

# PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION AND LIBERATION OF WOMAN IN ELIZABETH INCHBALD'S PLAYS

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## ABSTRACT

This article delves into the themes of patriarchal oppression and female liberation as portrayed in two significant plays by Elizabeth Inchbald: *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are* and *A Case of Conscience*. Through a detailed analysis of these works, the study explores the struggles of female characters who are marginalized and oppressed within the confines of marriage, shedding light on the inherent inequalities and restrictions faced by women in a patriarchal society. Drawing parallels with radical feminism, the article emphasizes the need to challenge and dismantle oppressive structures, including marriage, to empower women fully. Inchbald's plays serve as powerful critiques of societal norms, advocating for women's autonomy, freedom of choice, and agency. The study underscores the relevance of these themes in contemporary society and advocates for a future where women are liberated from patriarchal constraints, aligning with the principles of radical feminism.

**Keywords:** *Elizabeth Inchbald, feminism, patriarchy, patriarchal oppression, female liberation*

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## **ELİZABETH INCHBALD'UN OYUNLARINDA ATAERKİL BASKI VE KADIN ÖZGÜRLÜĞÜ: RADİKAL FEMİNİST PERSPEKTİF**

### **ÖZ**

Bu makale, Elizabeth Inchbald'un *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are* ve *A Case of Conscience* adlı iki önemli oyununda işlenen ataerkil baskı ve kadın özgürlüğü temalarını ele almaktadır. Bu eserlerin detaylı analizi aracılığıyla, çalışma, evlilik kurumunun sınırları içinde marjinalleşen ve baskı altında olan kadın karakterlerin mücadelesini keşfeder, kadınların ataerkil bir toplumda karşılaştığı doğuştan gelen eşitsizlikleri ve kısıtlamaları açığa çıkarır. Radikal feminizmle benzerlikler çizerek, makale, kadınları tam anlamıyla güçlendirmek için evlilik dahil olmak üzere baskıcı yapıları sorgulama ve ortadan kaldırma ihtiyacını vurgular. Inchbald'un oyunları, toplumsal normların güçlü eleştirileri olarak hizmet eder, kadınların özerkliğini, seçim özgürlüğünü ve etkinliğini savunur. Çalışma, bu temaların çağdaş toplumda ne kadar önemli olduğunu vurgular ve kadınların radikal feminizm teorisi ile ataerkil kısıtlamalardan kurtulduğu bir geleceği destekler.

*Anahtar kelimeler:* Elizabeth Inchbald, feminizm, ataerkillik, ataerkil baskı, kadın özgürlüğü

### **INTRODUCTION**

In society there have always been individuals who identify women in a second-class status and gender restrictions have become essential issues in women's cultural, social, intellectual, and political development. "The word 'feminism' is based on the French word 'feminisme' and was first used in English in the 1890s" (Choudaraju 739). Smith defines feminism as follows: "Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of colour, working-class women, poor women, disabled women, Jewish women, lesbians, old women – as well as white, economically privileged, heterosexual women" (qtd. in Dicker 7).

Radical feminism was defined by MacKinnon as "feminism unmodified" (16). The idea came out in the late 1960s and it was a theory of the conscious groups of this period. The participants of these groups were mostly women and they claimed that they had suffered from the earlier movements of the

1950s and 1960s such as Civil Rights Movement and Anti-War Movement. They had concluded from these movements that “policy is personal”. In the beginning of the period, women were not directly complaining about men’s patriarchy; instead, they began to express their thoughts on their relationships with their husbands:

Though women do not complain of the power of husbands, each complains of her own husband, or of the husbands of her friends. It is the same in all other cases of servitude; at least in the commencement of the emancipatory movement. The serfs did not at first complain of the power of the lords, but only of their tyranny (Wootton 719).

Later, the idea of condemning patriarchy for uneasiness and unhappiness of women enlarged and patriarchy began to be condemned for women’s inequality in society.

It was an undeniable fact that women were unequal in society in the 1960s and there were several reasons forming this inequality. These reasons were social, political, and economic ones. Patriarchy was a dominant idea in that time and radical feminists condemned patriarchy for women’s inequality. Radical feminists believed that the oppression of women was the most devastating oppression observed in the history of the world.

Radical feminism analyses the relationship between social inequality and sexual difference; the domination of women by men is regarded to provide the foundation of social inequality, and the sexual oppression of women is regarded to underlie the economic, cultural and social subordination of women” (Madsen 153). Radical feminists depict patriarchy as the oppression of women by men and only if this patriarchy is abolished in the society women can feel liberated since “not even the most ardent feminist can claim to be ‘liberated’ in a sexist society” (Shulman 604).

Some radical feminists also believe that women must manage what it means to be a woman. Since women have acted their roles as ‘the women depicted by patriarchy’ throughout history they must create new roles and form a culture for themselves to secure their liberation from the patriarchal system. However, radical feminism regards women as superior to men: “radical feminism used an essentialist notion of identity to ground its politics in what was thought to be the superior nature of women” (Rudy 205).

In the first years of the rise of the movement radical feminism became an effective movement; women had high enthusiasm and energy, and they displayed speak-outs and demonstrations. Thus, the radical feminism movement created a public consciousness and later, it called forth the rise of other feminist movements as well. It is worth noting that “it was radical feminism that put women’s liberation on the map, that got sexual politics recognized as a public issue, that created the vocabulary (‘consciousness-raising’, ‘the personal is political’, ‘sisterhood is powerful’, etc.)” (Willis 92).

### **RADICAL FEMINISM AS A THEORY**

Radical feminism as a term was regarded as a part of cultural criticism since it first emerged: “the radical feminism was [...] a theory and practice of cultural criticism” (Yelin 117). In the patriarchal society men have been presented as power-holders; they were the domineering power in institutions and states. However, radical feminists believe that women are innately more democratic and more peaceful than men; therefore, they must build a new matriarchal culture in the society. Accordingly, individuals would be treated equally in the society that radical feminists build and the culture that they construct would be rooted on matriarchal principles.

Radical feminists believe that the root of patriarchy is in the oppressive family structure in which women’s sexuality is controlled and their reproductive capacities are repressed; this patriarchy also supports violence against women, especially, if women do not fit in their roles assigned in the family. “Radical feminist theory in particular, identifies male violence against women as a form of social control” (Mackay 12). In this sense, the supreme power of men could only be achieved by violence if women rebel against the patriarchal system they live in. Therefore, the aim of radical feminism is “to end male supremacy in all areas of social and economic life” (Willis 91).

Some other assertions made by radical feminists are that organized religions and many other cultural structures support patriarchy. They also believe that compulsory heterosexuality is oppressive; therefore, women could be encouraged to choose lesbianism if they want to. “The liberation of women requires a revolutionary change that challenge patriarchal institutions including the family structure” (Graff). Accordingly, radical feminism condemns sex-related institutions of the society as the vehicles of patriarchy: “such sex-related institutions as family, motherhood, chastity, prostitution, birth control and the double standard of morality had been subjected to feminist

analysis by the ‘first wave’ feminists” (Shulman 590-591). Radical feminists also imply that men’s psychology is partly diseased as they are inclined towards violence and apt to dominate women. For radical feminists, men are innately violent and destructive.

Many radical feminists emphasized the violence against women since they observed that the violence supported the idea of patriarchy. Radical feminists were “the driving force behind the rape crisis hotlines and shelters for women subjected to the domestic violence” (Graff). Finally, their effort ended domestic violence for a while and as a result of their high effort victims began to talk about rape. Radical feminists also helped to change the criminal justice system in some countries. They involved in the organizations for women’s right to decide on abortion and they emphasized the foundation of some alternative institutions for women such as places that were allocated for women only.

Radical feminism addresses the idea of sisterhood asserting that “all women are sisters and cherishing women’s mutual understanding and support” (Banks 232). Radical feminists also claim that governments must be ruled by women since men do not have the ability to govern equally. They want to rule out patriarchy since they regard it as the root of all women’s problems. “Radical feminists strongly believe that patriarchy is at the root of all forms of oppression and so they demand the removal of all manmade structures” (Case 63). Therefore, “radical feminists want to establish a structure that destroys patriarchal dominance, hence, defends mainly the primacy of the position of women” (Aston 66).

In the light of the assertions declared by radical feminists, this study is an attempt to analyze a well-known British woman playwright, Elizabeth Inchbald’s two prominent plays *Wives as They Were* and *Maids as They Are* and *A Case of Conscience*. *Wives as They Were* and *Maids as They Are* was produced in the end of the eighteenth century; and *A Case of Conscience* was published in the very beginning of the nineteenth century. Although these were the times when feminism as a movement did not emerge, feminist sensibility and the awareness of the need for a feminist movement were prevalent. In this sense, this study will also prove that this feminist sensibility was fair and the assertions of radical feminists were rightful considering the oppression of the woman characters in two plays via a powerful patriarchal institution in society, marriage.

### **WIVES AS THEY WERE AND MAIDS AS THEY ARE**

Inchbald employs two marginalized woman characters in her play *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are*. These two characters named Miss Maria Dorrillon and Lady Priory are both under the oppression of their tyrannical husbands. The play centers around the household of Mr. Norberry, Maria's kind-hearted guardian. Maria's mother died when she was six, and she never saw her father, Sir William Dorrillon. Indeed, her father has been staying with Maria, disguised as Mr. Mandred, with the purpose of seeing how his daughter would mature. Maria and Mandred are frequently at odds since Maria is now a matured woman, who likes flirting.

The plot and the ending of the play seem to suggest that it is a typical sentimental comedy; however, Inchbald's depiction of women goes beyond this genre since she clearly portrays the oppressed women in the society. Even in the first scene, the playwright presents how men in the play view women:

Mr. Nor. [...] We, Mr. Norberry, can never be perfect; but surely women, women, might easily be made angels! And if they were, we should soon be glad to make them into women again (Inchbald 9).

This quotation from the play implies that women are regarded as individuals with whom men can play whenever they wish. In this sense, the dominant patriarchal power has the potential to marginalize women in any case. In addition, this act would be realized with a patriarchal institute, marriage since here the word 'angels' refers to the patriarchal assertion about women, 'angel in the house'. The act of becoming an angel, or in other words, the dominant patriarchy's converting women into angels is only realized with marriage. Therefore, marriage is used as a patriarchal institution here to convert women into 'angels', that is, slaves in the house. This idea proves that the assertion made by radical feminists, which suggests that all the oppression of women is caused by patriarchy, seems to be true.

Lord Priory is totally obsessed with controlling his wife's body. His relationship with his wife, Lady Priory is based on obedience and cruelty. Lord Priory believes in absolute patriarchal power asserting that he always behaves his wife according to the ancient mode of treating wives. This system seems brilliant for him because this is the only way that his wife obeys him. He claims that the ancient men seldom gave their wives liberty; therefore, he refuses to give his wife any liberty, and she imposes a patriarchal power

on his wife by keeping her out of the society. He even resorts to violence:

I am still – apt to be hasty and passionate; but that is rather an advantage to me as a husband – it causes me to be obeyed without hesitation – no liberty for contention, tears of repining. I insure conjugal sunshine, by now and then introducing a storm (Inchbald 12).

His opinions prove his views about marriage. He regards marriage as a patriarchal institution to impose oppression over women. His wife exists for his happiness; she will either obey him or pay the consequences of his storm. Lord Priory also uses his wife as his valet:

I have had no employment for a valet since I married: - my wife, for want of dissipation, has not only time to attend upon herself, but upon me. Do you think I could suffer a clumsy man to tie on my neckcloth, or comb out my hair, when the soft, delicate, and tender hands of my wife are at my command? (Inchbald 14).

His ideas make his wife, Lady Prior inferior and marginalized. This case is what radical feminism totally opposes to, oppression and disdain of women. In addition, Lord Priory is also a man who is afraid of being approached even by men. He wishes to keep his wife away from the male body; therefore, he feels that his body must also be kept away.

Lady Priory does not object to her husband's behavior; instead, she looks to follow his rules to prevent any form of storm from him. When Bronzely asks to speak to her, she states: "I am sorry, sir, you should know so little of the rules of our family, as to suppose, that I could give an answer upon any subject in which my husband condescends to be engaged" (Inchbald 39). Her idea about relying on her husband in all matters is simple: "I could have no secrets from my husband" for "He is myself". Therefore, Lady Priory has no identity as a woman, and what might save her from the oppression of her husband could be the sisterhood concept that radical feminists suggest. Then, she could tell her problems to other women, and they could find a solution to end this patriarchal supremacy.

With the characterization of Lord and Lady Priory, Inchbald aims to raise the concerns about women's rights in marriage. As Bronzley states: "this poor woman lives in slavery with her husband" (41). Lady Priory's statement that "He is myself" presents how little liberty she has. Although she does not speak out her displeasure with her marriage, Lady Priory's unhappiness



is revealed when she elopes with Bronzely. Her elopement is interpreted as a revolt to the patriarchal institution, marriage since she is not interested in Bronzely in terms of a sexual relationship. Indeed, she only wants to prove that the patriarchal power imposed on any woman is unjust and oppressive.

Inchbald presents Lady Priory to show the position of women in marriage. Lady Priory tells Bronzely that: “to the best of my understanding, your sex, in respect to us, are all tyrants. I was born to be the slave of some of you – I made the choice to obey my husband” (56). Her idea, with her ironic situation, presents that women have a profound lack of choice over their destinies.

When Bronzely and Lady Priory return to Norberry’s, her husband questions her feeling for Bronzely, and she remains silent. Then, she asserts: “I am at a loss what to say” (Inchbald 83). Her silent resistance makes her husband quiver. She later states that she only has gratitude for Bronzely. She is, indeed, content to have taught her husband a lesson. Lord Priory needs some education about how to behave women; other men in the play do as well. Dorrillon also has a violent temper. Both Priory and Dorillon lack balance between body and mind, and they need some education for anger control. Maria suggests about Dorrillon that “He wants compassion and all the tender virtues” (Inchbald 21). In addition, Bronzely speaks of Lord Priory’s faults: “neither your voice or your looks agree with your words” (Inchbald 46). Both men need education, this idea of giving education to men about women and changing the social norms and values in the society, is also parallel with the assertions of radical feminism.

Inchbald presents a typical ending for the play: all the identities are revealed. However, the oppression of women by patriarchy is not resolved. For instance, Maria cannot speak about her marriage again since marriage remains a patriarchal institution with which men suppress women:

Dorr. The first command I lay upon my daughter is – to take refuge from your [Bronzely’s] pursuits, in the protection of Sir George Evelyn.

Sir G. And may I hope, Maria –

Miss Dor. No – I will instantly put an end to all your hopes.

Sir W. By raising you to summit of your wishes. Alarmed at my severity, she has owned her readiness to become the subject of a milder government (Inchbald 85).



In this exchange, Maria is regarded as a commodity. She is passed by her father to George. She has no chance to refuse this marriage since marriage remains as a patriarchal institution so that the patriarchal power does not let anyone to comment on it. Marriage becomes a contract imposed on women; all what Maria can do is to keep silent about the issue. In this sense, Maria becomes like Lady Prior; she has been reduced to a position of slave.

Maria's statement ends the play: "A maid of the present day, shall become a wife like those – former times" (Inchbald 86). These words assure the continuity of the traditional form of marriage as a patriarchal institution and its use to oppress women. Inchbald addresses the misuse of marriage by men since, when it is misused; it contributes to the destruction of women's female identity and makes them maids or slaves of men. The institution is also believed to give men the power to abuse women physically and socially, which is also an unfair opinion. Therefore, radical feminism as a theory opposes this false traditional opinion and wants women to feel free about deciding upon their marriage. This play by Elizabeth Inchbald clearly proves that radical feminists are rightful in their assertions to free all women in the society.

### **A CASE OF CONSCIENCE**

A Case of Conscience by Elizabeth Inchbald was published in 1800 but it was never performed. The play has an intricate plot. It presents the unhappy marriage of the Marquis and Marchioness of Romono. After twenty years of this marriage, the husband becomes an oppressive patriarchal figure to his wife. Their son who returns from a three-year war gets shocked to find that his father has turned into a furious man, and his mother has become a depressed and oppressed woman. Their family priest, Manuel, visits them and tries to solve the secret behind Romono's anger. The Marchioness, Adriana, only believes that she must endure her husband's anger with patience. She guesses that his anger stems from her decision to leave her earlier fiancé, the Duke of Cordunna, to marry Romono. Romono feels that his anger is rightful since he has discovered that his wife was not a virgin on their wedding day, and their son Oviedo is Cordunna's child. Then, Romono makes up a story to have the neighbouring hermit speak to her wife with the aim of uncovering her true feelings about Cordunna. However, the hermit seems to be Cordunna himself in disguise. Consequently, he begs Adriana to run away with him.

*A Case of Conscience* differs from *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are* in that Inchbald presents female desire in a complicated way. The two women in the play, Adriana and Eudora, remain sexually committed to men who they desire regardless of distance. However, Adriana feels guilty for pursuing her desire. Twenty years before, Adriana decides to leave Cordunna although Cordunna loves her. Adriana wants Romono: "the instant [Romono] made love to her, she dismissed his Grace" (Inchbald 320). She refuses him despite her father who demands her marriage to Cordunna. In this sense, as in the case of Inchbald's previously discussed play, *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are*, marriage is regarded as a patriarchal institution that the patriarchy uses to oppress women. Adriana, then, is portrayed as a woman who follows her own desires. However, every year, she feels guilty for pursuing her desires since she does not fulfil Cordunna's and her father's wishes. Here, Adriana is characterized as a strong woman since she feels free to choose whatever she wishes; this type of a female figure is parallel to the women that radical feminists aim to conceptualize.

Actually, male desire is not presented as a prominent issue in the play. From the beginning of the play, male characters make clear that women are no more than commodities. Romono's married servants, Girone and Beatrix, open the play. Girone has been at war for three years, and Beatrix questions his fidelity. His reply presents the position of age in the patriarchal understanding of the women:

Gir. ...in our very last engagement we stormed and took a city.

Beat. But you were kind to the poor women, I hope.

Gir. Yes, for thy sake.

Beat. And for my sake, I hope not too kind.

Gir. No; for your sake, I spared all of your age: but the young ones we considered as another class of people, and we were less ceremonious with them (Inchbald 297).

Girone's regarding younger women as sexual objects remains throughout the play. In this sense, women are marginalized and objectified by patriarchy. They are reduced to objects. When Girone and Oviedo are arrested for rescuing Eudora from the convent, Girone asserts: "Oh! That we were going to be tried for stealing a pretty girl by any court but a religious one! We should be sure of acquittal before a court-material" (Inchbald 335). Here,

he implies that the patriarchy would understand and not punish them for desiring a young woman.

The distinction between age and desire is based on appearance. When Beatrix informs Girone of the changes in Romono, Girone attributes the case to Adriana's faded beauty:

Beat. My Lord has become an unkind husband! ... my Lady the Marchioness has lost all her power in this house!

Gir. That's a bad piece of news indeed! – and yet I can believe it; for women's power seldom lasts longer than their complexion.

Beat. She is as fair as ever – or, if the rose be faded on her cheek, good sense, compassion, and all the Christian virtues, have rendered doubly bright her sparkling eye (Inchbald 298).

In this sense, although Beatrix emphasizes virtue and intellect, and highlights Adriana's character, Girone has the traditional patriarchal understanding of women: he thinks that it is the appearance that matters.

Several years older than Oviedo's intended, Eudora, Adriana becomes an unwanted woman. When she asks her husband's permission to greet her son, Romono replies: "I forbid your taking in your female train my ward Eudora. Send her instantly to me; then dispose of your vacant hours as best may suit you" (Inchbald 303-304).

Clearly, Romono wants to see the younger beauty himself, and he does not want the older woman to interfere.

Romono's treatment of Adriana presents how much he devalues her. He obviously removes all her power in the household and over her body:

Beat. She, who once, with so much dignity, commanded everything which belonged to him, now has not even the liberty of being out of temper. That is so hard upon her – has not power even to scold the servants.

Gir. But she has leave to cry, I suppose?

Beat. Not before my Lord; and sometimes stifles her tears till she throws herself into a fit of illness.

Gir. And does he give her leave to be ill?

Beat. Oh! Then he is alarmed! Then he looks pale and trembles. Still, his manner don't soften, though his heart seems melting (Inchbald 299).

Romono disdains Adriana's body since he does not find her beautiful any more, and this case makes Adriana ill. In this sense, the damage that the patriarchy gives to women is clearly presented, and marriage as an institution functions as a tool for this wrong attitude. Indeed, throughout the play, female characters become ill when their desires are repressed. This oppression by the patriarchy is what radical feminists oppose to since they believe that women can only be healthy and happy when they are completely free to do whatever they wish.

Despite her sickness, Adriana forces herself to survive in her state. She is a powerful woman, indeed; yet, she is oppressed by patriarchy through her marriage. Although she misses the passionate love that she once lived with Romono, she still loves her husband. Her passionate love turns into a maternal love by time. In addition, she feels bound to her husband; she thinks that she must obey Romono in "atonement for the guilt of having preferred him to Cordunna" (Inchbald 309). Throughout her life, Adriana punishes herself for her desire. However, her husband believes that women must not be motivated by their desires: "women should be stinted in their pleasures" (Inchbald 301).

Adriana's desires are also oppressed by patriarchy. However, she continues to struggle with them. Considering to elope with Cordunna, she states: "When I forsook you, my faithful lover, I deserved the punishment I have known; but should I desert my husband, tenfold misery will avenge the husband's cause" (Inchbald 327). She believes that she still suffers as a result of denying her father's and Cordunna's wishes. Therefore, to leave her husband would contribute to her guilt more. Here, Adriana is presented by Inchbald as a figure who carries the burden of all patriarchal desires, and she suffers from them.

Eudora resembles Adriana in that she is also oppressed by patriarchy. When Romono banishes Eudora to the convent to punish his son, he ignores her pleas:

Marq. You will shed a few tears, and pass a few days in deep melancholy ... but when a short time has elapsed, and you have taken the veil, you'll soon forget you ever knew Oviedo, and the happiest of the joyful sisterhood.

Eud. My Lord, indeed you are mistaken. If you can impute to my frivolous sex inconstancy like this, can you suppose that Count Oviedo will forget me? Marq. Then I'll allow your arguments have reason. He, no doubt, will pine in grief for you till the end of his life – may, perhaps, hasten that end by poison, or a dagger (Inchbald 306).

These expressions suggest that female desire is temporary. However, male desire is much more dangerous and needs to be controlled. Romono's words also reveal why Eudora must be locked: she is smart, beautiful, and passionate. These characteristics of a strong woman threaten the patriarchy who aims to control women. His plan works, then, since she declares that she is ill when she is in convent. Locking her away from the man she loves makes Eudora physically ill. Similar to Lord Priory and Dorrillon in *Wives as They Were* and *Maids as They Are*, Romono needs education about the control of mind and body.

Manuel's presence in the final of the play is crucial as he functions as Inchbald's voice about the female desire. He aims to lessen Adriana's guilt by suggesting that her desire is appropriate:

You, Lady, may at times feel grief for the dire effect of your early promises broken to Duke Cordunna. But, lest such reflection should inspire a sensation like remorse, understand – that it was Virtue, not Vice, to break every promise extorted by your parents, before your judgment and experience were matured, so as to comprehend the nature of the vow you gave (Inchbald 352).

Manuel, here, attacks the marriage as a patriarchal institution. Furthermore, he highlights the necessity of waiting until women gain some experience in life before making marital choices. This process of maturing is vital for women's happiness since marriage must not be a patriarchal institution as well as a tool to dominate women. This idea is also parallel with the assertions of radical feminists in that they stand for free choice in marriage. From both plays of Elizabeth Inchbald and the assertions of radical feminism it could be concluded that women must choose what to do, where to go, and who to marry. They might even choose lesbianism if they wish. Women must stand for whatever oppresses them. Therefore, marriage as an institution must serve for their happiness, rather than as a patriarchal institution and a tool to oppress them. In addition, women's desire is as significant as men's desire. Women must not be condemned and punished for expressing their sexual desires and choices. They must be equal to men in their domesticity.

This way of a social living brings peace and comfort for both men and women in all societies.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the plays *Wives as They Were and Maids as They Are* and *A Case of Conscience* by Elizabeth Inchbald provide powerful insights into the patriarchal oppression of women in society, particularly within the institution of marriage. These works vividly portray the struggles of women who are marginalized, objectified, and oppressed by the prevailing patriarchal norms. Through the characters of Lady Priory, Maria Dorrillon, Adriana, and Eudora, Inchbald exposes the deep-rooted inequalities and restrictions faced by women, highlighting the need for their liberation and autonomy. The analysis of these plays resonates strongly with the principles of radical feminism, which vehemently challenges the patriarchal system and advocates for the freedom and equality of all women. Radical feminists, as depicted in the article, emphasize the importance of dismantling oppressive structures, including marriage, to empower women fully. They argue for women's right to make choices about their bodies, desires, and lives without fear of societal condemnation or punishment.

Inchbald's works serve as a powerful critique of the societal norms prevalent in her time, reflecting the broader struggle of women against patriarchal oppression. The characters' desires, choices, and agency in these plays underscore the necessity of redefining marriage as an institution that respects the autonomy and happiness of both partners. Furthermore, Inchbald's portrayal of female characters seeking freedom and asserting their desires aligns with the radical feminist vision of a society where women are liberated from the shackles of patriarchy.

In contemporary times, the messages conveyed by Inchbald's plays and the ideals of radical feminism continue to be relevant. The ongoing fight for gender equality, women's rights, and freedom of choice echoes the themes explored in these works. It is imperative for society to recognize and challenge the patriarchal norms that continue to oppress women and hinder their progress. By embracing the principles advocated by radical feminism and fostering an environment of equality, respect, and empowerment, society can move closer to ensuring a future where women are truly liberated from the patriarchal constraints depicted in these thought-provoking plays.

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