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Shift in the Adaptation of Social Values from Classical to Modern Literature: A Comparative Study of *Abhijanashakuntalam* and *Moll Flanders*

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ABSTRACT

Social values form an important part of the culture of our society. Values account for the stability of social order as they provide the general rules for social conduct. Values such as fundamental rights, devotion, respect for human dignity, rationality, sacrifice, individuality, equality, democracy etc. guide our behavior in many ways. These are the norms people use in evaluating their daily lives; arrange their priorities and choose between alternative courses of action. This research paper particularly focuses on the two major characters i.e. Shakuntala from *AbhijnanaShakuntalam* and Moll Flanders from *Moll Flanders* who represents various social values of women belonging to different climes, cultures, and centuries. The present paper focuses to throw some light on various social values such as emotions, behavior, attitude, feelings, experiences, mental states, degree of patience, quality of forgiveness, reaction to social situations, modesty, and decency to show how these social values have been represented in the classical and modern literature and how they have marked a shift in the representation of women.

Keywords: Social values; culture; characterization; society

INTRODUCTION

Values hold an integral part of our society. Every society needs some values to function properly as values are the set rules which guide the society to work smoothly and ethically. Values are the qualities possessed by an individual and thought desirable. Values are similar to attitudes but are more permanent and well built in nature. Values lay the grounds for the understanding of attitudes and motivation. Values may be defined as a “concept of the desirable, an internalized criterion or standard of evaluation a person possesses. Such concepts and standards are relatively few and

determine or guide an individual's evaluations of the many objects encountered in everyday life".

Every individual of a society has certain values/roles to perform in the society. Likewise, both men and women possess individual roles that they need to play in the society. Both men and women have different set of duties and those duties are performed cannot be performed without the social values. Social values are supposed to be same to both the genders but certain values as made by the patriarchy have been assigned specially to women only. Women have always been judged through the values they carry within themselves. The morals they have are reflected in their character and personality and have been judged on this basis since centuries by the male dominant society. As such women have to be cautious about their actions in this patriarchal society unlike men who has always received freedom and flexibility in their actions.

Resultantly, each era has its own characteristics and social values. From classical to modern, each era has different characteristics assigned both for men and women. Also, each era has its own values for both men and women but one thing is same that in all these climes women is not given the equal status to men. The characteristics of a particular society have been perfectly depicted by the writers of that era or century. Literature, considered to be the reflection of society reflects the perceptions and attitudes of the society as well. It portrays human life through its characters, words, and deeds and they convey the message to instruct, inform, enlighten, emancipate, and delight. Both the aspects of human nature i.e. good and bad present in the society are well portrayed through literature. The changing role of women in literature from the past to present indicates the evolution of women and women empowerment.

Even the Ramayana and Mahabharata's women characters have been subjugated and discriminated by the patriarchy. Women were considered less worthy than men and were treated as a commodity to please men. The fact is that these characters were curated and edited to fulfill the needs of a patriarchal society. Sita has been known for her sacrificing nature, whereas Draupadi has been known for her sharp oratory and comments. Women in Greek Mythology shows that women's rights were very limited and not allowed to express much of their freedom. In ancient Greek role of women was considered to be insignificant as compared to Greek men. The medieval literature shows women obey the narrow roles of daughters, wives, and mothers. Gradually, with the advent of modernization and education women began to express more of their opinions and had equal role in society. In this research paper we are dealing with the change in social values particularly portrayed by women of two different eras of literature that is classical literature and modern literature. In classical literature we are particularly talking about the Indian classical literature and in modern literature we are talking about the early modern literature of Britain.

Indian classical literature is also known as the early Indian literature or Sanskrit literature. Indian literature has an extended tradition history of thousands of years with special accomplishments, becoming the common

spiritual heritage of mankind. Classic Sanskrit literature originated with epics and Puranas and these served as source of inspiration for their successors, who also influenced in shaping the women characters.

In ancient Indian society, women had limited importance in the family and society but were a spiritual support and foundation for hero's strength in particular and for the community's strength in general. They were able to inspire hero's action and aspirations with their own nobility with deep human affection. The general characteristics of the women in ancient Indian literature were compassion and kindness, determination and patience, love, faithfulness, loyalty and the desire for happiness which were considered as the typical image for Indian culture and an endless source of inspiration for Indian art and literature.

Talking about the early modern period of Britain, it is well recognized in the history of literature. British literary works of 18th century was very famous and well established in the world of literature. Many of the famous writers like Jonathan Swift, John Dryden and Samuel Johnson has depicted the British society very well through their novels and satires. One of the main characteristics of this literary period was the portrayal of women.

The eighteenth-century of England marks a traditional patriarchal society. Many women acquire education and satisfying lives but their happiness often depends on the importance that husbands give to their wishes and judgment. Women's comfort, fulfillment and self-respect depend on the good will of the men around them: their husbands and their relatives. Female maturity means being married, having children, and running a house. A woman who is married enjoys greater social status than a spinster. Majority of women in early modern society are married with husbands that sustain them. However, not all women find marriage as an economic support. Early modern women can achieve the possibility of having romantic and sexual attraction with their partners, but they are not always free to rank it first; equality of birth and wealth are generally essential especially among the gentry and the middle class.

To analyze and examine in detail the social values endured by female characters of Indian Classical Literature and Early modern period of Britain, Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* from *Abhijanashakuntalam* and Moll Flanders from *Moll Flanders* have been taken up for the detailed critical analysis.

Shakuntala vs Moll Flanders

Abhijanashakuntalam is a beautiful tale of love and romance, the name literally meaning 'of Shakuntala who is recognized by a token'. *Abhijanashakuntalam* is a marvelous work of the great poet and playwright Kalidasa. It throws light on various social values i.e.- emotions, behavior, attitude, feelings, experiences, mental states, degree of patience, quality of forgiveness, reaction to social situations, modesty, and decency of women are reflected in the play.

In the first act, we see Dushyanta falls in love with Shakuntala. Simultaneously, Shakuntala is also overwhelmed by the king's appearance

and immediately falls in love with him. The king thinks of the possibility of him being a suitable husband to Shakuntala because a man of a higher class was allowed to marry, besides a girl of his own class, a girl of lower class. If both of them are Brahmin then the possibility of them to get married reduces as marriage with a woman of the higher class was strictly forbidden at that time.

Shakuntala was so cultured, decent, sober, and moderate that she couldn't directly express her inner feelings to her beloved. Manu also declares that women can't have independence of action under any circumstances. A woman has no liberty of action at any time. There are certain social, religious taboos which operated as social sanctions.

Shakuntala was affected by the malady of king's love and she told king that- "though smitten with love, I am not the mistress of my person. I can give you my heart but it is my father who has the power to dispose of my person, not I." She presents an illusion of the Aryan female modesty. Though trouble by the arrows of cupid she showed a full sense of female honour. Her words prove her lively sense of feminine dignity and respect for her elders. This heightens her essence and worth immensely in our eyes. As Kanva says:

Serve your elders, and act the part of a loving friend towards your co-wives; though wronged do not act in a refractory way towards your husband, in a fit of anger; be extremely polite towards your dependents, and not elated with pride in prosperity. Thus, do young ladies attain the dignity of a house wife; those of an opposite character are a curse to the banes of their family. (17)

It embodies the noblest advice that could be ever given to a young woman on such an occasion when she was prepared to join her husband as his wife. It was considered the principal duty of a girl after marriage in ancient times. To abide entirely by the wishes of her husband and to be devoted to his wellbeing alone is considered to be the highest duty of a Hindu women. From her parent's perspective, the daughter is only a deposit guarded by the father to be made over to her husband at the proper time.

To conclude the discussion, one can notice that caste system was very much prevalent and dominant in the society. Women were not allowed to have independence of action under any circumstances. They are not free or independent to do anything she desires. There are certain social, religious taboos which operated as social sanctions. To abide entirely by the wishes of her husband and to be devoted to his wellbeing alone was considered to be the highest duty of Hindu women. The widow could not inherit her husband's property in those days; she was simply entitled to maintenance i.e. maintaining the house, family, and her children. It shows that there was nothing more attached to women in the time of Kalidasa. Values, ethics, duty, responsibility etc. were related to her commitment towards the family. They were strictly restricted in every sphere to breathe the air of an independent being. They were recognized as the oppressed class of the society and merely a puppet in the hands of male dominating society.

On the other hand, Moll from *Moll Flanders* is totally different from Shakuntala. Moll's most salient characteristics are her ingenuity, energy, and determination to survive and do well. She is willing to sacrifice moral principles in order to prosper, but does not appear to be extraordinarily wicked: when her continued prosperity seems secure, she can be an exemplary wife, sober and virtuous. She is beautiful and clever at the same time.

From early age, Moll understood that women around her required power and freedom to take their own decisions. But Moll's idea of a good life was quite different from what other women around her thought to be. Moll wanted to become a gentlewoman right from her childhood which meant independent life. Since women of the 18th century didn't have the luxury to work and earn their livelihood as compared to today's scenario, so Moll's dream of leading a rich life couldn't be fulfilled easily. She was bound to undertake a lot of unusual and unexpected decisions throughout her life which makes the reader question her character.

Moll marries the draper after the death of Robert whom she had been married for five years. Later she marries the plantation owner, banker, and finally settles down with Jemy. She easily leaves Humphrey, her son from her husband whom she finds it to be her brother. She is mistress to Robert's elder brother and the gentleman who later dies due to illness. Later in life, she also becomes a thief with the help of her governess who helps her enter the criminal world.

The subjective response here can be that Moll was just practical throughout her life. She knew that it was difficult to survive with idealism and emotions in those times. As a female protagonist, Moll makes the best use of her intelligence, self-sufficiency and practical competence to live through every situation she encounters. She uses men as tools for survival and security and creates more opportunities for making more money for her future. In fact, her moral code is such that she can fit into the situation fully and come out without losing anything from her side. It seems strange when the reader finds that she is able to slip into marriages one after another without any residual emotions. It is difficult to accept that Daniel Defoe's heroine has used the holy institution of marriage just to climb the socioeconomic ladder that too for five times. Practically speaking there was no other way for Moll to make her place in the society as in those days, it was difficult for women to survive in the society without a good and prosperous husband.

In fact, Moll's character is a persona of a strong and accommodating person who can withstand the storm of bad times in life. Ignoring the moral point of view of Moll's character, one can really get true inspiration from her life and the decisions she made. It is easy for any of us to fall into the trap of stress after a loss of a beloved or at some financial crisis. Unlike Moll, it takes a great deal of courage to revive to one's normal life. We find it hard to get over our emotional bondage and move ahead in life. Moll's story is a strong example of how determination and valour can help a person get through any situation in life.

Had Moll been only after money, she would have never left the plantation owner (her husband whom later she found it to be her brother). She could have easily sustained the rest of her life living with the plantation owner in Virginia. But the guilt of having married her own brother made her quit the marriage and return to England without fearing her future. So, it's not that she was only focused on exploiting the people around her to fulfil her desires. However, the never-ending desire of becoming a gentlewoman kept her spirits high and she easily made her way through the adversities.

Moll was an extraordinary person who had her own dreams and wanted to fulfil them. Moreover, she wasn't a housewife who just wanted to enjoy life by sitting at the backseat. She was beautiful, courageous, independent, determined, practical, and ambitious and a strong woman who wanted to be a gentlewoman.

CONCLUSION

Literature has witnessed the roles of women evolving through ages, most of the published writers were men until recent times, and therefore the portrayal of women was undoubtedly bias. Since the time of the first explorers to the present, women's roles and portrayal in literature reflect the changes occurring historically for women. By studying these changes, it is observed that not only the characters have changed but the identity of women has also changed. Women's roles have changed, their thinking has changed, the sacrificial attitude that they had always been admired for has also changed and, they have become determined and more compassionate in their approach and attitude. For them, their individuality matters and now they want a security in their life to live a beautiful and stable life ahead. The roles have changed, the values have changed but ultimately the change is good and much needed.

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