

EXPLORING GENDER INEQUALITY AND MAKING OF THE GENDER IN THE LITERARY CONTEXT: A STUDY OF SELECTED FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

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Abstract : As we all know that literature is the mirror of our society. It portrays society in all its aspects such as social, political, historical and cultural. Literature also plays a great role to define or elevate our society. Thus the concept of gender inequality does not remain untouched in literary works also. Gender in itself is grossly misunderstood word. The moment this word is spoken, one arrives at the concept of weaker sex present in society i.e. the female. There is difference between sex and gender. Sex is a biological phenomenon while gender is socially constructed. The purpose of the present paper is to explore the concept of gender inequality through the example of literary works. In literature also women are portrayed as a secondary object, just as God has created them only to support the males. If we analyze the maxim- "Behind every successful man there is a woman" we find that in our literature also which is full of such maxims females are portrayed behind the males, not ahead or even by side. Women are portrayed in 'lack' and 'other' terms. Derogatory language is used in portraying some female characters. Thus it would be valuable to explore the gender inequality in literary context.

Keywords - Inequality, Gender, Biasness, Socio-Political, Socialization, Behavioral Code, Exploited

Introduction

Gender inequality can be traced in all the aspects whether it is socio-political or economical. There are more social taboos for females rather than males. Although they can do every task which a man supposed to do, yet they are treated like 'Abla Nari'. In financial aspects also the females are given lesser salary than a male employee i.e. the reason to hire more females teachers rather than males in secondary schools. In her famous work 'The second sex', Simon – De- Beavoir says- 'a woman is not born but she is made'. It is their socialization which makes them so. There are different- different norms or behavioral code for girls and boys. Even their roles which they have to play in this society are predestined. For example the emotion 'weep' or 'crying' is made only for girls. It doesn't suit to boys according to our society. The words just as 'bold', 'power' and 'protector' appeal to only a male, they are not for females.

Before 19th century, there are few female authors in British literature. There are many reasons behind this fact such as- females are not considered intelligent enough to create a valuable works. They are made only for domestic affairs. Tennyson also says-

"Man for the field, woman for the hearth
Man for the sword for the needle she is
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey"

(Tennyson, p. 261).

Females were dependent on males financially. Even publishers also denied to publish their work under their names. Being a female author, their works couldn't get the attention of male oriented readers. Either they have to publish their work under the male pseudonym or anonymously. We have several examples of such female authors who has published their work under the pseudonym as- Emily Bronte as Ellis Bell, Mary Anne Evans as George Eliot, Joanne Rowling as J. K. Rowling/Robert Galbraith, Louisa May Alcott as A. M. Barnard etc. There are some female authors who published their work anonymously as Jane Austin, Emily Dickenson, Mary Shelley, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Sarah Margaret Fuller etc. Their capability as an author was underestimated by the prejudiced publishers. In present time, all these female authors have immortalized their name in the history of literature. Their works gained much popularity as gained by male authors.

In literature most of the female characters are portrayed as a meek creature or as a seductress. For instance Shakespeare portrayed Cleopatra in the terms of lack (lack of patience, lack of moral strength etc)

Antony: Fie wrangling Queen:
Whom every thing becomes, to chide, to laugh,
To weep: whose every passion fully strives
(Shakespeare William, (p.4).

If we analyze the text we find that the weaker sex in the play is Antony not Cleopatra (as the writer shows) as he himself knows-

"These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,
Or lose myself in dotage" (p.9).

She is portrayed as a seductress-

"Now I feed myself
With most delicious poison. Think on me
That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black,
And wrinkled deep in time. Broad-fronted Caesar, ...I was
A morsel for a Monarch: and great Pompey
Would stand and make his eyes grow in my brow,

There would he anchor his aspect, and die
With looking on his life" (p.20).

She is shown as a victim of her mood as it changes in every minute. She has no control over her nerves. Although she should be a strong and minded character. She should be shown as beauty with brain because she tamed those three persons who conquered the whole world i.e. Pompeii, Julius Caesar and Antony. How can she become a weak creature for Shakespeare? This is called gender inequality. We can find some glimpses of misogyny in Shakespeare himself as he dedicated his sonnets to a dark lady. Why he has used the word 'dark' for that lady or we can say for a beloved. If she was unfaithful to him, why did he dedicate his sonnets to her?

In his play 'Hamlet' Ophelia also treated as a weak character or merely a puppet in the hands of his father and King Claudius. To serve their purpose, they used her as a tool. Her father didn't care for her feelings. He behaves like a dominant or arrogant father. In this play he (Shakespeare) compares a woman with frailty. How can we forget this statement given by Shakespeare through Hamlet, "Frailty thy name is woman". Hamlet's misogyny can be seen in these lines-

Get the to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?
If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry:
Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny
Get the to a nunnery, go farewell. Or if thou wilt needs marry, marry fool:
For wise men know well enough what monster you make of them"(Hamlet,p.164)

The next example is taken from 'Mill on the Floss'. It deals the story of a brother and sister named Tom and Maggie. Although Maggie is far superior to her brother in the matter of intelligence. Her father also admits this truth as he says to Mr. Relay, "She understands everything one's talking about, she does indeed.... She can read books and understand them better than half the folks who are grown up" (Mill on the Floss, P.12). Even after knowing this fact her father doesn't send her to get better education like Tom. He only cares about Tom's education. Mr. Tulliver says-"But he's slow with his tongue, you see, and he doesn't read very well he can't bear books. Now, what I want is to send him to a school where they'll make a smart chap of him, so that he's a bit quicker with his tongue and his pen" (P.12-13).

He is sorry for Maggie because she is not a boy. If she was a boy, she could get this opportunity rather than Tom. "Ay, she's a clever lass, said Mr. Tulliver, as Maggie retired. It's a pity she wasn't the boy. She'd have been a match for the lawyers, she would" (P.12). Even Tom also considers himself superior to Maggie. For instance he says- "I don't want your money, you silly thing. I've got a great deal more money than you, because I'm a boy" (P.18).

The next novel is 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles' by Thomas Hardy. Tess works as a milkmaid in Talbathoy dairy, where she met Angel Clare. After their wedding they confessed to each other their past mishappenings. Angel confessed to Tess that- "he then told her of that time of his life to which allusion has been made when tossed about by doubts and difficulties in London like a cork on the waves, he plunged into eight and forty hours, dissipation with a stranger" (Hardy, P.256). He asked Tess to forgive him. He is forgiven by Tess for his adultery.

Tess also confessed that she had been raped by Alec and had a child which died after some days of his birth. After hearing the confession of Tess, Clare gives stereotype reply, "Am I to believe this? From your manner I am to take it as true. You cannot be out of your mind! You ought to be! Yet you are notmy wife, my supposition as that." (p.259). He finds himself unable to forgive Tess, Tess pleads him to forgive her.

"In the name of our love, forgive me! She whispered with a dry mouth,
I have forgiven you for the same!
And, as he did not answer, she said again,
Forgive me as you are forgiven! I forgive you Angel.
You- yes, you do!
But you do not forgive me?" (p. 259).
Angel Clare's point of view is biased when he replied to Tess in such words-
"Tess forgiveness doesn't apply to that case! You were one person;
Now you are another. My God-how can forgiveness meet such a grotesque-
Prestidigitation as that!"
(p. 259).

Thus we can say that this is the peak point of biasness. A male wants for himself forgiveness for that deed for which he cannot forgive that lady who forgave him for that deed.

The real cause of Tess's sufferings is only Angel Clare. If he forgives her, the circumstances of her life would be better.

Conclusion-

Thus we see several instances of prejudiced attitude of males towards females. They have different points of views for women which they don't apply for themselves whether the matter is same. There should be proper balance between the male and female psychology. If we say Cleopatra's love is not true for Antony. She cheated Antony. But when we analyze the text we find these lines also true in the case of Antony. After being in love with Cleopatra why did he marry Octavia. He is a great cheater. He not only cheated Cleopatra but Fulvia and Octavia also the victims of his deceiving behavior. We can't justify the attitude of Angel Clare towards Tess. Ophelia is one of the most innocent characters of English literature who is exploited by her surrounding males for their purpose.

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