

A Comparative Assessment of Feminist Criticism and Female Characters in Shakespeare's Plays

Dr. Kumari Rekha*

Assistant Professor of English, Kanti Indra Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Digha, Patna

Abstract – Shakespeare's main goal is to represent the women in their plays. The writers use the female characters of their plays of their representation. Feminist analysis seem to be the most quickly developing and widely-used approach to Shakespeare in recent times. Feminist critique deeply focuses on marriage & traditions of courtesy, sex & family structures. The study found that Shakespeare uses the gender style to represent female characters in her plays.

Key Words – Female Characters, Feminist Criticism, Shakespeare

-----X-----

INTRODUCTION

Female characters play an significant role For dramatic run of Shakespeare's events,. As in fact, Shakespeare's women's dramas were bound by the rules & norms of the Elizabethan age. Thus, in Elizabethan England, it was very common to get women to marry, to get power, heritage, dowries or the land.

Although the Queen herself was an unmarried woman, the role of women was extremely limited in society. Individual women were their fathers' property and married to their future husbands. Women were regarded in Elizabethan as the weaker sex & dangerous since their sexuality is supposed to be supernatural and thus hated by men. Women of the time should be virtues such as fidelity, silence, sexual chastity, piety, humility, steadfastness, & patience. Naturally, in relation to men all these virtues have their sense. The role allocation was strictly governed in Elisabethan society; men were breadwinners, & women had to be obedient housewives & mothers. However, women have been portrayed in Shakespearean drama in a very different way within this deprived, tight & structured scope.

In Shakespeare's plays, the building of female character represents the general picture of the female Elizabethan. Shakespeare is committed to supporting the English stereotypes of men & women, their position & their duties in society.

Feminist analysis seem to be the most quickly developing and widely-used approach to Shakespeare in recent times. Moreover, feminist critique is an

extremely simple and fascinating view for any educational level with regard to Shakespeare teaching.

The view of women poses some questions; how does gender mean? How is feminism correlated with 'maleness'? What are the roles of the women? There's something to it?

Therefore, in the sense of feminism itself, women's solution & all those issues are understood better: the push to obtain social , political & economic equal opportunities for women. This does not mean, however, that feminism is anti-humans. Consequently, this structures & promotes the subordination and inequality of women against values & traditions.

In total, in all social institutions, feminism exposes and questions the cultural shaping of gender roles, such as family, work, politics, religion & inevitably, literature & drama. Feminist analysis explores how literature and drama reflect women's experiences. It attempts to reveal how patriarchal culture frequently stereotypes, twists, avoids or represses this experience in plays, novels, or other writing (Gibson 1998, pp.30-31). It misrepresents how females feel, believe, and behave.

Shakespeare's play is full of resourceful and self-confident women, who build room and achieve or are a spiritual autonomous person. In Shakespeare's plays, there are numerous personalities who are very diverse: Cleopatra, Lady Macbeth, Viola, Rosalind, Desdemona, Portia to name only a few. This article therefore focuses on Ophelia, Gertrude & Desdemona, the tragic female

characters, who deserve equal or even more attention than male characters. It often seems that their character ends in their deaths and is connected to a tragic burden and remorse. Gertrude is blamed for remarrying soon and soon after the death of her husband.

Looking at Ophelia & Desdemona, finding their guilt which caused their deaths seems more difficult. In training and rewarding Hamlet's love Ophelia may or cannot be considered guilty by the audience. As far as Desdemona is concerned, Desdemona is unfairly found guilty of Othello's husband when the people know that she is not guilty.

The Character of Ophelia

The Shakespeare style of female characters is fascinating; many of them are radicals. However, in Shakespeare's plays not all female characters are defiant and docile, as well as young woman – the classical good ladies, to put it too far.

They consider their families, especially their parents, to be ideal children, who reflect well on their families & never jeopardise their authority. The daughters are presentable, friendly & embrace their fathers' preferred supporter. The fathers are continually persuaded that they know the right things for their daughters and don't want their will enforced. Contrary to their rebellious counterparts, the friendly daughters do not challenge the actions of their fathers and follow the consequences. It seems to be the ideal feminine portrayal of Shakespeare, just like that time.

Young women endure loneliness, violence, & death in his tragedies like Ophelia in Hamlet. In particular, all female characters seem to have the same unfortunate fate, which is the unnatural, early death (Hamilton, 2003, pp. 69-70).

The ideal representation tends to be Ophelia of the Elizabethan children. In Hamlet, women are expressed as the subordinate status in Elizabethan England, in which their fathers or their husbands strictly govern their lives. Their rights are limited in civil, social & economic terms. In Hamlet, Ophelia & Queen Gertrude, the feminine characters are of little, or no control or autonomy. In this section the emphasis will lie on Hamlet's female character Ophelia; Polonius's daughter, Laertes's girlfriend, and Hamlet's often love. Ophelia is a good, innocent woman, who obeys to both Polonius and Laertes. She is an intelligent young & caring woman, overwhelmed with dramatic destiny, madness & death.

Critics have argued that Ophelian biography from the text of Shakespeares cannot be reconstructed; Ophelia is featured in five of the 20 scenes of the play, and Hamlet's preplay of her love is only seen with some vague flashbacks.

"We can imagine Hamlet's tale without Ophelia, but literally Ophelia doesn't have a tale without Hamlet," Edwards (1979) says in this context."

The Character of Hamlet's Mother: Gertrude

The critics often found Gertrude to be a mother incestuous to betray her dead, helpless and victimised husband. However this unfavourable portrayal of her that is delivered to the viewer is not true and contrived. Gertrude does not have many lines to explain all of this about her features. We don't know in her words that she is sexual, sensual, unjust and dependent. They portray Gertrude in this unfavourable and exaggerated manner in the storeys of two principal characters. In this essay, I will argue that the storeys of Hamlet and Gertrude's Ghost are unsure and concentrate more on Gertrude as a strong independent Queen, a mother who protects her children, a moral character conscious of her faults, a free-will and a significant character.

Gertrude is not correct and artificially depicted as a sensuous and unfavourable woman character in Hamlet. In reality, her character is not based on her words and behaviour, all these uncomfortable attributions are based on the skewed impressions of men around her. "Gertrude, as she and her libido are made up for us by the two men who have complaints with her when she herself is not given any chance to testify for itself" (p. 323), Levin explains (2008). Thus, the narratives from Hamlet and the Ghost, who Richard Levin (2007) calls "untrustworthiness characters," are not her words or acts that prove her sense of disloyalty to her kin. She justifies that characters are seen as actual individuals whose environments and circumstances have a significant role to play in altering them. Thus, both Hamlet's and Ghost's complaints distort the portrayal of the Gertrude that they represent. Levin writes to elaborate in her essay "Elusive Libido of Gertruda, and Untrustworthy Narrators of Shakespeare":

characters.. possess an internal dimension,

Such as personal agendas, attitudes & emotions

influence & therefore can affect the statements they make

their trustworthiness This seems to be the case

Hamlet & Ghost's speech ...

Hamlet & the Ghost's statements and statements are emotionally charged. The reasons behind Gertruda's unfavourable and exaggerated portrayal are both. We can first see how the viewpoint of the ghost decides Gertrude's character. Although the Ghost informs Hamlet that after his speech he will feel vengeance for his murder, in his speech, the Ghost

seems to concentrate more on his brother Claudius's rehearsal with Gertrude

With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts-

O wicked wit and gifts that have the power

So to seduce!-won to his shameful lust

The will of my most seeming virtuous queen.

O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there

From me, whose love was of that dignity

That it went hand in hand even with the vow

I made to her in marriage, and to decline

Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor

To those of mine!

But virtue, as it never will be moved,

Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,

So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,

Will sate itself in a celestial bed

And prey on garbage.

The Ghost explains the rest of the speech in the preceding quotation briefly about his assassination & devote himself to condemning Gertrude's marriage which causes him to feel deceived by her. His problem, as can be seen from the speech, is the loss of Gertrude instead of his status as a King: "Obviously, the Ghost grievance is the adultery of Gertrude, & his agenda is... to justify it away, which will totally condemn his role & Claudius' role and fly his own."

Women's Roles in Othello

In Othello of Shakespeare, you have a cast of about 12 men & 3 women. All three of the women in this storey are a male equivalent. A general, Othello, is destroyed with envy by thinking that his wife is cheating his lieutenant, Cassio. His storey consists of a general. This envy is misrepresented by Iago to Othello. Othello eventually kills his wife, injures Iago and then suicides. Iago and Cassio are the two other women in the play. None of the three women is a single person. All three are a man's "own." While this storey is central for women, it is still considered to be sub-human and property. The characters say they "love" each other in this play while the women are just men's property. They are property that is used, dominated, exploited and sometimes even discarded if "damaged."

First, the men in the picture see Desdemona as a property to own. It is evident. Her dad, Brabantio, was outraged when Desdemona found himself running and Othello was married. Othello is called a thief in his name (I.2.55). Brabantio might speak to Othello about her virginity being robbed or Desdemona actually being stealed away. He approaches Desdemona as a property in every way. She's someone that can be stolen from herself. He looks at Othello as a cheat. This breaks down the notion that Desdemona is an individual with free will and a right to choose. Can't she love, can't be all possessed. This idea comes when Othello "assigns" his spouse to Iago for a box of pumpkins, swords and shields (I.3.283). This idea is created. No more than that is Desdemona. It's just an item to be taken care of. This is also how her dad looks at her. He tells Othello to keep an eye on her, because she can "trickle" him just as he did. This meant that she was able to escape and no longer owned him when she fled out from the property of her father (I.3.293). Act two, Othello discusses Desdemona's marriage as an acquisition (II.3.8). Then Iago is led to believe that the woman was Othello's sleep. His property was abused by Othello, referring to the circumstance as Othello was "rolling into his seat" (II.1.286). It shows how he really felt about their relationship that he refers to her as his 'seat' coupled with the fact that he publicly humiliated her as he felt she is 'used' property. In the relationship between Iago and his wife Emilia is no love, the male and the female only own and dominate. There is no love. Iago eventually murders his wife, attempting to silence her in order to save his life. Othello also kills his wife out of rage, claiming to have "not wisely, but too well loved" (v.2.344). These ideas encourage the idea that men have the power to purchase their products, to use them and to dump them if they are "consumed" or infringed. These two women were infringed on. They were both Iago & Othello, but as if they were garbage, they discarded them. They're nothing but property. You may be a piece of paper to write about and it's no longer valuable because someone else has written about it. So these women are seen by men.

Othello is thrown into jealous anger at the heart of the plot, because he thinks that Cassio is violating his possession, that is to say, that he is sleeping with his wife. He believes this not from his wife's actions he loves, but because of what one of his trustworthy male rulers tells him. The fact that men have gender a role causes this to take place is further in the storey that men should be trusted rather than women. The women are considered meek and incapable of telling the truth. As seen in Act 1, Brabantio advises Othello not to run away from Othello like it did to Desdemona. This gives rise to the notion of women being soft, and their only strength is to lie and escape. 1 Othello hits Desdemona in Act 4 after calling her innocently "My Lord" and "Othello Sweet." Desdemona says she didn't deserve this after being hit. As if she ever

deserved to be hit by him. It's also a scene in which men retain control over women. She looks meek and anxious Othello to please. Othello is angry & dominates her by plotting and murdering her.

Towards the end of the play, Othello is so annoyed by what is told that he is eventually confronted by Desdemona about Cassio's lying and "use." The word "used" in this context is significant. It reveals that Othello & men don't care whether they love the woman or not. It is a question of interference and property. It feels like Desdemona now is a meaningless object that Othello feels insulted. It's not all his anymore. The products are destroyed, they don't need any more. He kills her, then. This doesn't mean that in today's world this doesn't happen either. Many examples of jealous husbands have believed their wife had tricked them, but they had at least violently beaten them if they had not killed them. She says nobody killed her except herself even though she is asked who killed her and that Desdemona is waking up for a few brief moments. Again, the binary oppositions that are submitted / dominated are seen. Othello is the masculine in the game. He is strong, furious, physical, strong and a leader. Desdemona is female. Desdemona is feminine. She is fragile, gentle, submissive, talk rather than aggression.

Those few instances during the game show that the concept of love has little to do with the relationship between Desdemona and Othello and with other men and women. Women can be seen as the possession of men, and this excludes the notion that love first of all was linked to these relations. These ties are all strong and authoritative acts against their female "competitors." This binary opposition between the male and the female leads to the male dominating the female. If all were treated as men rather than as men and women, the playing would have not been a disaster, but the philosophy of male superiority and female submission would not have been strengthened. All in all, I agree that almost any piece of literature might have this kind of circumstance. This play, however, seems to suggest some serious problems with these male/ female roles & how love for these people does not even exist in this game. These men & women had not been born and assumed that they could play these essential male and female roles. In culture, they have become men & women. Wittig would argue that culture has cast these ideas upon them. I must accept I must.

WOMEN IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY HAMLET

Feminist literary criticism

The literary review that emerges from women's, feminist & feminist politics is feminist literary criticism (also regarded as feministic criticism).

Critical Methodology

When you read a file, a feminist critical resists conventional assumptions. Beside questioning normative assumptions, feminist literary analysis often vigorously promotes women's literacy in literature & understanding of women's experiences. Feminist literary criticism is based on essential methods:

- **Identifying with female characters:** Critics question the male-centered viewpoint of writers by questioning the way female characters are defined. Feminist literary critique reveals that women have traditionally been viewed as artifacts seen from a male point of view.
- **Reevaluating literature & world in which literature is read:** By analysing the classical literature, the critician can wonder whether society respected men & their works primarily because it respected men more than women.

Embodying or Undercutting Stereotypes

Literary feminist critique accepts that the literature represents and forms prejudices & other cultural assumptions. Feminist literary critique explores, then, how literary works embody or undermine patriarchal perceptions, both occurring in the same work often.

Years before the official nameing of a school of literary criticism, feminist theory and different forms of feminist criticism began. The "Woman's Bible," written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the late XIXth century, is a good example of a work of critique firmly in this school which looks beyond a male-centered, more obvious perspective & understanding.

The male literary canon was gradually questioned during the second-wave period by scholarly circles. Since then, feminist literary analysis is related to postmodernism & ever more nuanced issues of gender and culture.

Tools of the Feminist Literary Critic

In other vital disciplines, feminist literary criticism will offer instruments such as historical analysis, psychology, linguistics, sociological analysis & economic analysis. Feminist critique may also explore the intersection of variables, such as race, sexuality, physical capability, & class.

The following approaches can be used for feminist literary criticism:

- The definition in novels, storeys, plays, biographies & storeys of women's character, particularly if the author is male

- Deconstruction of how one's own gender affects reading and interpreting a text and how the reader decides which characters & which ones based on the sex of the reader.
- Deconstruction of the way women autobiographers and female biographers deal with their subjects and how biographers handle secondary women
- Define literary relationships and ideas about power, sexuality and sex.
- Criticism of the patriarchal or feminine language, for example, of the 'universal' use of the male proclamation 'he' and 'he'
- Note and detect variations in writing by men and women, for instance, a style that makes women more reflexive and men more straightforward (example: "She lets herself in" vs. "He opened the door")
- To assert women authors who are unknown, marginalised or undervalued, often called canons, as the regular list of "significant" writers (for example, increasing the contributions of early dramatist Aphra Behn, showing her how she was treated differently from her own period, and reclaiming Zora Neale Hur)
- To restore 'women's voice,' even though marginalised or ignoring, as a worthy contribution to literature.
- To examine a variety of works in a genre, for example science fiction or detective fiction, as a summary of the feminist approach to this genre
- Analysis of a single author's various work (often women)
- To analyse, including power relations, how relations between men and women and those who assume the role of men and women in the text are represented;
- To study the text to find ways of opposing or opposing patriarchy

Feminist literary criticism is distinct from gynaecology because feminist literary criticism can examine and deconstruct men's literary works.

Gynocriticism

The literary study of female authors is alluded to by Gynocriticism or gynocritical. It is a vital activity to explore and document the ingenuity of women. Gyna-criticism aims to recognise the writings of women as

an integral aspect of the truth of women. Some analysts now use "gyna-criticism," which is about practitioners and "gyna-critics."

The 1979 essay of American literary critic Elaine Showalter coined the word 'gyna-critics' as 'Towards a feminist poetics.' Gyna-criticism was intended to create a literary tradition for women without including men's authors, unlike feminist literary critical works that could examine feminist-specific writers. Showalter thought that feminist critique was still working on male stereotypes, while gynacriticism was beginning a new stage in the self-development of women.

CONCLUSION

Female characters play an significant part for dramatic round of Shakespeare's plays, . As in fact, Shakespeare's dramas have been bound by patriarchal Elizabethan's rules & conventions. Thereby, feminist approaches and all of these issues are better understood in the sense of feminism itself: the promotion of social , political and economic rights & women's equality. This paper explores Shakespeare's most important female characters & feminist in all his plays.

REFERENCES

- Alcott, Louisa May (1996). *The Feminist Alcott: Stories of a Woman's Power*. Edited by Madeleine B. Stern, Northeastern University.
- Barr, Marleen S. (1993). *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond*. University of North Carolina.
- Bolin, Alice (2018). *Dead Girls: Essays on Surviving an American Obsession*. William Morrow.
- Burke, Sally (1996). *American Feminist Playwrights: A Critical History*. Twayne.
- Carlin, Deborah (1992). *Cather, Canon, and the Politics of Reading*. University of Massachusetts.
- Castillo, Debra A. (1992). *Talking Back: Toward a Latin American Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cornell University.
- Chocano, Carina (2017). *You Play the Girl*. Mariner.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar (2007) editors. *Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism: A Norton Reader*. Norton.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar (1993). editors. *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist*

Essays on Women Poets. Indiana University.

Lauret, Maria (1994). *Liberating Literature: Feminist Fiction in America*. Routledge.

Lavigne, Carlen (2013). *Cyberpunk Women, Feminism and Science Fiction: A Critical Study*. McFarland.

Lorde, Audre (2020). *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Penguin.

Perreault, Jeanne (1995). *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography*. University of Minnesota.

Plain, Gill, and Susan Sellers (2012). editors. *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cambridge University.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson (1992). editors. *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. University of Minnesota.

Corresponding Author

Dr. Kumari Rekha*

Assistant Professor of English, Kanti Indra Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Digha, Patna