at the margin whosoever male or female. The stereotypes like submissive, obedient, loyal, docile, weak, etc. are some of the common stereotypes in both patriarchal and colonial discourses. But females are often the victims of such stereotypes because female are placed at the margin. Thus, female identity, subjectivity, and representation are intimately connected.

⁶¹ Kinana Hamam, "Postcolonialism and Feminism: An Intersectional Discourse of Reconstruction" in 2014, 10.

⁶² Pui-lan Kwok, "Finding a Home for Ruth: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Otherness" *In New Paradigms for Bible study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, ed. Fowler, Robert M., (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 101.

⁶³ Biddy Martin, "Feminism, Criticism and Foucault" in *Knowing Women Feminism and Knowledge*, ed. Helen Crowley & Susan Himmelweit, (Milton Keynes: Open University, 2006), 278.

In exploring the politics of subjectivity, many feminist were influenced by ideas of Foucault.⁶⁴ Similarly, postcolonial thinkers also believe that identity and subjectivity are socio-cultural constructs. Foucault asserts that the identity and subjectivity as historically and rationally constructed in which power plays a dominant role.⁶⁵ Islamic feminist critics Valentine M. Moghadam in her text *Identity Politics and Women* argues, the 1980s was the era when the discourses and movements based on issues of identity was the central concern of the feminist criticism. She explains that the questions of cultural, religious, national, linguistic and sexual were the focal point that had a direct link to economic justice.⁶⁶

A pioneer third wave feminist, Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* discusses the importance of the concept of identity for feminist thinkers. She rejects the notion that identity is made up of certain essential features of women. Instead, she proposes that identity is a construction of social and cultural ideologies. They pose themselves as natural and enforce norms that define what it is to be a woman; further, they warn and intimidate to expel those who do not abide by these norms.⁶⁷

Both postcolonial and feminist thinkers have quasi-consensus that identity whatsoever individual or cultural are the socio-cultural construct; thus, politics of identity plays a very dominant role in these studies. Therefore, both postcolonial and feminist studies analyze the text by critically analyzing historical or socio-cultural context — for example, postcolonialism advocates for the identity and subjectivity of the colonized subject. Similarly, feminism concerned with the identity of the female under the patriarchal social system. Both theories critique the subjugation and subordination of identity and subjectivity by

⁶⁴ Helen Crowley, and Susan Himmelweit, *Knowing Women Feminism and Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 236.

⁶⁵ Helen Crowley, and Susan Himmelweit, *Knowing Women Feminism and Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 236.

⁶⁶ Valentine M. Moghadam, *Identity Politics and Women* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), 3.

⁶⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York:Routledge, 1993), 7.

deconstructing the center/margin, subject/ object, self/other dichotomies or they go against any other binaries.

2.6. Cultural Hybridity, Mimicry and Ambivalence

Cultural hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence are highly debated concepts under postcolonial discourses to refer to the experiences of colonized subjects. But I discuss its relevance to the experiences of the principal protagonist of the book of Ruth. The concept of hybridity came into the scholarly debate after the publication of Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* in 1994. It refers to the condition where two or more than two cultures mix resulting in the existential anxiety. According to Bhabha, "Hybridity is the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life."⁶⁸ In postcolonial discourses, cultural hybridity and mimicry are studied relevantly. Bhabha states that colonized people's blind imitation or mimicry of the colonizers' culture results in the hybrid identity. Bhabha asserts that such imitation deteriorates the subject's native culture resulting in cultural hybridity.

In the Book of Ruth female protagonists go through cultural hybridization that I examine in a character analysis of its characters in chapter 5. Peter Barry states that "hybridity is the situation whereby individuals and groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture (for instance, that of the colonizer, through a colonial school system, and that through local and oral traditions."⁶⁹

Bhabha asserts mimicry is when someone tries to copy someone else in some way and the result can become almost ridiculous: "a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite."⁷⁰ He further remarks, mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. For Bhabha mimicry is thus, the sign of a double articulation: a complex strategy of reform, regulation, discipline, which 'appropriates' the center as it

⁶⁸ Homi K., Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 314.

⁶⁹ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017),

⁷⁰ Homi K., Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 122.

visualizes power.⁷¹ When a person feels inferiority to others in the society he tries to imitate another person's behavior and way of life; to become a mimic of someone else.

But in this thesis, I like to relate Naomi's imitation of patriarchal culture with postcolonial term mimicry. In my opinion, the women under patriarchy also go through similar experiences, so they imitate the patriarchal practices to acculturate and assimilate into the mainstream society. Therefore, the experiences of 'colonized' within the colonial discourse and the condition of woman in patriarchal discourse are almost the same because both go through similar episodes of hybridization. Not only that, I like to borrow, Gramscian term, 'hegemony' to refer to the experiences of both colonial subject and female under the patriarchal system. Though Gramscian term hegemony is genuinely a political tool, it could be a be an appropriate tool to study the psychological assimilation of a power center in society.

In postcolonial discourse, the state of ambivalence result when the people under colonialism fail to assimilate or mimic the colonial culture to the fullest in such condition the colonized subjects neither belongs to his/her culture neither the colonizer's culture. In the book of Ruth, the biculturalism of the female protagonist Naomi and Ruth nurtures ambivalence in them. Mimicry is essential to assimilate the colonizer's culture, but it is not possible to fully assimilate into a new culture, and it results in the state of ambivalence.

The state of ambivalence in a colonial sense refers to the conflicting situation where the subject neither belongs to his culture nor the colonizers. But in the book of Ruth, I perpetuate something similar experiences of the female protagonists of the Book of Ruth as well. Naomi's acts of sending Ruth to the threshing floor (Ruth 3:1) shows her mimicry of patriarchal values. But that creates ambiguity in her personality. I have discussed the state of diverse ambivalence in the book of Ruth in section 3.3.⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid., 126.

⁷² See my thesis 3.3. p. 41.

CHAPTER: III

3. Methodological Reflection

3.1. Narratology and the Book of Ruth

This thesis belongs to the Biblical feminist exegesis, so it discusses the importance of Biblical narratology as well as feminist narratology in reading Book of Ruth. The concept of narratology first appeared as classical narratology in the 1970s, but it was in practice in the literary field before it was coined in 1969 by Tzvetan Todorov. However, the Russian formalist scholars Vladimir Propp (1928) and Mikhail Bakhtin (1975) are credited as the founder of narratology.

In the field of Biblical exegesis, Gunkel's commentary on Genesis is considered the first text that analyzes the literary aspects of Biblical narratives.⁷³ He pioneered the analysis of literary elements of Biblical books by inventing a new genre called 'Form Criticism' that appeared as a response against the traditional model of 'Historical Criticism.' Gunkel in his text *Legends of Genesis* introduces his new concept Form Criticism which is very close to the literary New Criticism strategically. Gunkel, in his Form Criticism, has recognized the artistic qualities of the Old Testament and has praised the Biblical narrators for the depth of their writing style despite the terse nature of their work.

Unlike Gunkel, historical critics had given much focus on the efforts of the narrators in its quest to uncover authorial intentions and origins in history. Historical critics have often fallen short of addressing literary questions. Form criticism, particularly in the work of Hermann Gunkel, served as a possible foundation for narrative criticism by focusing on scenes, characters, and narrative structure, leaving historical critics with road maps to the literary world of the Biblical text. However, many scholars have viewed this road as one of many

⁷³ Hermann Gunkel and Nowack Wilhelm, *Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Et Ruprecht, 1917), VII-LVI.

potential paths for discoveries, limiting the form-critical discussion to the genre and tying places and alleged composite characters to Tradition History.⁷⁴

After Gunkel as well, various Biblical critics have focused on the narratological aspects of the Biblical texts. Marjo C. A. Korpel in her text *The Structure of the Book of Ruth* makes a historical survey of the narratological reading of the book of Ruth. She gives an example from Jacob Myers (1955), Stephen Bertman (1965), Hagia Hildegard Witzernath (1975), Kirsten Nielsen (1997) Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (1999) to the most recent structural study by Klaas Smelik (2000).⁷⁵ These critics have read the book of Ruth focusing on the various aspects of its narrative.

Mieke Bal theorizes narratology as the systematic study of narrative text; that analyzes the various aspects of human history artfully. She says it is a theory of narrative that focuses on the routine set of generalized statements that narrative carries.⁷⁶ In other words, narratology is an analytical tool dedicated to studying the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation.⁷⁷ It refers to the study of narrative as a genre, and its primary objective is to describe the constants, variables, and combinations typical of story and to clarify how these characteristics of narrative texts connect within the framework of theoretical models (typologies).⁷⁸

The classical narratology excluded the contextual and socio-cultural aspects of a text in the narrative analysis, but later various literary critics came with their innovative ideas who attempted to combine narratology with ideological frameworks to focus on the structure and

⁷⁴ Tolmie Francois, *Narratology and Biblical Narratives: A Practical Guide* (San Francisco: International Scholars, 1999), 2.

⁷⁵ Marjo C. A. Korpel, *The Structure of the Book of Ruth*. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001),

⁷⁶ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 1997), 3.

⁷⁷ Jan Christoph Meister, "Narratology," accessed 15 Jan 2019 <https://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Narratology>

⁷⁸ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Trans. Jane Lewin. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1980), 8.

functions of narrative. For Example, Mieke Bal (1987) Susan Lanser (1986) and Robyn Warhol (1989) proposed feminist narratologies.⁷⁹ The combination of narratology with various theoretical perspective has made it distinct from other narrative studies. Thus, this thesis is influenced by such amalgamation of narratology with a theoretical perspective and makes a combination of narratology with Postcolonial feminism.

According to Monika Fludemik (1996), every narrative is different in terms of its structure and function. She argues that such narrative diversity poses a question of whether postcolonial narrative differs from colonial and non-colonial narratives?⁸⁰ Therefore such narrative diversity could be addressed appropriately with the help of narratological analysis of any text. Reading Book of Ruth from postcolonial feminist narratology gives us a glimpse of complicated gender relationship underlying in the text.

Combining narratology with recently developed postcolonial feminism is one of the primary objectives of my thesis. Narratological study of a text focuses on the narrativity of the text, but postcolonial perspective adds socio/cultural, religious, racial, sexual, political as well as economic aspects while analyzing a text. Thus the postcolonial feminist narratological study of Ruth is a genuinely interdisciplinary approach. Within the methodology of narratological analysis, my central focus will be on character analysis but besides that, I will focus on the significance of narrative point of view and perspective, the problematic in the title, and the state of ambivalence in the narrative as well.

3.2. Difference between Narrative Point of View and Perspective

An author's use of a specific point of view and selection of perspective has a greater impact on the characterization of the book. Point of view refers to the perspective of the presentation of the author's ideas, and it is vital in character analysis because it is impossible to discuss character without the reference of point of view.⁸¹ There are three different types of point of

⁷⁹ Monika Fludernik, *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 268.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁸¹ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 43.

views the first person, second person, and third person point of views. First person and second person point of views are the most commonly used point of views. The use of pronouns helps the readers to distinguish the point of view used in the book.

Adele Berlin differentiates the narrative point of view from the perspective. She further claims that the Book of Ruth reinforces Naomi's perspective. She argues that even the child of Boaz and Ruth is called a child born to Naomi" (4:17). All this trend focus that the story is presented from Naomi's—perspectives. We see things through her eyes, feel things as she feels them, her deprivation and loneliness, her return to Bethlehem, her bitterness and poverty, her concern with Ruth's future security, her view of Boaz, and her restoration through the birth of her grandson."⁸² The author of the story has used the third person omniscient point of view to narrate the story from Naomi's perspective. Therefore, the narrative revolves around her centrality.

Monika Fludernik in her text, *An Introduction to Narratology*, argues that at this point we should note that narratives may be told from the perspective of a narrator, from that of a character and, finally, from a neutral, impersonal perspective (also known as 'camera-eye'). A distinction can be made, then, between embodied and impersonal points of view, and between external and internal ones. 'Embodied' here would mean that the reflector figure is fleshed out as a character so that one can assume that s/he has a subjective position on various matters.⁸³ In my opinion, there is a specific purpose of the unknown the author behind narrating the story from Naomi's perspective. It is the strategy of the author to establish Naomi as a reliable agent of patriarchy and to teach Ruth those patriarchal values through her.

3.2. Problematic Behind the Female Authorship and Title

⁸² Ibid., 84.

⁸³Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 36.

Carol Meyer argues that recent scholarship convincingly reversed the notion that the production of literature in Biblical antiquity was almost entirely the result of the compositional activities of men.⁸⁴ The delineation of the female protagonist and female worldview presented in Book of Ruth gives some basis for female authorship of the Book of Ruth, but the inclusion of genealogy (Ruth 4:18-22) at the end overshadows the feminist worldview of the book

Ruth narrative is one of the two Biblical books that bear women's name. But the question of its authorship has remained a mystery yet. Van Dijk-Hemmes in her article "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture?" raises the question and hypothesizes three features of the story that indicates toward female authorship, (1), "an intent which is less than normally androcentric"; (2), "a redefinition of reality from the female perspective"; and (3) "definable differences between the view of the male and the female figures"⁸⁵ But Van Dijk-Hemmes in her same article quotes S.D. Goitein who asserts that it is hard to claim that the books about the woman were written by woman⁸⁶ Brenner also disagrees with the concept of female authorship she argues that through the various textual elements uphold the central position of female interests, even those elements comply with androcentric views.⁸⁷

Another remarkable complication in the book is the contradiction between the title and its narrative. Kristin Moen Saxegaard writes that "In Ruth 1:3 Elimelech is described as "Naomi's husband." such representation of Naomi makes her the center of the plot. Not only that she is the one who takes the long way home to Bethlehem; her daughters-in-law are

⁸⁴Carol Meyer, "Returning Home: Ruth 1.8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth," in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,1993), 89.

⁸⁵ Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture?" in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,1993), 136.

⁸⁶ S.D. Goitein, 'Woman as Creators of Biblical Genres' *Prooftexts* 8.1 (1988), p4. in Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, "Ruth: A Product of Women's Culture?" in *Feminist Companion to Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 134.

⁸⁷ Athalya Brenner, "Naomi and Ruth: Further Reflection" in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,1993), 140.

described as her traveling companions and subordinated to her.⁸⁸ But, if Naomi is the center of the narrative; why the book is named after Ruth? What is the underlying purpose of the title?

Saxegaard further writes “Naomi’s name is mentioned 22 times in the text (Ruth 1:2, 3, 8, 11, 18, 19, 20, 2, 22; 2:1, 2, 6, 20(x2), 22; 3:1; 4:3, 5, 9, 14, 16, 17). With Naomi in such a superior position, it might appear strange that the book has the name “Book of Ruth” but not “Book of Naomi.” We see Ruth subordinated and dependent to Naomi throughout the story and as a daughter-in-law we see Ruth following Naomi subserviently until the story concludes with genealogy. The entire narrative revolves around Naomi’s endeavors and ends by showing Naomi as an emerging matriarch.

Throughout the narrative, Ruth attracts admiration, sympathy as well as criticism from the readers but Naomi remains the center of the story. Athalya Brenner quotes J.M. Sasson who argues that “Her (Naomi’s) daughter-in-law is described as the agent of redemption, but not as the chief beneficiary.”⁸⁹ Now certainly the question rises if Naomi is the major protagonist of the story; why it is named after Ruth? In my opinion, the book is named after Ruth because of her fidelity, loyalty, and sacrifices to Naomi or as compensation toward her sacrifices or because of the sympathy toward her destitution. But some critics link the problematic of the title to the complicated relationship between Naomi and Ruth.

Zefira Gitay in her article “Ruth and the Women of Bethlehem” rejects this opinion and raises some questions as well “the story of the Book of Ruth focuses on the image of a woman whose actions and emotions have been exalted by the Biblical narrator. It is a story of a woman who has lost everything she had had—her family and her possessions. She is a woman of worth nonetheless, and her merciful actions are designed to be rewarded. But who is Ruth? What is her role in the scroll? And why is she depicted as the heroine who bears the

⁸⁸ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 77.

⁸⁹ Athalya Brenner, “Naomi And Ruth” *Vetus Testamentum*, vol.33, no.4, (1983), 385-86.

title of the book?”⁹⁰ Zefira further points out that, Given Naomi’s central role in the story, a question cannot be avoided: why is the book not named after her? Is it because, in the eyes of whoever named the book, Naomi does not forgive Ruth for marrying her son? Or because Ruth insists on following Naomi to Bethlehem of her initiative?”⁹¹ This claim of Zefira problematizes ideal relation between Ruth and Naomi which I elaborate in character analysis.

3.3. Inherent Ambivalence in the narrative

The narrative of Ruth implies various states of ambivalence; some of them are underlying in narrative structure whereas some results due to the psychological conflict of characters. Here, in this section, I deal with various such circumstances in Ruth narrative.

The first, state of ambivalence lies in the discrepancies between the title and the plot of the story that I described in detail in above 3.4. The book is named after Ruth, but the entire narrative is presented from Naomi’s perspective. Second, the ambivalent position of the Book of Ruth in Biblical Exegesis. In above 3.3 I described those who emphasize it as a female text argue that the text presents female worldview, but I deconstruct such opinion they base their argument on the delineation of female characters, but the concluding genealogy excludes the name of the female protagonist and establishes the patrilineal lineage of Boaz.

Third, similar ambivalence is observed in Ruth 1:20-21, it reflects her bitterness to the Yahweh by complaining the Yahweh. In 5.2.4. Of this thesis, I have discussed Naomi’s psychological conflict. I examined despite her unsurmountable faith she complains about the misfortune brought by Yahweh in her life. But she accepts such ordeals by changing her name from Naomi to Mara. Fourth, the unknown author’s favoritism to Naomi creates another state of ambivalence in its readers. Ruth’s portrayal as an obedient, docile, and voiceless daughter-in-law while Naomi is given agency and subjectivity. Naomi controls not

⁹⁰ Zefira Gitay, “Ruth and the Women of Bethlehem” in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 178.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

only the narrative but also Ruth's action. It shows the ambivalent attitude of the author toward female protagonists.

Fifth, after the death of Elimelech and two sons, Naomi acts as a representative of her dead husband; her relationship with Ruth seems more ambivalent and ambiguous. Her sending Ruth to Boaz's threshing floor and her mediation in Ruth's marriage with Boaz exemplifies it. Sixth, Naomi seems brave and courageous to Ruth, but she looks submissive toward patriarchy. Naomi's mimicry of patriarchal social norms is the result of her inferiority complex. Thus, in my opinion, due to the presence of such ambivalence in the narrative, the claim '*Ruth* as a feminist text' seems imprecise and flawed.

CHAPTER: IV

4. Characters Analysis Book of Ruth

4.1. Introduction to Character Analysis

According to Saxegaard Biblical narratology is the suitable approach to study Biblical characters.⁹² Saxegaard further contends that "Within the field of narratology, the study of characters is central."⁹³ Characters represent a real-life human being in a narrative. Though they resemble a real-life human being, they are fictional but not the real. In this context, Michael V. Fox describes characters "as if they were real"⁹⁴ stressing the words as if he tries to differentiate literary characters from the real people.

According to Patrick O'Neill, the concept of characterization is a stylistic and narrative technique that represents human features, actions, intentions, desires, and traits in the literary texts. Similarly, they emphasize the interaction of these human qualities with the reader's cognitive strategies for recognizing and developing knowledge about other people. The

⁹² Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 8.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁴ Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology* (Grand Rapids Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 6.

multifarious ways in which characters emerge from the words on the page, in which story-world actors acquire a personality, is one of the most fascinating and least systematically explored aspects of narrative theory and narrative practice.⁹⁵

Characters are the carrier of the action; hence the analysis of the character's action, traits, and utterances, and their relationship with each other helps a narratologist to locate a specific theme in the text. The main characters in the Book of Ruth has some dominant virtues e.g., Ruth is faithful and obedient, Naomi's loyalty to God and Boaz's generosity, compassion, responsibility, and cleverness and finally Elimelech's responsibility and ability to take risk for the family betterment are some unique traits that make them the exceptional literary characters.

4.2. Classification of Characters in the Book of Ruth

Classification of characters is one of the essential tools in narratological analysis. It helps to reveal the significance of a character in the narrative. In addition to that, the study of characters helps us to understand the attitude of the narrator/writer. According to Adele Berlin,

There are two techniques of characterization that are direct and indirect. In Indirect characterization, the narrator directly tells us about the characters. But in indirect characterization narrative reveals its reader about the characters through the narrator in the context of the story. The Biblical narrative uses the technique of indirect characterization mostly.⁹⁶

In the Book of Ruth, the narrator blends both direct and indirect characterization. But the book of Ruth mostly consists of indirect characterization; therefore it is hard to know their feelings, attitude to each other. Most of the time the narrator narrates characters utterances as

⁹⁵ Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 49.

⁹⁶ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983),

well as the past events. For example, Elimelech's family migration to Moab, death of Elimelech and marriage of Mahlon and Elimelech, and their death all are narrated by the narrator.

In this section, I put forward various critics' ideas on character classification and discuss its significance in the book of Ruth. We can classify characters in terms of the quality they hold and the roles they perform in the narrative. For example, in terms of roles, they can be the protagonist, antagonist, foil, main, minor, etc. But in terms of quality they can be round, flat, full-fledged, type, agent, dynamic, static, etc. Since there is no animated antagonist in the book of Ruth; I discuss the classification of characters in terms of quality. In the Book of Ruth Naomi, Ruth and Boaz are the main characters in terms of narrative point of view. While Orpah, Elimelech, Mahlon, Chillion, Obed, Mr. so and so, Neighboring women, Elders of the city, etc. are some of the minor characters.

Defining and classifying character is one of the key tools in the study of narratology. The traits and features assigned to each character determine their characters types. Seymour Chatman describes characters as "paradigms of traits" and quotes psychologist J.P. Guilford's definition of a trait as "any distinguishable, relatively enduring way in which one individual differs from another."⁹⁷

In *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* Saxegaards makes a narratological analysis and explores various inherent complexities of its characters. She claims that "Classifying characters is useful when describing the different characters." She incorporates E.M. Forster, Adele Berlin, Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman and other various scholar's ideas on characters classification.

E.M. Forster divides characters into two types *flat* and *round*. He describes the *flat* as "constructed around a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round."⁹⁸ Round characters according to Forster

⁹⁷ Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (SPCK, 1990), 54

⁹⁸ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold & Co,1927), 93.

are by a range of ideas and qualities very close to the real-life human being. They are like good friends and pleasures its reader each time they appear in the story.⁹⁹ I classify Naomi and Orpah as Forster’s round character because they go through a significant transformation in the narrative. Orpah first, decides to follow Naomi, but later changes her mind (Ruth 1:14). In the narrative, Naomi appears as a silent wife of Elimelech, but after three death her family she appears as one of the principal female characters in the Old Testament narrative. (Ruth 1:1, 3:1-2)

According to Forster flat character is the one who always appears the same in the narrative.¹⁰⁰ He defines flat characters as single dimensional who don’t react or change in response to circumstances¹⁰¹. He argues that “One great advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognized whenever they come in—perceived by the reader’s emotional eye, not by the visual eye. Regarding the nature of flat characters, Forster further says, “A second advantage is that they are easily remembered by the reader afterward. The flat character remain in the reader's mind as unalterable for the reason that they were not changed by circumstances; they moved through circumstances.¹⁰² Ruth, Boaz and minor characters appear as flat because they remain constant and unchanged throughout the story. Ruth’s submissiveness, loyalty, faithfulness remains forever the same while Boaz’s portrayed as a kind-hearted man until the end of the book.

Saxegaards deals with Adele Berlin’s classification of characters in her book. Berlin in her book *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* divides characters into three types: “agent,” “type,” and “full-fledged.”¹⁰³ Berlin categorizes Naomi and Boaz as full-fledged characters, and she defines Elimelech, Chilion, Mahlon, Orpah, Peloni, Almoni, and Obed as “Agents.” According to Berlin Full Fledged characters are like main characters while the

⁹⁹See at 4.3.1 of this thesis p.56

¹⁰⁰ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold & Co,1927), 94.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 93.

¹⁰² Ibid.,

¹⁰³ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 32. Quoted in Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010),17.

agents are the minor characters. Furthermore, Saxegaard asserts that Naomi's identity changes through the narrative: she moves from being Elimelech's wife to a mourning and bitter widow and resigned mother-in-law; she then becomes an arranger of seduction and at last a nurse. All these characteristics make her a full-fledged character.¹⁰⁴

But Berlin emphasizes the character type of Ruth is not that obvious. She may have traits of the "type" but may also be "full-fledged" characters.¹⁰⁵ Berlin's classification of Ruth either 'type' or 'full-fledged' character shows inconsistency in Ruth's character. Such in disparity in Ruth's characters traits is the result of her dependence and lack of subjectivity which I discuss in her character analysis. Thus, Berlin's classification of Ruth provides me a theoretical background to analyze the character, Ruth.

Besides, above-mentioned characters type, some literary theorists also like to divide characters as static or dynamic, depending on whether their basic profile changes throughout the narrative.¹⁰⁶ These two characters types resemble Forster's classification of the characters. Dynamic can be compared with round characters while static characters can be compared with flat character. In the book, Naomi and Orpah fall under dynamic character whereas Boaz and Ruth can be categorized as static characters.

4.3. Naming Female Characters

The objective behind the analysis of the characters' name is to explore the author's attitude toward the characters and their contribution to the development of the narrative. The meaning of the names Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah has a direct link to the identity and subjectivity of these characters.

Ruth is the second most important character in the narrative, but Saxegaard argues that name Ruth has no clear meaning in the story. It refers to, "Comrade, Companion, or

¹⁰⁴ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010),75.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.,17.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Allan Powel, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (SPCK, 1990), 53.

Neighbor.”¹⁰⁷But it doesn’t indicate to a single dominant purpose. I like to link vagueness in Ruth’s name to her double marginalization in the narrative. Saxegaard further claims that “it is so hard to find any plausible meaning for this name while all the other names in the story have rather distinct implications which are significant for the plot.”¹⁰⁸

Similarly, the meaning of the name Naomi (‘נְאוֹמִי’) refers to good, pleasant, lovely, and winsome¹⁰⁹ but there is harsh contrast between what her name suggests and the misery she faces. Naomi’s predicament is obviously opposite to the meaning of her name. This irony between her name and her fate is one of the narrative techniques to show her complicated female identity. The circumstances of suffering from famine and death of her husband and sons has made her life bitter. Later in Bethlehem Naomi changes her name to ‘Mara’ that has clear link to the ‘bitterness’ of her life.

Orpah is the female protagonist with the least role, but her portrayal as opposite to Ruth gives her remarkable position in the narrative. The name Orpah in ancient Hebrew means the ‘neck’ that refers to the sensual part of a woman’s body, or it may also imply “cloud” or even “perfume.” The first connotation ‘neck’ is more appropriate that fits with her act of “turning her back” at Naomi.

4.4. Loss and Gain of the Female Protagonists

The female protagonist in *Ruth* narrative can be compared based on their loss and gain. When the story opens, all three female protagonists have lost their husbands, and are suffering in calamities, and are in search of the new shelter. Naomi desires to leave Moab to act out the trauma of the death of her family members. When Naomi departs for Bethlehem during starvation, she had her family (she is full) but had no food, but in Moab, she gains the food

¹⁰⁷ Lu Yong, “Leadership characters in the book of Ruth: A Narrative Analysis” *Journal of Corporate Responsibility and Leadership* vol.3. issue 3. (2016), 60.

¹⁰⁸ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 106.

¹⁰⁹ Jack Sasson, “The issues of Geullah in Ruth” *Journal for the study of the Old Testament* no 5 (1978), 17.

but loses her family, so she returns to Bethlehem empty-handed.¹¹⁰ It shows that loss and gain follow female protagonists as a shadow does to the object. Naomi explores her grief-stricken self here,

Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah, and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. (Ruth 1:3-5)

The very opening verses of the book, introduces Naomi as 'Elimelech's wife.' (Ruth 1:1-2) Saxegaard writes "in these opening verses, Naomi is referred to the description "wife." That places Naomi close to Elimelech, submissive to her husband, as also the two sons are related to their father not their mother.¹¹¹ The description wife seizes the autonomous female identity of Naomi, and that is the concern of feminist critics. Kate and Reimer in their book *Reading Ruth* claim that "In the story, Naomi, and Ruth embody all these marginalized qualities and challenge the Jewish world to live up to Torah Ideals."¹¹² Naomi's and Ruth's leaving Moab leads to the loss of their identity attached to Moab. First, migrating to Moab along with her husband; Naomi loses her former identity and lives in Moab with a split personality. But later she migrates with Ruth to Bethlehem and Ruth goes through the same predicament.

After reaching Bethlehem Naomi states to the neighboring women, she is an empty vessel (Ruth 1:21). The death of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Kilion is unrecoverable loss in the story, it even deteriorates her faith in Providence, and she develops states of ambivalence (Ruth 1:20) in both female protagonists. Naomi's changing of her name to 'Mara' is the result of

¹¹⁰ Mieke Bal "Heroism and Proper Names, or the Fruits of Analogy," in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 59.

¹¹¹ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 80.

¹¹² Judith A. Kates & Gail Twersky Reimer, *Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), xix.

her bitterness. Naomi turns her distress to God (Ruth 1:13, 20-21). She understands her significant loss as a result of God's punishment and abandonment.¹¹³

CHAPTER: V

5. Analysis of Female Character

In this chapter, I analyze three female characters Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah. I show how Naomi's valorized over Ruth and Orpah. Studying female characters of the Book of Ruth from postcolonial feminist narratology is useful in the understanding of gender dynamics and gender relationships that formulates specific roles for both males and females. Naomi and Ruth's central pursuit in Bethlehem is not anything other than social security, shelter, and food.

My thesis primarily focuses on Naomi and Ruth, but analysis of Orpah helps to understand the conflict of interest and the state of ambivalence in female characters. Thus, in this chapter, I discuss the problematics in the female companion between Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah as a result of the conflict of interest and states of ambivalence in the narrative.

5.1. Character Analysis Ruth

5.1.1. Ruth as an Outsider/Foreigner in Bethlehem

People in Bethlehem know that Ruth is not from Israel (2:6, 11), and she is referred to a Moabite in almost every chapter. (1:22/ 2:2, 6/ 4:5/ 10) Ruth introduces herself as a foreigner to Boaz. (Ruth 2:10) The Hebrew term *gērîm*, usually translated as "sojourners," or "aliens" are those from other groups who have accepted the worship of Yahweh whereas the other group, and the Hebrew term *nokrîm* usually translated "foreigners," are the ones who have not accepted Yahweh.¹¹⁴ Here Ruth in Bethlehem belongs to the group of *nokrîm*, but she confesses and embraces Israelite practices.

¹¹³ Ibid., 89.

¹¹⁴ B. Lang, "nkr," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, IX: 423–31.

There are various references in the book that proves Ruth as a foreigner in Israel. She admits it when talking with Boaz on the threshing floor; “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me since I am a foreigner?” (Ruth 2:11) Boaz says “The Lord recompense you for what you have..., under whose wings you have come to take refuge” (Ruth 2:12). Boaz’s use of the metaphor of refuge visualizes how Ruth’s dependence under the wings of foreign god moreover these verses depicts her condition in a foreign land.

Saxegaard argues that this matter of fact raises a delicate problem since the OT holds a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards foreigners in general and Moabite in particular.¹¹⁵ Saxegaards indicates toward the law of Israel that forbids foreigner, exemplified by the Moabite, to enter the assembly of God (Deut. 23:3), and Nehemiah describes his curses against mixed marriage, where Moabites are specially mentioned.¹¹⁶ In this sense “Ruth the Moabite” is to be associated with immorality, seductive actions, the enemy and not to be forgotten, those who obey foreign gods.¹¹⁷ The Book of Ruth is entirely based on two geographical locations Israel and Mob. Gen 19:30-38 gives us an understanding of the relationships between Israel and Moab. Moab was the land of descendants of Lot, and Israelite believed that they had been conceived in sin. Because of this hostility the marriages between Moab and Israelite people was considered taboo and against God’s command. Numbers 21-25 makes it clear that these two countries did not have a friendly relation.

Naomi’s request to Ruth and Orpah to leave her and return to their mother’s homes is the result of fear of their foreignness. Naomi is afraid of potential hurdles and difficulties she would have to face because of the presence of Moabites Ruth and Orpah. Naomi’s fear is foregrounded on the age-long hostility between Israel and Moab. Thus, foreignness is one of the dominant concepts that the narrative of Ruth deals with, and this experience of foreignness creates hindrances information of personal identity in both Ruth and Naomi.

¹¹⁵ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 200.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

5.1.2. Uncertainty in the Name Ruth

In the previous section, I mentioned that the name Ruth doesn't have clear meaning it loosely indicates toward, 'friend' or 'female companion.' But Adele Berlin argues that "OT personal names are peculiar since they mean something."¹¹⁸ Besides this uncertainty in meaning of her name Saxegaard focuses on the different identity markers of Ruth, "she is called "Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law", "daughter-in-law", "Moabite woman", "Ruth, her daughter-in-law", "daughter-in-law", "daughter", "Ruth, the Moabite, the wife of the dead man", "Ruth, Mahlon's wife", "foreigner", "young girl", "maidservant", and "handmaid".¹¹⁹ Saxegaard provides the significance of each naming on her identity. Saxegaard finds this uncertainty in Ruth's name very interesting. She further claims that it is so hard to find any plausible meaning for this name while all the other names in the narrative have rather distinct implications which are significant for the plot.¹²⁰

Why the author chooses the name 'Ruth' to the character 'Ruth'? This question can be answered by reading between the lines of the book. I discussed already that the author reveals his/her attitude toward characters by assigning them specific names.¹²¹ Ambiguity in Ruth's name is a narrative technique that resembles her foreignness and split self in the narrative. According to Saxegaard, the uncertainty about Ruth's name is the first hint of her mysterious identity which is revealed in the unfolding of the story. She further argues that,

The Ruth narrative offers an ambiguous picture of Ruth's character, which coheres well with her unidentifiable name. Ruth's identity is further stressed through her characteristics as foreigner and handmaid, and also three questions, each asking for her identity. The

¹¹⁸ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 64.

¹¹⁹ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *High Fidelity and Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 110.

¹²⁰ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *High Fidelity and Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 106.

¹²¹ See at 4.2 of my Thesis, 48.

uncertainty surrounding Ruth's characteristics remains when approaching her actions in the plot.¹²²

Ruth as a woman and daughter-in-law, moreover a childless, homeless widow in a foreign land, represents the plight of Israelite women. Saxegaard's ambiguous picture of Ruth fits inf Ruth because I believe that the uncertainty in Ruth's name is guided by the politics of androcentrism that poses severe threats to her autonomous female identity. Saxegaard further argues that Ruth's inner life and traits are not very accessible to the reader.¹²³ Ruth's identity remains a mystery throughout the narrative. Furthermore, at the end of the narrative genealogy silences her voice.

5.1.3. Ruth's Subservience, Devotion or Inferiority Complex?

From a theological perspective, Ruth is one of the highly reputed Biblical women; known for her unquestionable faith and loyalty. But her unbounded loyalty and subservience raise serious concern for feminist scholars. In such an ancient society a woman had to be loyal and submissive not only to the male members of her husband's family instead she had to be faithful and submissive to other senior women of the family as well. Naomi, as the mother-in-law of Ruth, is not only a woman she is also a representative of Elimelech. Therefore, Ruth's assimilation of Naomi's culture, people, nationality and god is her assimilation into patriarchy indirectly. Ruth is loyal to Naomi, but Naomi is faithful to patriarchal societal values that shows how patriarchy functions as a control mechanism in society. When Naomi requests Ruth to go back to her mother's home she replies to Naomi;

Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the

¹²² Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *High Fidelity and Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 128.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 105.

Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”
(Ruth 1:16-17).

The above revelation of Ruth explores her devotion along with inferiority complex. Not only Ruth, but Orpah also seems to understand that there is no other world for them except the world of her husband. Thus, Orpah decides to leave. Therefore, Ruth’s devotion and subservience are the results of patriarchal hegemony that makes her psychologically weak and fragile. Ruth while talking to Boaz remarks,

“May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.” (Ruth 2:13)

Ruth addresses Boaz as ‘lord’ and declares herself as his ‘maidservant.’ By saying I am not like one of your maidservants she wants to say that she is not even equal to Boaz’s maidservant. Her above declaration is the confession of her deficiency and inferiority complex. What would have happened to her, if she had rebelled against the Israelite values? Of course, she would have been restricted or banished from Israel. Brenner describes Ruth’s inability to stand on her own feet, “Ruth followed her mother-in-law (1:16-18) and swore to her faithfulness beyond death. This voluntary undertaking makes it clear that Ruth cannot look for a place of social security on her own.¹²⁴ Ruth is sympathized and finally rewarded for her submissiveness and fidelity by Israelite society. Ruth fits into Israelite social system because she has fully assimilated Israelite patriarchal practices.

In the narrative of Ruth, fidelity, honesty, and faithfulness is accepted as essential features of womanhood. Ruth leaves her culture, religion, heritage and her people to preserve her husband's name. She becomes an epitome of a loyal woman, first and foremost, to her

¹²⁴ Athalya Brenner, *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 26.

husband who willingly participates in the male-centered story assists males to maintain their superiority over her.¹²⁵

5.1.4. Ruth as an Instrument

“All the while Ruth is just an instrument in Naomi’s hand.”¹²⁶ She actively participates in Boaz and Naomi’s plan to deliver an heir for them. Athalya Brenner admits that in its present form the Book of Ruth contains various difficulties which cannot be easily dismissed. One such difficulty she mentions is the birth of Obed. She says, “Although Ruth is the one who marries Boaz and gives birth to a son and heir, Naomi is “redeemed.”¹²⁷ Brenner’s assertion visualizes the condition of Ruth in the story. Roland Boer, a Marxist Biblical thinker, asserts that “Ethnicity, class, and gender – all draw together. Ruth remains a foreign body within Israel, so much so that despite all her protestations of loyalty (1:16-17), she cannot be the mother of the son. In the narrative Obed belongs to Boaz and Naomi; Ruth is merely the vessel by which the son is born.”¹²⁸

Marriage between Boaz and Ruth is the result of socio-cultural factors. This unmatched marriage lacks many prerequisites for a healthy marital relationship. There is less space for emotion and affection in this relation because enriching social values and fulfilling their necessities are the primary objective of this marriage. But this marriage has a common resolution or goal. Boaz is looking for an heir and support in his old age, Naomi is expecting a descendant for Elimelech’s lineage, and Ruth is in search of socio-economic security that is possible only after marrying a man.

¹²⁵ Orit Avnery, “Who is In and Who is Out” *Harvuta* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2010), 74.

¹²⁶ Zefira Gitay, “Ruth and the Women of Bethlehem” in *Feminist Companion to Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 186.

¹²⁷ Athalya Brenner, “Naomi and Ruth” in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 71.

¹²⁸ Roland Boer, *Marxist Criticism of the Bible*, (New York: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2003), 85.

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and when he went into her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. (Ruth 4:13)

Before marrying Boaz, Ruth was Naomi's belonging now she is Boaz's possession. Generally, the newborn child should be passed to the mother's lap, but here the child Obed is moved to Naomi as if she has born him. After the birth of Obed the sovereign right of motherhood shifts from Ruth to Naomi that threatens the female identity of Ruth;

And Naomi took the boy and put him in her arms,
and she cared for him like a mother.
The neighboring women gave him a name and said,
"Naomi has had a son!" And they called him Obed." (Ruth 4:16-17)

Ruth sacrificed everything that belonged to her. After the birth of Obed; she is on the verge of sacrificing her motherhood as well. She becomes a mere instrument in a higher plan of Yahweh. Kwok, Pui-lan writes that

"Ruth disassociates herself from her father's family and joins her husband's family and participates in establishing the monarchy. Although Ruth gives birth to the baby and the women name the newborn, the child is reckoned according to Boaz's family line the closing genealogy."¹²⁹

The marriage between Ruth and Boaz is a significant event because it provides Naomi inheritance, Boaz an heir and motherhood to childless and widowed Ruth. This marriage is even more crucial from the theological perspective because it opens the door to the Davidic dynasty. But, this marriage seems problematic from a postcolonial feminist perspective. It could be said that the marriage between Ruth and Boaz was less a matter of celebration for Ruth instead it was an achievement for Naomi and Boaz because according to the provision

¹²⁹ Pui-lan Kwok, "Finding a Home for Ruth: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Otherness" *In New Paradigms for Bible study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, ed. Fowler, Robert M., (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 137.

of levirate law the first child would inherit Naomi's dead husband and would give Boaz an heir.

Ruth is a selfless woman who entirely devotes herself to Naomi. She could have turned away from Naomi and started a new life in Moab. Instead, she abandoned all her nearest and dearest to walk on the path of faith toward Yahweh. Ruth becomes an instrument in the higher plan of Yahweh because the intention of Yahweh in the book is to provide a ruler for the Israelite people through Ruth. Thus, Yahweh used her because she trusted in and committed herself to Yahweh (Ruth 1:16-17). But it was not forceful; instead, it was voluntary. It is her faith, despite her natural condition, made her usable by God.”¹³⁰

Athalya Brenner remarks that Ruth's portrayal in the story is like a surrogate mother; whose task is to deliver a baby for Naomi and Boaz. Brenner further argues that “Ruth is described as the agent of redemption, but not as the chief beneficiary.¹³¹ But Saxegaard compliments Ruth, as a brave, never-complaining, hard-working and sacrificing woman. Who follows Naomi on her way back to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:7, 19, 22) the barley harvest provides her elderly mother-in-law food (Ruth 2:3—18), seeks Boaz at the threshing floor (Ruth 3:6—15), and finally she becomes Boaz's wife and delivers a son (Ruth 4:13).¹³²

5.1.5. Hierarchy based on Gender: Gleaning as a Feminine Task

There are various references in the Book of Ruth that emphasizes the existence of hierarchy within ancient Israel. Such a hierarchy is formulated in terms of economic condition, gender, and religion, etc. Ruth remains at the margin in terms of all these three parameters. She is a poor gentile woman from a foreign land. A wealthy male like Boaz is at the top of such hierarchy who influence the social decision-making process. Roland Boer emphasizes the gender hierarchy in Ruth narrative;

¹³⁰ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, “Dr. Constable Notes on Ruth” (Sonic Light, 2017), 6.

¹³¹ Athalya Brenner, “Naomi And Ruth,” *Vetus Testamentum*, vol.33, no.4. (1983), 71.

¹³² Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 105.

There were female workers in the field. Ruth 2:23 suggests most clearly that young women glean rather than reap. For this story, the women workers occupy the lowest rung in the work hierarchy. As for Ruth, she is one of the laborers but one step down from the lowest group, a female servant who is not like one of Boaz's female servants.¹³³

The Book of Ruth doesn't depict gender violence and discrimination explicitly, but it reveals that gender hierarchy precludes female autonomy.¹³⁴ The ancient Israel society illustrated in the Book of Ruth hierarchically structured men were placed at the top while the females are represented at the lower strata of such hierarchy. Unfortunately, the females of such society internalize such hierarchy since they were not able to resist such practices. Ruth's following statement reflects her internalization of patriarchy;

Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. (Ruth 2:2)

In harvesting field of Boaz, women are assigned the role of gleaner; they follow male reapers to collect the leftover grain. The primary responsibility in harvesting work is provided to the male reaper, but the secondary job gleaning is assigned to woman. It visualizes the subordination of female in the economic field as well. Ruth uses the pronoun 'him' because she knows that the males are the reaper and primary job of the female is gleaning in the harvesting. Further, it emphasizes how a woman of ancient Israel must live under the grace of rich and powerful male.

Similarly, Kirsten Nielsen in her book *Ruth* exposes how the women in ancient Israel were considered as male's possession; she writes Boaz asks his supervisor who the girl belongs to? (Ruth 2:5). Nielsen says the same formulation is used in Gen. 32:18 and 1 Sam. 30:13. It is clear that the males in ancient Israelite society take women as an inferior person or they are

¹³³ Roland Boer, *Marxist Criticism of the Bible* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 2003), 79.

¹³⁴ Carol Meyers, "Returning Home: Ruth 1.8 and the Gendering of the Book of Ruth," in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield:Sheffield Academic Press,1993), 109.

identified through the name of their master. As for Ruth, the supervisor can say that she is a Moabite woman and that she is the one who came home from Moab with Naomi. In this way, Naomi and Ruth are linked in Boaz's consciousness.¹³⁵

Katharine Doob Sakenfeld is close to Nielsen in her argument, concerning her views on the status of woman in ancient Israel society. Sakenfeld argues that the long term socio-economic security of women depends on her marriage with one of the wealthy man of the community. This approach to economic security, it is rightly argued, is not structurally adequate to the full humanity of women as it is understood at the turn of the millennium, at least in most western cultures.¹³⁶ The above discussion provides us enough strength that Ruth, who has forsaken her past and assimilated Israelite religion as her own, has to live under male patronage for socio-economic security.

5.1.6. Threshing Floor Scene and the Question of Morality

Ruth in the threshing area risks the same outcome as Tamar did with Judah in Genesis 38.¹³⁷ Naomi's suggestions to Ruth to go to the threshing floor has initiated a debate.¹³⁸ The threshing floor scene is erotic that depicts the patriarchal image of the woman as a seductress.¹³⁹ Naomi's act of sending Ruth to Boaz's threshing floor seems ironical and ambiguous. Saxegaard describes it as an example of ambiguity in the *Ruth* narrative.¹⁴⁰ Naomi's following instruction to Ruth attracts the concern of the feminist critics,

wash and anoint yourself,

¹³⁵ Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*. (London: SCM Press, 1997), 57.

¹³⁶ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth*. (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 10.

¹³⁷ André LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2006.), 104.

¹³⁸ Ilona Rashkow "Ruth: The Discourse of Power and The Power of Discourse," in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 37.

¹³⁹ Orit Avnery, "Who is In and Who is Out" *Harvuta* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2010), 74

¹⁴⁰ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 157.

put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor;
but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and
drinking. (Ruth 3:3)

Naomi's selection of words 'washing', 'anointing' and 'clothing' stir sensations and depicts her implicit interest. Naomi's instructions to Ruth to wash and anoint herself can be interpreted as Naomi teaching Ruth about Israelite hospitality. Since Ruth is new to Bethlehem, Naomi's teaching could be taken as the part of daily activities of maintaining hygiene and sanitation because the climate was hot and water was scarce, and people were not fully aware of the importance of health and sanitation."¹⁴¹ But for Saxegaards, such preparation of Ruth resembles a prostitute preparing herself to serve her client.¹⁴² Naomi instructs Ruth as an experienced instructor to influence Boaz by bestowing herself on his feet. Naomi says to Ruth,

When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do. (Ruth 3:4)

The instruction, 'uncover his feet' carries sexual connotations¹⁴³ and euphemism as well. It is interpreted in diverse ways by the critics; because the word 'feet' used to refer to the man's genitals in ancient times. Ludwig levy interprets it as the quasi-universal erotic symbol in the context of ancient Israel. She presents foot as a masculine symbol, and of the sandal as a feminine symbol.¹⁴⁴ But whatsoever, Naomi's act of sending her widowed daughter-in-law to visit a stranger at night is an immoral act from a religious point of view. Such an act if

¹⁴¹ Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth and Esther* (WBC 9; Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1996), 150; Bush refers here to Deut 28:40; Mic 6:15; 2 Sam 12:20; 2 Chr 18:15.

¹⁴² Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 139.

¹⁴³ Ilona Rashkow "Ruth: The Discourse of Power and The Power of Discourse," in *Ruth and Esther : Feminist Companion to Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 37.

¹⁴⁴ André LaCocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2006.), 103.

exposed would have raised contempt and humility to both of them. Orit Avenery claims the scene of the threshing floor as the objectification of feminine values she further argues that,

Women are turned from actors into objects. Ruth, who initiated the whole process, becomes the object of contractual acquisition, handed over to Boaz in the same fashion that he acquires the lands of Elimelech, Naomi's late husband. Boaz's words "to the elders and all the people" clearly summarize the transaction and support a patriarchal reading of the whole story.¹⁴⁵

Saxegaard seems critical towards Naomi's act of sending Ruth to the threshing floor, Saxegaards interprets, "Ruth also dresses up and offers herself to a drunken Boaz at night, calling herself "your handmaid." These traits are otherwise regarded as unacceptable within the broader literature of the OT, and therefore make her identity much more ambiguous than her traditional portrayal suggest."¹⁴⁶ This act of Naomi and Ruth deteriorates their veneration, but their indignity is the result of a socio-cultural belief system that they are unaware of.

5.1.7. Intercultural/Interracial Marriage

I section 5.1.1.; I discussed that Ruth is among the few foreign women in the Old Testament narrative. She marries twice in the story, and both marriages are intercultural. Ruth's Moabite identity indicate tensions between endogamy (the custom of marrying only within the limits of a local tribe or clan) and exogamy (the tradition of marrying outside a tribe or clan)¹⁴⁷.

Outside the Book of Ruth, there are some other references of intercultural marriage in the OT. Despite Deuteronomy's prohibition in intercultural and interracial marriages;

No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of

¹⁴⁵ Orit Avnery, "Who is In and Who is Out" *Harvuta* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2010), 74.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ Lu Yong, "Leadership characters in the Book of Ruth: A narrative analysis" 2016, 61.

the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt... you shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live.” (Deut. 23.3-6)

Though Deuteronomy forbids relation with non-Israelite, Exodus 2:15–22 describes Moses’s wedding with a foreigner Midianite woman named Zipporah and, Samson marries Delilah, a foreign woman. Above remarks from Deuteronomy visualizes the existing rivalry and feud between various ancient Israelite tribes. But, Ruth’s subservience, devotion, loyalty, commitment and unquestionable faith toward Yahweh make her acceptable among the enemies.

Marriage as a social institution, it is based on a contract between male and female to live their life together. According to patriarchal norms, after marriage, a woman must leave her parents’ home and migrate to her husband’s home. This sort of cultural practice compels a woman to assimilate into a new society its cultural and religious traditions. In Ruth narrative, we see Ruth’s identity changes from Moabite to an Israelite after getting married to Boaz. The intercultural marriage changes whatever belongs to her not only that it affects her socio-cultural and religious identity as well.

Marriage has been an essential medium of socialization since ages. Athalya Brenner remarks that women can achieve integration in the host community after the marriage where cultural, religious, linguistic, ethnic and similar variables can be overridden. Therefore, Brenner argues that Ruth is a prime example of this reality. As a low-class foreign woman, a worker without property, who could become invisible in the Israelite community but she becomes able to acculturate into Israelite society by marrying Boaz.¹⁴⁸ But Brenner again says, though marriage helps to acculturate full integration even in the case of Ruth, an exemplary female character in many ways, is in fact, impossible.”¹⁴⁹ Therefore, Brenner highlights that marriage provides a woman an opportunity to acculturate into mainstream patriarchal society.

¹⁴⁸ Athalya Brenner, *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 160–61.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 162

Ruth's marriage with Boaz plays a very dominant role for Ruth's assimilation and acculturation into the ancient Israelite community.

5.1.8. The Levirate Law and objectification of Women

The levirate marriage, known as Yibbum in Judaism, is an old ritual practice of ancient Israel in which a childless widow has to marry one of the brothers of his deceased husband. The Hebrew Bible reinforces the provision of levirate marriage. There is another references of levirate marriages between Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar in Gen. 38:8.

It is mention that, If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go into her and take her as his wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. The first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel". (Deut. 25:5-8)

The levirate marriage can be directly linked to the concept of objectification of women that is highly discussed in postcolonial studies. Postcolonial thinkers believe that colonial mechanism objectifies colonial subjects. But postcolonial feminist thinkers are concerned about the objectification of womanhood in a male-dominated society. The customs of levirate law objectifies womanhood by considering a woman as a mere object to be possessed. Burrow Millar states that, according to Deuteronomy, the primary goal of levirate marriage is to provide the deceased with an heir.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Sakenfeld raises the questions, does the use of 'acquire' in verse 5 reduce Ruth's personhood treating her property to be purchased...¹⁵¹ Such an issue can be answered by studying her from a postcolonial feminist perspective.

¹⁵⁰ Millar Burrows. "Levirate Marriage in Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 59, no. 1. (1940), 30.

¹⁵¹ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 71.

Ruth as a widow must obey the decision of elders of the society. Her interest and willingness is rarely a subject of discussion. But, the levirate law is not always forceful because in some circumstances the wife of deceased voluntarily proposes levirate marriage to maintain socio-economic security and livelihood. Boaz is not a real brother of Ruth, but Naomi and Ruth adapt the law to their purposes.¹⁵² Though the widow expresses her consent for levirate law, the role of socio-economic and religious-cultural factor cannot be neglected. Ruth is not externally forced to marry Boaz, but she is tied with circumstances that she has no other alternatives than marrying a man of her grandfather's age. Boaz's given dialogue at the city gate clarifies the motif of the levirate marriage between Boaz and Ruth;

You are witnesses today that I have acquired from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife to raise a descendant who will inherit his property so the name of the deceased might not disappear from among his relatives and from his village. You are witnesses today. (Ruth 4:9-10)

At the city in front of the witnesses, Boaz declares that he acquires the Elimelech's belongings including Ruth and piece of land. The information piece of land he intentionally brings into the discussion because it is just a part of his trick, but his prime concern was to acquire Ruth along with the piece of land.

5.1.9. Fertility as an Essential Trait of Womanhood

According to Saxegaard childlessness is a recurrent theme in OT narratives.¹⁵³ Famine in the Bethlehem and childlessness of women protagonists have close connections in the story. Climatic drought compels Elimelech to take shelter in Moab. Similarly, infertility and childlessness of female protagonists oblige them to leave Moab and find favor in Boaz's household (Ruth 3:1-4). Naomi's anxiety of childlessness is the upshot of patriarchal gender

¹⁵² Orit Avnery, "Who is In and Who is Out" *Harvuta* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2010), 76.

¹⁵³ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 140.

roles which expects a woman to bear children. In ancient Israelite society barrenness and childlessness were treated as an ultimate disgrace and viewed as a sign of divine disfavor. Not only that, it was believed that God was responsible for the closing and opening of the womb of a woman (Gen. 29:31-32).

The Israelite family was in all periods a male-headed household where childbearing and nurturing was the primary task of women.¹⁵⁴ But ambiguity in Ruth's characterization is that on the one hand she is given a highly reputed position in Israelite society. On the other hand, she appears as mere seed bearer in the story. The condition of Ruth resembles Hager from Abraham's story where Hager is coerced into serving as a surrogate for the barren Sarah.¹⁵⁵ Precisely, the purpose of Ruth marriage to Boaz is to provide an heir to Boaz. The concluding genealogy reduces Ruth's role as seed bearer or a surrogate mother. Such representation of Ruth is the result of the patriarchal ideology that stereotypes woman as a mere childbearing machine. Naomi's request to her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers-in-law home demonstrates her lamentation of being old, infertile and childless. Therefore, she instructs Ruth and Orpah to leave her;

Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? (Ruth 1:11)

Naomi and Boaz's desire for a descendant and continuity of family lineage is directly linked to the fertility and childbearing. We see Orpah's return to her mother's home and Ruth's acceptance of marriage with Boaz without any questions all directly link to the childbearing. Avnery Orit argues, Ruth appears as a surrogate mother, her womb is hired by Boaz and Naomi to bear descendent for them. Neighboring women do not take an interest in her until she bears the child but interestingly even after the child is born, she is dumped aside and the child is of Ruth is addressed as her son. And Naomi, too, is but a secondary player in the

¹⁵⁴ Phyllis Ann. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1997), 55.

¹⁵⁵ John Lee. Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 19.

narrative of patriarchal lineage”.¹⁵⁶ Naomi, Ruth and other neighboring women in Bethlehem have internalized the significance of childbearing as an essential requisite of womanhood in a patriarchal society.

5.1.10. Conclusion

After a brief examination of the character of Ruth, I conclude that Ruth is the specimen of naïve and innocent Biblical women and her representation in the story deconstructs her pre-established image. I discovered that there is an intersection of various external and internal factors in Ruth narrative that subordinates her female autonomy and existence. The intersection of gender, race, culture, and religion makes her indeed a marginalized character not only in terms of gender instead in diverse ways. I depicted that, her doubly marginalized condition in the narrative first by patriarchal societal norms and second by her mother-in-law poses a challenge to the gynocentrism of Ruth narrative.

I discussed uncertainty in Ruth’s name, her foreignness, inferiority complex, interracial marriage, and objectification through levirate law as some of the key characteristics of Ruth narrative that makes her mere puppet on the hand of patriarchal society as well as her mother-in-law. Though feminist critics view the tenants of gynocentrism in her representation, I like to question such gynocentrism of Ruth by problematizing her relationship with other female protagonists. Adrien J. Bledstein says, “As reflected in the opening and closing of the book, the social circumstances are androcentric. A man determines the movement of the family in the first instance, and the line of male genealogy from Perez to King David concludes the book, within the story men, hold wealth and power, and the laws are meant to protect a male inheritance.”¹⁵⁷

My analysis of Ruth emphasized that Ruth as a good companion of Naomi co-operates her in every hardship, but her devotion and faith to Yahweh are taken as her weakness that is used

¹⁵⁶ Orit Avnery, “Who is In and Who is Out” *Harvuta* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2010), 76.

¹⁵⁷ Adrien J. Bledstein, “Female Companionship: If the Book of Ruth were Written by a Women”, in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 119.

as a weapon to silence her voice. Thus, her silence and passivity in the narrative are presented as a sign of marginalization. One of my aim in the analysis of Ruth through Postcolonial Feminist narratology was to show how the author provides her dominant role but devoid of subjectivity.

5.2. Character Analysis: Naomi

5.2.1. A Journey from Margin to the Center

Athalya Brenner in her book *Ruth and Esther* writes “in the very opening of the Book of Ruth the wife Naomi, is first of all characterized as Elimelech’s wife (Ruth 1:2)—a common definition of women’s identity in a patriarchal society.”¹⁵⁸ Naomi’s adversity compels her to change because there was no alternative left to her. The story emphasizes how a marginal female character is represented as the principal protagonist of the book; thus the book deals with the fundamental question of how the fringes of Jewish society become a part of the center?”¹⁵⁹ Naomi’s conversion from submissive housewife to a courageous mother-in-law is the departure point and one of the remarkable transitions in the story. From the perspective of Naomi the Book of Ruth a unique Biblical narrative, that subverts the traditional center/margin dichotomies by bringing the margin to the center.

Naomi’s physical journey from Moab to Bethlehem is very significant in the narrative. It is not a mere physical journey; rather it symbolizes her transition from margin to the center.

With her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

(Ruth1:7)

¹⁵⁸ Imtraud Fischer, “The Book of Ruth: A ‘Feminist’ commentary to Torah?,” in *Feminist Companion to the Bible* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 25.

¹⁵⁹ Orit Avnery, “Who is In and Who is Out” *Harvuta* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2010), 73.

The Ruth narrative provides minimal descriptions about Naomi but from her conversation with other women, we can conceptualize her character type, as a typical ancient Israelite woman, she shows unquestionable loyalty to her dead husband. Naomi followed her husband on the journey to Moab. But after ten years her daughters-in-law Ruth accompanies in her journey back to Bethlehem. Back in Bethlehem Naomi acts as a representative of Elimelech's patrilineal family lineage.

My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for.
(Ruth 3:1)

The most striking characteristic of Naomi is her adaptability to the situation; she easily adapts herself to the changed situation. Her changing of the name from Naomi to 'Mara' depicts her realization of changed personality. This changing of the name from Naomi to Mara describes Naomi's assimilation and acceptance of providence of Yahweh. Changing someone's name is a well-known practice in Old Testament Literature. Abram and Sarai attain new names as Yahweh makes a covenant with Abraham, promising him heirs. (Gen. 17:5) This change of name from Naomi to Mara is a significant transformation in the book.

Do not call me Naomi. Why do you call me Naomi? When Yahweh has testified against me, and Shaddai has brought calamity upon me? I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me. (Ruth 1:20-21)

This dynamicity of Naomi makes her the heroine of the story together with her daughter-in-law Ruth. Being a childless widow was a terrible experience for women especially in ancient Israel they are placed at the bottom of the society and is among 'the marginalized.'¹⁶⁰ But Naomi courageously transforms her position from margin to the center.

¹⁶⁰ Cheryl B. Anderson, "Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic Law," *Journal for the study of the Old Testament Supplement*, series 394. (2004), 54.

5.2.2. Germination of Seeds of Matriarchy in Ancient Israel

Naomi uses the word 'Mother's home' in the very first opening verse when she requests her daughters-in-law to return to her Mother's home. But such utterance seems intentional rather than accidental;

Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and me. (Ruth 1:8)

Saxegaard argues that "Mother's House" rarely occurs in OT.¹⁶¹ There is differing opinion about the use of 'Mother's house' Saxegaard quotes Laila Leah Bronner who said, "mother's house is linked to love, wisdom, women's agency, and marriage."¹⁶² But in my opinion, the crucial change in Naomi's attitude toward Ruth is the result of her repressed desire to be a matriarch. Naomi allies with Boaz, she decides on her behalf, instructs Ruth to go to the threshing floor. All these acts show Naomi's imitation of patriarchal social norms. Naomi's influential personality and inherent positive virtues help to germinate seeds of matriarchy through her.

Athalya Brenner in her article "Naomi and Ruth: Further Reflection" gives a similar opinion and shows how Naomi is valorized over Ruth and Boaz. Brenner points out that "At the end of the narrative (before the genealogy), both Ruth and Boaz lose their subjectivity; Naomi and Obed retain theirs. Obed is the true 'redeemer' but in terms of the text a baby, a voiceless minor. Naomi, who puts the baby in her lap, performs the last act."¹⁶³ Brenner's above statement is evidence of the emergence of Naomi as the mighty matriarch.

¹⁶¹ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 135.

¹⁶² Laila Leah Bronner, "The invisible Relationship" (1999), 188. Quoted in Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 135.

¹⁶³ Athalya Brenner, "Naomi and Ruth: Further Reflections," in *Feminist companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 141.

5.2.3. Imitation of Patriarchal Values: An Act of Mimicry

Naomi's sending Ruth to the threshing floor, her alliance with Boaz is the result of her patriarchal influence. From the postcolonial feminist perspective, Naomi's gynocentrism appears as a mere imitation of patriarchal values. Though Naomi is female, she acts as a representative of Elimelech. It shows her split identity; she seems to be torn in-between two male and female self.

In Naomi's perspective, her daughters-in-law have no advantages following old woman like her because she doesn't have any possibilities of giving birth to sons that could be their future husbands. It shows that the women too seem to see themselves as part of a patriarchal system. Naomi's agenda focuses on woman's role as child-bearers.¹⁶⁴ Naomi says to her daughter-in-law,

“Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons.” (Ruth 1:12)

The given remark of Naomi is sarcastic. What could be more painful than this? Why does Naomi regret that she is unable to bear a son? It is the most painful and bitter reality that threatens the so-called harmony between female protagonists. It visualizes the inferiority syndrome of Naomi that has not been discussed briefly by Biblical feminist yet. Naomi surrenders to patriarchy and instructs Ruth to do so. In her above speech, Naomi is revealing her inability to take Ruth and Orpah to Israel. Naomi's frequent repetition of 'sons' and 'husband' shows her valorization of male over her daughter-in-laws.

Naomi fails to persuade Ruth to return to her mothers home; instead, she clings to her. Fewel and Gunn speculate, Naomi requests her two daughters-in-laws three times to “return” to

¹⁶⁴ Orit Avnery, “Who is In and Who is Out,” *Harvuta*, (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2010), 74.

their own mothers' home. (1:8, 11, 12) It indicates not only her self-centeredness but also her unease at Ruth's Moabite origins.¹⁶⁵

Naomi's allies with Boaz shows her implied interest in using Ruth for her benefits. From a mother-in-law, she appears as a representative of patriarchy. Postcolonial thinker Franz Fanon's concept, *Black Skin, White Mask* suits Naomi's act of mimicry of patriarchal values. The idea of Black Skin, White Mask examines how colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is taught, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors.¹⁶⁶ Naomi appears with a double standard, on the one hand, she seems a caring mother-in-law for Ruth, but on the other hand, she imitates patriarchal values and acts in favor of the patriarchal social system.

Naomi has internalized her inferiority in a male-dominated patriarchal society; she has internalized role of the female as a child-bearer.¹⁶⁷ She seems indoctrinated by patriarchal ideology, and that is revealed in her blessing to Ruth and Orpah as well;

“The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.”
(Ruth 1:9).

For Naomi, a woman is incomplete until she is married and begets a child. Though Naomi seems courageous in front of Ruth, she neither can raise voice against the male domination, nor she has any realization of her inferiority. In the ancient patriarchal society virtues like courage, rationality, and decisiveness are considered male's possessions whereas women are provided with attributes like submissiveness, loyalty, and faithfulness, etc.

¹⁶⁵ Fewell & Gunn, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth*, (Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, 1990), 74.

¹⁶⁶ Ziauddin Sardar, “Foreword to the 2008 Edition,” In Franz Fanon, *Black Skin While Mask*, Rep. 2008, (London: Pluto Press, 2008), x.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.,

5.2.4. Ambivalence: Complaints and Acceptance

After losing her husband and sons, Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem. Her decision of leaving Moab shows that she either fears with her future in Moab or she wants to act out the trauma of the unrecoverable loss. It generates a state of ambivalence in her that results in her changing of the name from Naomi to 'Mara.' After reaching Bethlehem she unleashes her grief, expressing bitterness and rage to the emptiness of her present circumstances (Ruth 1:9).¹⁶⁸ Naomi to her old acquaintances says,

“Don’t call me Naomi, ” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.” (Ruth 1:20-21)

Naomi, a genuinely faithful devotee of Yahweh, starts complaining about the providence in front of other women. Saxegaards explains turmoil faced by Naomi in her own words, “in Naomi’s eyes, God’s hand has “turned against” (1:13); he has “testified against her” and “brought calamity upon her” (1:21). It implies an understanding of punishment, “certain guilt” presupposed on the part of Naomi.¹⁶⁹ Though Naomi makes complaints against Yahweh, she bestows unlimited faith throughout her life that exemplifies the state of ambivalence Naomi goes through.

5.2.5. An Irony: Seduction for the Sake of Redemption

Book of Ruth carries some bitter ironies, and one of such irony is Naomi’s act of sending Ruth to the threshing floor. Naomi seems courageous and brave in her words, but she appears weak and submissive in her actions. She clings to duty, morality, and ethics strictly but she

¹⁶⁸ Adrien J. Bledstein, “Female Companionship: If the Book of Ruth were Written by a Women”, in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 121.

¹⁶⁹ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010), 90.

supports Boaz's trick and acts immorally at the same time. So, in Ruth 3, Naomi conceives of what is essentially a mythic drama, a sacred marriage in the grand traditions of the ancient Near East. She asks Ruth to dress up, anoint herself, and go down to the threshing floor. Boaz will be sleeping alone there to protect the harvest. Ruth is to uncover his feet (or his genitals) and lie down and follow the man's instructions.¹⁷⁰

Naomi is worried about Ruth's socioeconomic security, but she puts Ruth's morality at risks by sending her to the threshing floor. It is not difficult to speculate that her purpose behind sending her to the threshing floor at night is to seduce Boaz. Naomi's concern for Ruth's future is justifiable, but Naomi has an implied intent behind it. This act of Naomi raises suspicion on their harmonious relationship. In my opinion, Naomi's intention behind sending Ruth to the threshing floor is the result of her self-centeredness to provide a descendant to her dead husband's lineage. Such an act could never be justified as moral in a civilized society.

5.2.6. Preference of Son and Male Lineage: Gender Discrimination

The longing for son is reflected in the Book of Ruth many times. It is not the only the book that depicts gender discrepancy; instead, there are various references in OT that represents the longings for son child and continuity of male family lineage. Naomi regrets to her daughter-in-law for not being able to reproduce sons.

Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons. (Ruth 1:12)

This question of Naomi to Ruth and Orpah puts a question mark on the autonomous female identity and subjectivity. It further poses a severe matter, why Naomi is so worried for sons and husbands for Ruth and Orpah? In my opinion, Naomi's skepticism toward Ruth and

¹⁷⁰ Jill Hammer, "Ruth and Naomi: The Return of the Seed," *The Journal of The Academy for Jewish Religion*, vol. 7, no. 1. (2011), 13.

Orpah is the result of a patriarchal belief system that considers women as weak, fragile and emotional. Since there are no male members left in her family to act as kinsman-redeemer Naomi suggests them to go back to their mothers' home to find a husband since she doesn't have a near of kin in her family to redeem them. Various laws of the Pentateuch mentions that a kinsman-redeemer must be a male; it is a male relative who is given the privilege or responsibility to work on behalf of a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need.

Susan Ackerman in her article "Women in Ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible" argues that sons, in particular, were important for maintaining a father's lineage within ancient Israel's system of patrilineal descent and for transmitting through the generations the landholdings that every Israelite family claimed perpetually to hold as its inalienable patrimony.¹⁷¹ Here, in the context of the Book of Ruth Naomi's interest in son have two reasons. First, she desires for son child to provide an heir and descendant to her dead husband lineage and the second, to maintain socio-economic security.

5.2.7. The Quest of Home and Socio-Economic Security

In the very first chapter Naomi requests her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers' home (Ruth 1:8) then in another verse she blesses them to have rest at their husbands home (Ruth 1:9) Not only that the most striking reference of the home is presented in chapter 2. When Ruth informs Naomi about Boaz's generosity to her, Naomi's hopelessness vanishes. Naomi praises Boaz for his generosity. Naomi tells Ruth that Boaz is one of her kin. Boaz's presence circulates rays of hopes to Naomi. Then she says to Ruth;

My daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you will be happy? (Ruth 3:1)

¹⁷¹ Ackerman Susan, "Women in Ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible," in Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion, May 2016.

Naomi's above response to Ruth shows her worries for her future security. But this home doesn't refer to just a structure made out of material like clay, stone, and timber instead it refers to an abstract concept where a woman could feel socially secure and peace of mind. For Naomi, one of the prerequisites of a home is the presence of male because socio-economic security to a woman is possible in male's protection. Naomi's intention here is to find rest for Ruth in Boaz's household.

Besides socio-economic security, Naomi is worried about the Moabite origin of Orpah and Ruth. Therefore, she requests them to return to their mother's home so that they could marry. For Naomi, a woman could only feel secure in her husband's house. Saxegaard remarks that the quest of the home plays the dominant role in the conversion of Ruth from an "outsider" to "Insider" in Bethlehem.¹⁷² Home in a patriarchal society means strong bonds and social security, and in the absence of home, a woman is considered incomplete and insecure. The death of her husband and sons compels Naomi and Ruth to leave Moab.

All three women Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah suffer from a sense of homelessness, and dislocation after the death of their husbands. It demonstrates that the concept of home is directly linked to the presence of a male. Therefore, for Naomi, the existence of home is related to the existence of male. So, here Naomi and Ruth's search of a home is the search of a male who could guarantee their future security. The objective behind Naomi's and Ruth's journey from Moab to Bethlehem is to search a home that is linked to their quest of identity. Pui-lan Kwok in her article "Finding Ruth a Home" states that;

The Judahite mother-in-law, Naomi, wants to find a home for her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth. The Hebrew word translated as "home" (*manoach*) can also mean a place where one can find rest and a sense of security. For many

¹⁷² Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 134.

readers, the word “home” connotes the private sphere of domesticity, shelter, comfort, nurture, rest and protection.¹⁷³

From a traditional perspective, a woman doesn't have a home of her own it is either her father's home or husband's home. However, modern feminist critics go against this traditional definition of home and advocate for the freedom from the confinement of home.

5.2.8. Conclusion

My reading of Naomi problematized the female companionship between Naomi and Ruth from a postcolonial feminist perspective. I depicted how Naomi's imitation of patriarchal social codes resembles the postcolonial act of mimicry that helps her to maintain her supremacy over Ruth, but such actions result in the state of ambivalence. In Bethlehem, Naomi appears as a representative of the patrilineal family lineage of Elimelech than a tender mother-in-law. Similarly, another significant aspect I discussed in the story is the favoritism narrator to Naomi by presenting the story from her perspective and providing her subjectivity and agency.

I discovered that Naomi unknowingly benefits the patriarchal system by sending Ruth closer to Boaz. It depicted how patriarchy uses a woman against another woman to legitimize its existence. Hence, I find Postcolonial thinker Franz Fanon's concept of “*Black Skin, White Mask*” suitable to approach Naomi's personality.¹⁷⁴ I emphasized that Naomi's braveness and courage in front of Ruth is the result of patriarchal influence on her because she remains voiceless in front of the males in the society while she speaks to Ruth and other females of the story. Her voicelessness at the city gate in chapter four (Ruth: 4:1-12) shows her Naomi imitates patriarchal and acts as the representative of patriarchy changes are noticed in her behavior toward Ruth.

¹⁷³ Pui-lan Kwok, “Finding a Home for Ruth: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Otherness” *In New Paradigms for Bible study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, ed. Fowler, Robert M., (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 101.

¹⁷⁴ See above 5.2.3. of my Thesis. p.65.

5.3. Character Analysis: Orpah

5.3.1. Inconsistency in Orpah's personality

The narrative of *Ruth* gives a minimal description of Orpah. She appears in chapter one and soon disappears from the story and is forgotten. But the most striking contrast between Ruth and Orpah is that she seems inconsistent and undetermined than Ruth. Saxegaard argues that “Orpah is one following Naomi’s advice, and the farewell is described with tears and cries. However, her name reveals that her action was perfidy.”¹⁷⁵

Orpah seems self-centered who defies Yahweh’s faith. First, she rejects Naomi’s requests to leave her, but she could not stand long on her decision; she suddenly changes her mind and gets convinced to leave Naomi with watery eyes. Orpah’s choice of leaving Naomi has a striking influence in narrative and her life as well. Patriarchy stereotypes female as inconsistency and irrational being, Orpah sudden decision reinforces such patriarchal stereotypes.

5.3.2. Unwillingness to leave Naomi and Ruth

Ruth and Orpah’s rejection of Naomi’s proposal to leave her proves their intimacy. The scene of Orpah’s leaving emphasizes deep love, affection, and reciprocity between these three female characters.

And they lifted their voices and cried again
Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law. (Ruth 1:14)

There was a specific purpose behind Naomi’s request to Ruth and Orpah to return to their mother’s home. But both Ruth and Orpah rejected Naomi’s proposal with wet eyes.

¹⁷⁵ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 68.

Saxegaard proclaims, leaving her mother-in-law, with crying and tears, is an unwilling action. (Ruth 1:4)¹⁷⁶

Orpah unwillingly follows Naomi's advice. In this regard, Orpah seems more obedient to Naomi than Ruth. For Saxegaard, Orpah is the obedient one, Ruth the one who defies Naomi's instruction.¹⁷⁷ She further remarks "despite how Orpah follows Naomi's guidance, it is her act of leaving which is our final impression of her. Ruth's opposite action should, therefore, be the right one. Her clinging is to be decisive for the plot and Naomi's happiness as well."¹⁷⁸ But Orpah's leaving initiates a new discourse for discussion. But these two women represent two distinct philosophies. Ruth and Orpah choose two different ways; one returns to her people and god whereas the other in the direction of scarcity and struggle.

5.3.3. What forces Orpah to leave Naomi?

There are multitudes of interconnected factor that forces Orpah to leave Naomi. This factor ranges from psychological, socio-cultural to religious. If Ruth could cling to Naomi why does Orpah leave? This fact shows many complicated knots behind the relationship between them. Why these two female protagonists chose two differing alternatives?

We can argue that her inner conflict of interest excites her to take this decision. But her act of separation visualizes the frailty in women relationship, and it deteriorates the entire feminist movement. Orpah rejects Naomi's proposal first, but all of sudden she decides to leave Naomi. Orpah's departure can be justified righteous because it was her compulsion and she made this decision to avoid the stigma of widowhood and childlessness, but the question arises if Ruth could follow Naomi why not Orpah? That portrays Orpah the most inconsistent character in the narrative. In her psychological conflict, self-centeredness wins over her faith and devotion.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 69.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 130.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 130.

The second most vital factor behind Orpah's leaving is socio-cultural. The hostility between Moab and Israel is the apparent socio-cultural factor because Moabites were restricted from entering Bethlehem. Deuteronomy mentions that "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD forever. (Deut 23:3) For women like Orpah socio-economic security is the most dominant factor that compels her to depart from Naomi.

5.3.4. Pragmatism Vs. Self-centeredness

Ruth and Orpah are compared and contrasted based on their loyalty, faithfulness, and devotion. Ruth is considered the most beautiful specimen of these qualities but Orpah the opposite. According to theologian McGee, J. Vernon Orpah made only a profession of faith and failed at the climactic moment; Ruth possessed genuine faith, which produced fruit and works.¹⁷⁹ McGee's comparison between Ruth and Orpah shows these two characters have two opposite virtues one follows reality principle¹⁸⁰ while Ruth follows the principle of faith, devotion, and spirituality. Orpah has an epiphany that makes her leave Naomi and Ruth. Orpah realizes that the path of Naomi is the path of hardship and deprivation

But we can look at Orpah from another perspective as well. She is the victim of her fate so it would be an injustice to tag Orpah as self-centered, and opportunist woman because it was not Orpah's decision to leave Naomi instead it was her obedience to Naomi's request that makes Orpah to leave her. The return of Orpah provides Ruth an opportunity to cling to Naomi because Ruth's journey with Naomi formerly begins after Orpah's leaving.

Here, Orpah seems more submissive and coward in comparison to Ruth because she couldn't resist and made her own decision. But Ruth seems rebellious and strong-minded handling any situation in her favor. This two opposing nature of them makes the former one a minor

¹⁷⁹ J. Vernon McGee, *Ruth: The Romance of Redemption* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1981), 61.

¹⁸⁰ Mieke Bal "Heroism and Proper Names, or the Fruits of Analogy," in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 49.

character, and there is no mention her in the narratives after she leaves. Thus, the story of Ruth and Orpah demonstrates the beautiful tale of the enormous potential for accomplishment where Orpah quits the journey whereas Ruth with incredible faith and loyalty wins over her fate and destiny.

5.3.5. Comparison of Three Female Characters Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah

Study of the relationship between female characters is one of the prime concerns of this thesis. Naomi is central of *Ruth* narrative, but Ruth is of equal importance. Naomi is a complex character, and Ruth is mysterious.¹⁸¹ Contrarily, Orpah is pragmatic. Thus, reading between the lines of *Ruth* narrative reveals the conflict of interest, complexities and the state of ambivalence between and among female characters.

The *Ruth* narrative uses the technique of indirect characterization except in some cases, most of the time we hear the narrator reporting the characters' utterances. In some circumstances, we can observe the complicated relationship between the characters. The frequent communication gap between Naomi and Ruth in the narrative is the result of their complicated relationship. We first see such a situation, when Ruth rejects Naomi's requests to return to her mother's home. Naomi reminds Ruth about the Orpah's return, and she requests Ruth to follow her sister-in-law, but Ruth rejects. Afterward, we see there is no conversation between them during their journey to Bethlehem.

Gitay Zefira asserts that the scene describing the women's return journey is illuminating. They don't speak (1:18); a tense atmosphere has been created.¹⁸² Thus, Naomi's and Ruth's silence during the journey back to Bethlehem has remarkable meaning in the book. Zefira Gitay further argues that,

¹⁸¹ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 170.

¹⁸² Zefira Gitay, "Ruth and the Women of Bethlehem" in *Feminist Companion to Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 183.

In terms of the story, it seems that Ruth doesn't succeed in winning Naomi's favor easily. We recall Naomi's tense attitude toward Ruth on their way back to Bethlehem. And, throughout the entire story, Naomi does not say to Ruth even once that her deeds are, in her view, gracious, or that she considers her a 'worth woman.'¹⁸³

Similarly, Saxegaard connects Fewel and Gunn who remarks that "Ruth's clinging, therefore, be read as the way Naomi probably sees Ruth: "as an albatross around her neck"¹⁸⁴ She further comments, "the picture of the younger clinging to the older has rather tragicomic undertones. Where one should cling to the stronger husband to be secure, Ruth clings to Naomi."¹⁸⁵

There is a short description of the relationship between Ruth and Orpah in the book because they get separated earlier. Both of them are daughters-in-law of Naomi, but they appear as each other's opposite. Orpah is the one who obeys Naomi's instruction and leaves for good, but Ruth clings to her. According to Saxegaard, Orpah and Ruth have three similarities they are both referred as "Moabite women" (Ruth 1:4), "daughter-in-law" (Ruth 1:6, 7, 8), and "daughters" (Ruth 1:11, 12, 13)¹⁸⁶

In 1:16-18 Ruth vehemently denies Naomi's proposal to return, but a critical reader can speculate the dilemmatic condition of Ruth and Orpah at the opening scene. It must have been hard for Ruth and Orpah to decide either to return to their mother's home or to cling to their mother-in-law. Both alternatives could have a perilous effect on them. Returning to mother's home could be a hazardous choice because they might get punished for marrying outside their clan. And clinging to her mother-in-law could also be risky for them because there is an age long enmity between Moab and Israel. Orpah chooses the first alternative and

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.186

¹⁸⁴ Fewel and Gunn, *A Son is Born to Naomi* (1988) p.103. Quoted in Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 130.

¹⁸⁵ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 130.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 68.

Ruth the second. Thus, the scene of separation illustrates the state of ambivalence in Ruth and Orpah.

5.3.6. Conclusion

In the above discussion, I analyzed Orpah from both positive and negative perspectives. From Postcolonial Feminist perspective, Orpah appears as a typical woman under patriarchy who fears to struggle and gives up. Orpah's departure reinforces patriarchal stereotypes about women. Her inconsistency weakens her position in the narrative as well as in entire scripture. Thus, Orpah's role doesn't empower the feminist worldview. Instead, it helps patriarchal discourse and weakens female bonding. Orpah's inconsistency is responsible behind her disappearance from the entire Biblical discourse. Her short-sightedness and immaturity make her a minor Biblical character.

But in my opinion, it would be unreasonable to look Orpahs from this point of view only besides that we should forget the various factors that compel her to quit. Her obedience and straightforwardness should not be undermined that allows Ruth to flourish as a dominant Biblical woman. So balancing both views on Orpah, it could be argued that Orpah is not solely self-centered women. Her departure cannot be blamed alone because it is not her desire to leave; instead, it is the result of Naomi's request as well as various socio-cultural factors.

CHAPTER- VI

6. Character Analysis Male Characters

My purpose of studying male characters is to show the influence of power politics in the representation of the characters in the Book of Ruth. The story emphasizes Boaz as a highly prosperous and wealthy man who is well known for his generosity and kindness while Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion are given minimal roles, and they are presented as escapist. Such disparity in the portrayal of male characters indicates that besides gender biases the story is highly influenced by the dominant power structure in society. Boaz is portrayed as influential and authoritarian he is merry and lives a highly respected life as a guardian, and

plays a vital role in the social decision-making process. Boaz's representation as a superior man in ancient Israelite society and his industriousness and excellent administrative skills resembles colonial authority in the narrative.

Though Elimelech is portrayed as a minor character and represented indirectly through the help of a narrator, he remains as one of the crucial characters of the story because Naomi's loyalty and faithfulness to him make him important in narrative level. Elimelech is the bread earner of his family who leads Naomi and his two sons out of Bethlehem to get rid of the famine. Elimelech is a minor character due to his minimal role, but he helps in the development of the plot. He is the focal point of Naomi's faith that is the foundation of the entire story. Analysis of his character is useful to examine the socio-cultural structure of ancient Israel.

Elimelech is a minor character in the story, but he is an important character from the narrative perspective. Uriel Simon argues that a minor character helps to further the plot while that of others is to lend the narrative greater meaning and depth.¹⁸⁷ But Adele Berlin claims that Elimelech is not a real character, nor are Mahlon, Chilion, Obed.¹⁸⁸ The presence of Boaz overshadows the identity of all these minor male characters. Thus through the analysis of all three male characters, I will reveal the role of the power structure in the book of Ruth.

Boaz is a kinsman of Elimelech, and they represent Israelite patriarchal society. The striking contrast between these two characters is that Elimelech defies god's provision and leaves Promised Land while Boaz is faithful to Yahweh. Elimelech is escapist who leaves Bethlehem in the time of scarcity. On the contrary, Boaz is industrious and encourages people to be honest, faithful and work hard. The cause of Elimelech's death is not revealed but it is assumed that Elimelech might have been punished for the sin of disobedience, but Boaz is merry and lives with sufficiency and prosperity.

¹⁸⁷ Uriel Simon, "Minor Characters in Biblical Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 15, no. 46. (1990), 14.

¹⁸⁸ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 86.

Another striking contrast between Elimelech and Boaz is that Elimelech is the man of courage who takes challenges while Boaz is the man with the tricks as I discussed above in 6.1.4. Boaz used his social position and his power to subordinate Mahlon and proper redeemer's place in the narrative.¹⁸⁹

6.1. Character Analysis of Boaz

6.1.1. Attraction toward Ruth

At the very first sight at gleaning field Boaz seems to be attracted toward Ruth. But Boaz is not in the position of wooing Ruth due to his social reputation and religious faith. Boaz's utterances sound masculine in a tone that treats Ruth as a helpless creature to be protected and patronized. But his protective nature toward Ruth is the result of his interest in Ruth. Boaz says to Ruth;

Don't go to glean in another field, don't go away from here, but stay close to my girls. Keep your eyes on the field. Have I not commanded the boys not to touch you? (Ruth 2:8-9)

By suggesting Ruth not to go anywhere from his field and stay close her girls Boaz wants to show that he is worried about Ruth's security. But Boaz's dialogue to Ruth reveals his attraction toward her. Not only that, Boaz even commands other boys to stay away from Ruth. Overall, Boaz's attitude to Ruth is the reflection of his attraction. Jill Hammer remarks Boaz's inclination toward Ruth as the result of his libido;

As if he is a landed gentleman out of a Jane Austen novel, Boaz rides up and asks: 'whose girl is that?' without any direct language, we instantly feel his interest, even his sexual interest, in Ruth. Boaz orders his staff to treat Ruth well and not to harass her. His order

¹⁸⁹ See 5.1.4. of my thesis, p. 85-86.

reminds us of Ruth's vulnerability: she may be seen as a readily available sex partner by field hands who know she has no protecting patriarch at home.¹⁹⁰

Hammer is extremely offensive toward Boaz because he has overshadowed the positive virtues of Boaz one-sidedly. Hammer has portrayed Boaz as a sex freak loaded with repressed libido in a disguise of a spiritual leader. But I find such offensive remarks problematic. But it is clear that Boaz is attracted to Ruth to materialize his dream of a descendant in his old age. And the purpose of his aid and generosity toward Naomi and Ruth is to influence them. Thus, he is not as selfless and unselfish, as described in the narrative.

6.1.2. A Wealthy Land Owner: A Representative of Patriarchy

Etymologically, the name Boaz means 'strength.' Boaz is the man of strength and wealth besides that Boaz is highly praised for his kindness to his fellow people. The Book of Ruth mentions,

Naomi's husband had a kinsman, one of the great power of the family of Elimelech, and his name was Boaz. (Ruth 2:1)

The narrator highly praises Boaz's faithfulness and devotion toward God. Boaz is portrayed strong, but I view his strength not physical; instead, his power is the result of the socio-cultural construct.

Boaz had power. He had the power of wealth he had power over his employee to make their life beautiful or miserable. He had power over Ruth. He could have denied her access to her field, or he could have let her pick up leftovers or instructed his employee to leave nothing but scraps behind. Boaz has the power of social position in his community¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Jill Hammer, "Ruth and Naomi: The Return of the Seed," *The Journal of The Academy for Jewish Religion*, vol. 7, no. 1. (2011), 12.

¹⁹¹ Norm Wakefield and Jody Brotsma, *Men Are from Israel, Women Are from Moab: Insights about the Sexes from the Book of Ruth*(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 108.

Various factors make Boaz powerful in comparison to other females. His wealth, manhood, and his social position are a source of his power. But, Saxegaard quotes Mieke Bal who shows irony in Boaz's presentation. She says Boaz is presented as "powerful/potent," but ironically the powerful/potent Boaz is the sleeper, the weak, the impotent."¹⁹² Saxegaards further claims that on the one hand, Boaz is described as the rich, mighty, righteous man whose name suggests "strength," on the other hand, he is the old, childless man, who has fallen asleep when Ruth comes to seduce him.

When Boaz sees Ruth gleaning in the field, he asks the in-charge of the reapers, whose young woman is this? (Ruth 2:5) The use of the relative pronoun 'Whose' in postcolonial feminist sense objectifies Ruth's womanhood. Boaz possesses economic resources and means of productions which Sylvia Walby defines as the "patriarchal mode of production"¹⁹³ Boaz not only controls the means of production rather he desires to possess Ruth by interpreting Levirate law for his advantages.

Though Boaz is generous toward Naomi and Ruth, at the same time he exposes his masculine possessive nature when he instructs Ruth in his field,

Don't go to glean in another field, don't go away from here, but stay close to my girls... have I not commanded the boys not to touch you? (Ruth 2:8-9)

Boaz's above statement exposes his masculine nature; he acts as a master and reveals his protective nature to Ruth. Though from theological perspective Boaz appears as a Messiah

¹⁹² Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 75. Quoted in Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 161.

¹⁹³ Sylvia Walby, "Towards a Theory of Patriarchy," Feb, 10th 2019 from <http://www.brown.uk.com/brownlibrary/WAL.html>.

and a redeemer, from the radical feminist perspective Boaz seems a typical representative of patriarchy.

Roland Boer sees Boaz as an exploiter of labor; he asserts that “In the economic picture in the book of Ruth, the Israelites – Naomi and Boaz – are those who do not work, who exploit and live off the surplus labor of others.¹⁹⁴ At the city gate after resolving the case of Ruth’s redemption Boaz in triumphant tone declares to the elders of the city;

You are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech’s and all that was Chillion’s and Mahlon’s from the hand of Naomi. And also Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, have I bought to be my wife, to restore the name of the dead to his inheritance, so that the name of the dead shall not be cut off from among his brothers, and from the gate of his place. (Ruth 4:9-10)

Boaz’s following utterances visualize the real condition of woman in ancient Israel where males are like masters and women are like the captives. They are possessed and owned by males according to their desire. In the concluding genealogy, we see Boaz is given upright position, but it excludes the name of the females. Richard Bauckham in his article “The Book of Ruth and the Possibility of a Feminist Canonical Hermeneutic” writes that;

In the genealogy (4:18-22) a male voice speaks, reciting the patrilineal descent of King David from Perez and attributing to Boaz a place of honor, as the seventh name in the genealogy whose tenth generation is David. In the usual manner of Israelite genealogy, women are excluded as irrelevant to the genealogy's purpose of demonstrating the male line of descent.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Roland Boer, *Marxist Criticism of the Bible* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd. 2003), 86.

¹⁹⁵ Richard Bauckham “The Book of Ruth and the Possibility of a Feminist Canonical Hermeneutic,” *Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 5, no. 1. (1997), 32.

The concluding genealogy deconstructs the gynocentrism of the book Ruth by depicting the politics of androcentrism. The exclusion of the female protagonist from the genealogy shows the act of ‘othering’ female from the male-centric social structure.

6.1.3. A Kinsman Redeemer: A Pseudo Levir

The concept of “Kinsman-Redeemer” is introduced in Leviticus (25:23-55). The idea of redemption has greater theological significance various forms of the Hebrew words translated “redeem,” “redeemer,” “redemption,” and “kinsman-redeemer” appear about 20 times in this book, making redemption one of its key emphases.¹⁹⁶ Naomi calls Boaz “one of our redeemers” (Ruth 2:20). Since Boaz is not the real brother of Mahlon and Chilion, so levirate law is not attracted to their relationship.

Boaz is not lawful to redeem, but he acquires Ruth with the help of strategy. His strategy succeeds in keeping proper redeemer away from Ruth. When the proper redeemer refuses to redeem Ruth and the Naomi+s piece of land it is Boaz as a next of kin shows his interest in redeeming. The next of kin is willing to follow the law of redemption but not the law of levirate.”¹⁹⁷ Boaz seeks for the ways to benefit himself maximum while maintaining his proper family honor; his solution bends the social rules about marriage while adhering to and exceeding the redemption law.”¹⁹⁸

6.1.4. Politics behind Generosity and Kindness: A Trickster

¹⁹⁶ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, “Dr. Constable Notes on Ruth” (Sonic Light, 2017), 7.

¹⁹⁷Pui-lan Kwok, “Finding a Home for Ruth: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Otherness” *In New Paradigms for Bible study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, ed. Fowler, Robert M., (London: T&T Clark, 2004),106.

¹⁹⁸Ibid.,

Boaz, the trickster,¹⁹⁹ is introduced in *Ruth* 2:1 as a mighty kinsman of Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech. Boaz performs tricks intellectually in the well acceptable manner he crosses the socio-cultural boundaries but remains highly reputed. Followings are some of the tricks of Boaz.

Firstly, Boaz is not the brother of Chillion and Mahlon, but he uses levirate law for his benefits. Saxegaard argues that Boaz uses her (Ruth) foreign status to keep Mr. So-and-so away, Boaz can handle the situation well, he realizes that marrying a foreign woman especially Moabite would be blasphemous to him, so he looks for an excuse for marrying a foreign woman. Though he is not a real brother, he finds levirate law suitable. This kind of action makes Boaz a trickster, the universal hero who brings about change in a situation via "trickery."²⁰⁰

Secondly, in the meeting at the city gate, Boaz exposes the secret information about the piece of land that Naomi owns. Saxegaard quotes Sasson's idea 'trump card'²⁰¹ to refer to his trick. Boaz's knowledge of Naomi owning a piece of land works as the secret weapon to keep the proper redeemer away from Ruth. Saxegaard further argues that,

Boaz needs to bring something new into the discussion that he presents himself as a salesman on behalf of Naomi. Boaz declares that he has an interest in buying the land of Naomi, as the redeemer next to the proper one, if the proper redeemer refuses to buy (*Ruth*: 4:4). With these words, Boaz admits his position as the next-in-line-redeemer. The proper redeemer declares his interest, but then, Boaz plays his "trump card," presenting the other side of the deal, which is the Moabite Ruth (*Ruth* 4:5)²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 161.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁰¹ Sasson, "Guellah in Ruth" (1978) 54. Quoted in, Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 161.

²⁰² Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 158.

The information about Naomi owning land is very new information in Israel. But it is just a trick of Boaz to keep away the proper redeemer. With the help of trickery, he makes the whole city gate bless his marriage, and when the son is born, he is named the father and enters the genealogy as the seventh generation.²⁰³ Boaz says to the proper redeemer,

The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabites, the widow of the dead, to restore the name of the dead to his inheritance. (Ruth 4:5)

At the city gate, Boaz appears well planned, and everything goes as his expectation. According to the Jewish law, both the land and the widow must be redeemed together but the kinsman-redeemer wishes to reclaim the property but refuse to redeem Ruth, he replies,

Then I can't redeem, for I do not wish to damage my property. You must redeem what I ought to redeem, for I cannot redeem. (Ruth 4:6).

Thirdly, and most vital trick of Boaz is silencing Mahlon. According to levirate law, the firstborn child from Boaz and Naomi should inherit Mahlon, but Boaz is listed as the legal father of Obed.²⁰⁴ Mahlon's name is excluded from genealogy and Boaz is mentioned as the father of Obed. Exclusion of Mahlon from the genealogy is the result of power politics where Boaz is placed on the top whereas Mahlon at the bottom.

6.1.5. Patriarch Boaz and Yahweh the Redeemer: A Comparison

Boaz is presented as a redeemer to female protagonists in the book. His kindness, generosity resembles godly traits. For Naomi and Ruth, in their destitute, Boaz appears as god the savior. The concept of redemption itself is problematic because it only talks about male redeemer but not a woman redeemer. Thus, the idea of redemption itself is a product of

²⁰³ Ibid., 199-200.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 180.

patriarchal belief system that views a woman helpless object to be redeemed When Boaz sees Ruth gleaning in his field; he shows enormous generosity and kindness to her. Boaz says to Ruth;

Yahweh, Israel's God,
under whose wings you have come for refuge (Ruth 2:12)

Spread your wings
Over your handmaid (Ruth 3:9)

The above 2:12 and 3:9 verses brings Boaz closer to god by making an analogy. Boaz refers to Ruth as refuge under the god's wings in 2:12 but in 3:9 Ruth requests Boaz to spread his wings over her. But this notion of god in the male image has received high criticism from feminist critics. It has focused on the idea that God is imaged as male, and so men can represent God, while women are not able to serve God.²⁰⁵ Naomi refers to an alternative name of Yahweh;

When Yahweh has testified against me
And Shaddai has brought calamity upon me (Ruth 1:21)

Shaddai has rarely used a synonym of God in the Old Testament. Saxegaard quotes Campbell who claims that name Shaddai refers to the patriarchal period. The narrator of the story valorizes Boaz as a wealthy, and powerful man while female protagonist dependent on him it shows the underlying gender biases in the story.

After returning from the gleaning field Ruth explains Boaz's generosity to Naomi, she is overwhelmed to hear about him. She says;

Blessed be him by Yahweh who has not left

²⁰⁵ Daphne Hampson, "The Challenge of Feminism to Christianity," *Theology*, Vol 88, no 725. (1985), 342.

His head from the living nor the dead. (Ruth 2:20)

But Saxegaard argues that Naomi sounds quite unclear because it is difficult to know either Naomi is referring to Boaz or god.²⁰⁶ Boaz's towering personality and his representation as redeemer drags him closer to Almighty God. Therefore, the narrator of the book bestows high tribute to him. Saxegaard further writes, "Boaz is the pillar of the society²⁰⁷ ²⁰⁸ wealthy, worthy, and powerful. He introduces Yahweh's blessings to the narrative, blesses his servants, blesses Ruth the foreigner, and brings food to Naomi."²⁰⁹ But such valorization of male protagonist generates gender biases and skepticism in the narrative.

6.1.6. Relationship between Jews and Gentiles: As Master and Slave

In ancient society, the relationship between Jews and gentile was the relationship between master and slave. Ruth readily declares herself Boaz's maidservant;

"May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord," she said. "You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants." (Ruth 2:13)

Ruth's above remarks remind Exodus. 21:6; Deut. 15:17 which describes slavery in ancient Israel. In Jewish socio-cultural practice, gentiles were considered slaves. Ruth addresses Boaz as the 'lord' and declares herself as his 'maidservant' by saying 'I am not like one of your maidservant she confesses her inferiority in front of Boaz's maidservant. This declaration of Ruth is the result of socio-cultural practices ancient Israel as well as due to her poverty and helplessness that compels her to surrender herself to the wealthy males like Boaz.

²⁰⁶ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 167.

²⁰⁷ Fewel and Gunn, "Boaz Pillar of Society" (1989), 54. Quoted in Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010), 149.

²⁰⁸ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 170.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

Kirsten Nelson in her book *Ruth* writes when Boaz sees an unknown girl gleaning on his field he asks his supervisor who the girl belongs to? Nielsen says, not only Book of Ruth same formulation is used in Genesis 32:18 and Samuel 30:13 as well, that indicates that women are considered inferior to male and they identified through their master (male).²¹⁰ Boaz is a wealthy landowner who acquires Ruth as a piece of property in the following dialogue at the city gate he shows his mastery and superiority over Ruth,

You are witnesses today that I have acquired from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, as my wife to rise a descendant who will inherit his property so the name of the deceased might not disappear from among his relatives and from his village. You are a witness today.”(Ruth 4:9-10)

Character Analysis: Other Minor Characters

6.2. Character Analysis Elimelech

6.2.1. Elimelech a Representative of Patriarchy

The opening verse (Ruth 1:1) of the book describes Elimelech as a man. A man, in a patriarchal society, is responsible for providing food, security to his family. Therefore, Elimelech as a head of Naomi’s family decides to leave Bethlehem to feed his family.

It is true that Elimelech escapes to Moab from Bethlehem due to famine and scarcity. From a theological perspective, he could be charged for his disobedience and opportunist nature, but from a patriarchal perspective viewpoint, he is a true patriarch. Because as a man he has fulfilled the expectation of society. According to patriarchal values a man’s first duty is to protect his wife and family from an impending disaster. Thus, he considers himself superior over his wife. The age of his sons is not mentioned when they migrate, but they must have

²¹⁰ Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*. (London: SCM Press, 1997), 57.

been juvenile to decide migration. And in a society like ancient Israel, women were excluded from such big decision of household which is even illustrated in the scene at the city gate in Chapter four. Therefore, Naomi must not have been responsible for this decision of migration. So, as the head of the family, it must have been Elimelech's decision to migrate to Moab. But the socio-cultural as well climatic factors play dominant roles in this migration of Elimelech's family.

6.2.2. The Irony in the Name of Elimelech

The narrative of the Book of Ruth carries some striking verbal ironies. And one of such crucial irony is the name of Elimelech himself. According to the Hebrew language, the meaning of name Elimelech refers to 'fruitful' and 'fertile.'. Not only that Elimelech belongs to the 'Ephraim' one of the great clans of ancient Israel. But ironically Elimelech does not have any such glory, and he has to escape Bethlehem due to famine and scarcity caused by infertility.

The second he named Ephraim,
For God has made me fruitful
in the land of my misfortune. (Genesis 41:52)

The irony in the name of Elimelech has an implied motive. Saxegard argues, in the opening scene in which Elimelech appears, he shows the opposite qualities of what his family name suggests: a famine comes, three people die, and there are no births.²¹¹ The tragedy of Elimelech and his sons indicates some divine intervention that is one of the turning points in the plot.

Another such irony lies in the name of 'Bethlehem' that has a link with former irony in the name of Elimelech. Literally in Hebrew 'Bethlehem' means the "house of bread." But ironically when the story begins, Bethlehem is engulfed by the severe drought and famine.

²¹¹ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 62.

Thus, this dramatic irony in the Book of Ruth showed the gap between its surface and implied meaning.

6.2.3. Punishment for the Sin of Disobedience

In the Old Testament literature, there are various references to the sin of disobedience. From the genesis to the Book of Ruth the sin of disobedience plays a significant role in the Old Testament narrative. Elimelech was from Ephrath one of the powerful families in Bethlehem. According to the Hebrew language, the term Elimelech meant "may kingship come my way" or "God is my king." Concerning the disobedience of Elimelech Elizabeth Cady Stanton argues that,

Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, is severely criticized by the Biblical writers for leaving his people and his country when in distress and seeking his fortune among the heathen Moabites, thus leading his sons into the temptation of taking strange wives. They say that the speedy deaths of the father and the sons were proof of God's disapprobation.²¹²

Elimelech is disobedient and unfaithful to Yahweh. God had promised the Israelites that if they departed from Him, He would discipline them by sending a famine on the Promised Land (Deut. 28:18, 23, 38-40, 42). So the food scarcity on Israel time indicated God's judgment for unfaithfulness. As Abram had migrated to Egypt because of a famine in his day (Gen.12:10), So "Elimelech" migrated to ("went to sojourn in") "Moab" to obtain food for his family.²¹³ When famine engulfed Bethlehem, he decided to leave his ancestral land Israel which was the Promised Land. Elimelech becomes selfish and only thinks about his family; he listens to his physical hunger forgetting his soul. So, in this battle between Elimelech's body and soul, his body wins over his soul.

²¹² Elizabeth Cady Shanton, "The Book of Ruth" in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,1993), 20.

²¹³ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, "Dr. Constable Notes on Ruth" (Sonic Light, 2017), 12.

A similar reference is found in Exodus 10:22-23 which proclaims; Judgment had come to Israel, and those that remained true to God were able to survive and thrive in these times. Elimelech leaves the promised land of God and goes to land under a curse (Moab). Elimelech's greed for material prosperity and disobedience toward the spiritual authority of God might have some connection to his and his sons' death. But, escaping famine and drought was very common in Old Testament literature. We can find reference of the escapement in the book of Genesis as well; Abram leaves Canaan and goes with Sarah to Egypt because of Famine (Gen12:10-20).

6.3. Character Analysis Mahlon and Chilion

6.3.1. Mahlon's Disappearance from the Genealogy: Politics of Patriarchy

Discussion on Mahlon and Chilion can be useful to show patriarchal biases in text. Mahlon can be read in connection with Boaz because Boaz marries his wife, Naomi. According to levirate law, the first-born child of Boaz and Ruth should inherit Mahlon and prevent his name from disappearing. Saxegaard opines that "one primary aim of levirate marriage between Boaz and Ruth was to preserve the name of the Mahlon, but Mahlon is ignored in genealogy. Saxegaard further says, according to levirate law, the firstborn child from Boaz and Naomi should inherit Mahlon, but Boaz is listed as the legal father of Obed."²¹⁴

I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his hometown. Today you are witnesses!". (Ruth 4:10)

Boaz promises to preserve the name of late Mahlon, but later we see Mahlon's name is not mentioned in the genealogy. It includes the name of patriarchs from Boaz to David.

²¹⁴ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 164.

Generally, we assume that patriarchy has adverse effects on female only. But Mahlon becomes the prey of patriarchal values. Hence, patriarchal ideology doesn't function in terms of gender dynamics alone; instead, it operates according to power relations in society. Naomi is female, but she is delineated whereas as Mahlon is male his name is removed from the genealogy. Exclusion of Mahlon from the genealogy manifests that patriarchy doesn't only obstruct female empowerment; instead, it even degrades males through power politics. We see Boaz who is at the commanding position easily manipulates the social system and silences the voice of powerless.

6.3.2. Mahlon and Chilion- Ephrathites of Bethlehem

saxegaard claims that "Mahlon and Chilion are never described as different from one another. They are presented together the very first time the story opens."²¹⁵ Mahlon and Chilion are characters from the Book of Ruth discussed very little by Biblical critics since they play minimal roles in the narrative. In Ruth 1:2 Mahlon, as well as Chilion, are introduced as the Ephrathites of Bethlehem. Ephrathite is the great clan of Ancient Israel. Both characters possess the title from their ancestors, but their glorious title seems incompatible to their tragic destitute. Representation of Mahlon and Chilion in the narrative The cause of death of all three males Naomi's family is unknown but such untimely death of Mahlon and Chilion makes them tragic figures.

Both Mahlon and Chilion married a Moabite woman and remained childless for ten years (Ruth 1:4-5). According to the Old Testament, childlessness may be understood as the result of someone's sin, namely Mahlon's, whose name implies "sterile" and who had married a Moabite.²¹⁶

6.3.3. Punishment for Intermarriage: A Patriarchal Discourse

²¹⁵ Ibid., 203.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 203.

Mahlon and Chilion are two tragic characters who died at a young age. They are sons of Naomi and Elimelech, who lived in Moab for ten years and got married to Moabite women and faced an untimely death. The causes of their death are not mentioned in the narrative. But from a theological perspective, it is believed that all death of Mahlon and Chilion is the result of intermarriage with Moabite women. Pui-lan Kwok in her article “Finding Ruth a Home” makes the speculation that it might be the result of their disobedience of God’s command. She states that,

The Israelites were admonished not to marry foreign women and worship their God. It was one of the reasons why the immediate next of kin refuse to marry Ruth because she was a Moabite. In fact, according to some rabbinical interpretation, Naomi’s sons Mahlon and Chilion were struck down by God because they had sinned marrying foreign women.”²¹⁷

But I find such speculation somewhat problematic or as a patriarchal discourse to prevent intermarriages. If Mahlon and Chilion could be punished for intermarriage with Moabite women how does Boaz survive after marrying Ruth? Though the real cause of death of Mahlon and Chilion are revealed, it is true that Mahlon is the one who suffers from patriarchal subordination even after his death.

6.3.4. Etymological Analysis of the Name Mahlon and Chilion

The name ‘Mahlon’ refers to ‘sickness’ in ancient Israelite language similarly the meaning of the name Chilion refers to ‘decimation.’ The purpose of the name of both of this character carries a negative connotation, and they face the same predicament as their name suggest. It is obvious for any reader to ask why the parents put such a name to their children?

²¹⁷ Pui-lan Kwok, “Finding a Home for Ruth: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Otherness” *In New Paradigms for Bible study: The Bible in the Third Millennium*, ed. Fowler, Robert M., (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 106.

Mahlon and Chilion are the opposite of Orpah and Ruth, but Saxegaard argues that “not until 4:10 is the reader informed that Mahlon is the late husband of Ruth”²¹⁸ before it was quite unclear who married whom. Saxegaard further writes that which of the men is marrying Orpah and which is marrying Ruth seems entirely incidental. Due to the order of presentations, it seems that Mahlon marries Orpah²¹⁹, but 4:10 makes it clear that it was Mahlon who married Ruth. This overall description makes Mahlon and Chilion very insignificant characters in terms of their role.

6.3.5. Conclusion

Chapter 6 of my thesis comes to a resolution with an insight that the disparity in the characterization of the male characters shows how patriarchy not only subordinates females, instead it could also have adverse effects on males, e.g., unnamed ‘Proper redeemer’(Ploni and Almoni) and Mahlon.

Boaz is posited high on the social hierarchy while other male characters are depicted as disobedient, sinner and escapist. But Boaz who performs tricks over tricks gets rewarded with sufficiency and religious significance. The story gets a happy ending, and his name is included in genealogy but the name Mahlon, late husband of Ruth, is excluded from the genealogy. He has high recognition and seems merry and lives a highly respected life as a guardian in Bethlehem, and he has a vital role in the social decision-making process.

I discussed Mahlon and Chilion as very insignificant characters, but Mahlon I interpreted Mahlon as a typical male character who becomes the victim of patriarchal power politics that excludes his name from the entire genealogy. Similarly, nameless ‘Male Redeemer’ Almoni and Ploni who is named as Mr, so and so is another male character who remains subordinated within the patriarchal discourse.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 66.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²²⁰ See at 6. of my Thesis. p, 97.

6.4. Comparison between Major Female and Minor Male Characters

Since this thesis aimed at the narrative analysis of the Book of Ruth from the postcolonial feminist perspective, the comparison between minor male characters with major female protagonists would be a milestone to show how the power structure in the story influences the representation of characters in the Book of Ruth. Ruth and Naomi play dominant roles as heroines in the story²²¹ while Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion are minor male characters who are often neglected by the Biblical scholars but I find it worthwhile to discuss these minor male characters in connection with female protagonists.

Comparison between minor and major characters sounds awkward, but in the context of the book of Ruth, it gives hints toward the underlying patriarchal discourse in ancient Israel society. The female protagonists have dominant status in the narrative, but they seem relatively less significant in social affairs. But in comparison to female protagonists, minor male characters have relatively limited roles. The power structure in society influences all these characters.

The author of the Book of Ruth has provided ‘obedience, loyalty and fidelity’ as the dominant character traits to all female characters. But widowhood, homelessness, cultural displacement and dislocation, and psychological alienation are some of the tragic predicament female characters suffer. Similarly, the minor male characters also suffer from tragic destitute. The female protagonists face severe tribulations while the minor male characters go through tragic destitute. Besides that, Mahlon and the proper redeemer are directly affected by Boaz’s trick in the story. We see Boaz not only control means of production; he even controls the social decision-making process that is visualized at the city gate scene Ruth (4:1-10) the proper redeemer is denied his levirate rights with the help of trick whereas Mahlon’s name is removed from the genealogy.

²²¹ Athalya Brenner, “Naomi and Ruth: Further Reflection” in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 71.

6.5. Ploni Almoni or Mr. So-and-So: The Proper Redeemer of Ruth

The namelessness²²² of the nearer kinsman shows that he is an insignificant character in the story. In my opinion namelessness of the proper redeemer is a strategy to valorize Boaz's personality. The narrative of *Ruth* never identified him with a name because he was not worthy of the honor. Though he declines to fulfill his social responsibility at the final hour, he cannot be blamed for this. It's Boaz who intentionally wants to keep him away from Ruth.²²³ He is ready to redeem the land but when Boaz informs that the person who redeems Naomi's property must redeem Ruth the Moabite as well he fears to damage his inheritance and withdraws.²²⁴

Why is the proper redeemer left unnamed? Though he is the real go' el for Ruth, his identity remains vague to the reader. For me, this namelessness is highly symbolical because it shows the role of the power structure in the formulation of one's identity. Such representation of proper redeemer in the Book of Ruth shows how a male could even be the victim of androcentrism.

6.6. Comparison between Bethlehemite Women and the Elders Men at the City Gate

There is two use of plural nouns to refer to the characters in the book, women of Bethlehem and Elder Men at the city gate. But the narrator represents these two characters differently. These two groups of people are unnamed characters but whose comparison can hints toward the underlying male-centric worldview of the narrator.

The neighboring women of Bethlehem are Naomi's old acquaintances who are referred by the group nouns. Book of Ruth mentions,

²²² Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 170.

²²³ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 170.

²²⁴ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth*. (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 72.

“So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? (Ruth 1:19)

Similarly, the elders men who gathered at the city gate to discuss Ruth’s redemption are the authoritarian persons who have the right to address social issues and decide. Though both of these groups of characters are nameless, the elder's men at the city gate exercise power and authority and they actively participated in the social decision-making process while the neighboring women just presented as trespassers.

The narrator shows the elders men at the city gate authoritative and authoritarian while the women of Bethlehem as housewives without a significant position in the society. Similarly, the setting of the representation of these characters has substantial meaning. City gates in ancient Israel refer to the public place where the authoritarian used to gather to decide on the socio-political and military affairs. Thus, Boaz taking ten elders men to the city gate links men to the social-political matters while the location of neighboring’s women meeting with Naomi is not discussed. Such, representation of

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7. Conclusions

After a detail analysis of Book of Ruth, I have concluded that studying characters of the Book of Ruth is useful in exploring various underlying aspects of the ancient Israelite society. I exemplified that character’s act as the carrier of the action in the narrative and how the critical analysis of characters' action, traits, and utterances, and their relationship to each other can help critics to specify certain perspective in the text. Not only that I examined that the analysis of characters of Book of Ruth is useful to understand the art of characterization

and purpose and objective of the unknown authors to provide a role to the characters; that serves the primary purpose of the text.

Through critical analysis of characters from postcolonial feminist narratology, the thesis maintained a balance between both male female characters in the Book of Ruth. I problematized that the previous readings of Book of Ruth that interpret the text either from a feminist or from a patriarchal gendered perspective. But I interrogated how such an approach fails to balance between male and female in the narrative. I emphasized that valorizing one gender over the other can undermine the contribution of each character and their unique position in the narrative and such an interpretation could create disharmony in the narrative level. The thesis proclaimed that beyond male-female gender dichotomy there are socio-cultural, politico-economic, as well as religious factors that influence the relationship between the characters of opposites as well as the same sexes in the narrative.

Among many critics and their texts, I chose Saxegaard's text *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth (2010)* as a primary dialogue partner because of her subtle analysis of character complexities of the Book of Ruth. I found that the study of character complexities can be useful in exploring the underlying reality of the ancient Israelite society in which the Book of Ruth is based. I discussed Saxegaard's concept of 'foreignness of Ruth' as a useful concept that is linked to the subordination of her identity, subjectivity, and representation in the text. Similarly, Saxegaard assigns fidelity, loyalty, and faithfulness as the dominant traits of female protagonists but such feminine virtues are the product of patriarchal mindset because patriarchy expects women to be faithful.

The thesis introduced three differing arguments of critics concerning the Book of Ruth. The first two views of critics focused on either female or patriarchal gendered perspective. Thus, their approach differs in terms of their argument in the book of Ruth. The first view of critics appreciated the Book of Ruth as a feminist text in terms of delineation of the female protagonist, its title, and its female worldview as the dominant aspects. Secondly, the other groups of critics observed the portrayal of Ruth as a gleaner, threshing floor scene, kinsman redeemer, and Levirate marriage as the patriarchal production that objectifies the womanhood in text.

Besides these two conflicting views, I presented the third perspective that reads the book of Ruth neither as a feminist nor as a masculine narrative; instead, they believe it as a polyphonic text consisting both voices. After a detailed analysis of the Book of Ruth, I found that the third perspective of the critics is useful in exploring the dynamics of characterization in the Book of Ruth. This thesis is highly influenced by this opinion and provides an equal focus on both male and female characters. It neither presents all male as oppressor nor it presents all female as oppressed.

The thesis deconstructed the so-called feminist worldview of the text that blames patriarchal values as solely responsible for the disempowerment and degradation of women. But the thesis emphasized that besides male-female gender dichotomy we shouldn't forget the various other underlying factors in the narrative. It exemplified how females are used by patriarchy to legitimize its existence in the society via Naomi and further how patriarchy uses a woman to silence the voice of another woman.

By analyzing Boaz, this thesis explored how patriarchy transcends the biological male-female dichotomy and creates problematics in the relationship within the opposite as well as the same sexes. The companionship between Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah comprises problematics, conflict of interest and states of ambivalence. Similarly, the relationship between males' characters also shows biases. These problematics and biases within the same sexes depict that how patriarchy can transcend the male-female dichotomies. But in the case of female companionship, patriarchy cannot be blamed entirely for such a condition. Hence, female characters are equally responsible for such a situation in the narrative. I studied Naomi's imitation of patriarchal values²²⁵, Ruth's subservience²²⁶, and Orpah inconsistency²²⁷ as some of the textual evidence.

The discussion on postcolonial and feminist discourses helped me to examine the role of the power structure in determining the character relationship in the narrative. I discovered that

²²⁵ See my thesis 5.2.3. p. 65.

²²⁶ See my Thesis 5.1.3. p. 49.

²²⁷ See my Thesis 5.3.1. p. 72.

though Ruth and Naomi are two primary female protagonists in the story they Boaz influences both with his towering personality. Besides that, the concept of intersection remained very useful to depict how the identity markers such as race, gender, class, nationality and linguistics factors intersect each other to the subordinate female protagonist in the narrative as well as in social level.

The combination of narratology with postcolonial feminism is useful in studying Ruth narrative because it helped to establish a perspective on each character of the Book of Ruth. The thesis presented a brief introduction to the historical background of the narratology and how it differed from the classical narratology. This combination of Narratology with postcolonial feminism explored what was often ignored and excluded by feminist critics in the Ruth narrative. Naomi's and Ruth's bonding had been taken as an ideal and unquestionable entity in the feminist exegesis but emphasized on the problematics in their relationship that causes a conflict of interest, and state of ambivalence.

Though Naomi is the center of the narrative, I started my analysis of a character from Ruth to show her importance in my thesis. It is the relationship between Ruth and Naomi that attracts the attention of feminist scholars, and it is Ruth who is represented as inferior to Naomi. Therefore, I presented her as an epitome of women under the patriarchal male gaze. Boaz's trick, Naomi's cleverness and the struggle between Boaz and Mr-so-and-so visualize Ruth as an object in a male-dominated patriarchal society.

I discovered that loyalty, faithfulness, love, and affections are some of the apparent themes of the book of Ruth. But postcolonial feminist narratology puts lights on the various underlying facts of the Ruth narrative. I have discovered that migration, displacement, cultural dislocation, homelessness, cultural fragmentation, etc. are some of the themes that are implied in the narrative. Such issues of the Book of Ruth have a direct link to the personal identity and subjectivity and representation of its characters. I discussed the role of marriage in the socialization of Ruth and how the interracial marriage with Boaz affected her identity.

The character sketch of Naomi in this thesis shows that how Naomi acts as an agent of patriarchy in the text by imitating patriarchal social roles and doing accordingly. By

borrowing the postcolonial thinker Franz Fanon's concept *Black Skin, White Mask*, I exposed how Naomi and Ruth internalize patriarchal values and develop an inferiority complex. Naomi mimics and imitates the patriarchal norms and culture by playing the role of mediator. In the narrative, she remains in between Ruth and Boaz and helps Boaz for accomplishing his goal. The act of redemption and levirate marriage between Ruth and Boaz is analyzed as the tool of objectification of Ruth in the thesis. Through her character analysis, the thesis deconstructed the traditionally held belief of ideal and selfless relationship between Naomi and Ruth by revealing the gap between appearance and reality.

After the critical analysis of the female character of the Book of Ruth, I have discovered that besides patriarchy other various factors act as the agent of female degradation in society. I realized that women in ancient Israel are less aware of their autonomous identity. So, they live their life being a part of patriarchal society following its practices and values. Women are confined within the lower spectrum of social hierarchy, but it would not be justifiable to blame male only for such situation because the complexities and psychological complication have played sufficient role to degrade women position in the society. One of my prime arguments in the thesis is to demonstrate that the patriarchal social values not only obstructs female empowerment but besides it generates hindrances in the relationship between males.

I realized that there are no such explicit provisions to categorize any society completely patriarchal or feminist. In every culture there exist binaries of male and female that generates a conflict of interest between them. So, such conflict of interest always fluctuates the power relationship in the society. In the Ruth narrative, Naomi's towering personality and her growing influence symbolize the fierce struggle between gynocentrism and androcentrism. After the birth of Obed, the Ruth becomes invisible while appears as a matriarch. Though Naomi is female, she makes a secret alliance with Boaz which was guided by their benefit. Therefore, it is not only patriarchy and male that use women for their interest; instead, Naomi being a female facilitates patriarchy to achieve its goal. By analyzing the socio-cultural and economic spheres of ancient Israel society, the thesis revealed that the social hierarchy based on gender was one of the factors behind female subjugation.

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