



Revolting Female Characters In Novels Of Krishna Sobti And Pratibha Ray:A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The present study aims to focus on the comparative aspects and characterization in the selected novels as well as to compare and contrast the characters through a female gaze. The present research is also an attempt to compare and evaluate the characters and analyse the selected novels of Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray. The novels of these writers (Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray) convey new questions about femininity and power structures by depicting modern women continuously fighting to negotiate their own identity in the new nation. These women writers presented the quest for a woman's identity at time when feminism was not an integral part of social and intellectual discourse as it has become over the past few decades. The proposed study is limited to novels of Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray. Under the research article the portrayal of women characters religious and moral aspects in selected novels of Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray on comparative line will be studied. The present study has wide research scope because it comprises two different regional literature with different languages such as Krishna Sobti belongs to Punjabi and Hindi literature and Pratibha Ray belongs to Odia literature. The selected novels are examined against the backdrop of Punjabi and Odia socio-cultural milieu. The comparative study of characters in the novels develop interest in readers. The present comparative study distinguishes to regional writers Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray who are are so influential in spreading the knowledge of India's culture around the world.

Keywords: Krishna Sobti, Pratibha Ray, Patriarchy, Feminism, Female characters, Independent Identity, Female Persona, Comparative Literature.

Introduction

The term "comparative literature" is difficult to define for it involves two or more literatures in comparison at the same time. Comparative literature is the study of interrelationship between two or more significant literary works or literatures. Indian comparative literature Association was established in 1981 which declared its aim as

to arrive at a conception of Indian literature which will not only modernize our literature departments but also take care of the task of discovering the greatness of a literature and to present a panoramic view of Indian literature activities through ages. (Bassnet)

Comparative literature is considered as the study of "literature without borders" .

India is a multilingual country, most population lives in rural areas with traditional belief, old customs and religions. In India, one finds lingual, ethnic, religious diversity; unity in diversity. In keeping India United and transferring the rich cultural heritage, comparative literature plays an important role. The proposed study is the study of two writers who share different regions of India but their work is committed to transferring rich cultural and humanistic values. This study helps to experience and examine unity in diversity. Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray establish the independent identity of a woman exposing the mental disharmony caused by polygamy. These writers brings in the tragic view of family life in a middle class Indian society, indicating injustice done to a woman.

Literature Review

When we talk about the comparative research done on Krishna Sobti or Pratibha Ray, the first one that we come across is Mamta Chaturvedi's '*Shashi Prabha Shastri evam Krishna Sobti ke upanyason mein Shilp ka tulnatmak Adhyan*' from Kanpur (1994), this research focuses on techniques of novels in the field of literature. Another that we come across is '*Krishna Sobti aur Intzaar Hussain Ki Zindagi-nama aur Basti upanyason mein Watan Ki avdharna : ek tulnatmak Adhyan*'(2007). Yet another is done on '*Krishna Sobti aur Mridula Garg ke Katha Sahitya Mein chitrit Nari samasyaon ka tulnatmak Adhyan*' (2001) which talks about the problems faced by the women in the literary works of Krishna Sobti and Mridula garg. In '*Krishna Sobti evam Amrita Pritam ki kahaniyon mein Punjabi samvedna : tulnatmak Adhyan*' Rajpal has recognised the Punjabi soil and studied the cultural specificity of it which can be considered the key points in understanding the Punjabi sentiments. Both the writers belongs to Punjab. In an article '*Enticing Fictions and Illustrative Creativity of Pratibha Ray*' Santosh Tripathy emphasizes that "as a novelist of great reputation Pratibha' s illustrative creativity has aided some enticing features to the growth of the Indian literature in post-colonial and post-modern era"(Tripathy 129). Pratibha Ray has been displayed as a humanist-feminist writer.

One thing that is there from this available text is that, from the angle of comparative study, Krishna Sobti has been compared with Shashi Prabha Shastri, Intezaar Hussain, Mridula Garg, Amrita Pritam, but not much attention has been given for in depth study of culturally different novelist to test their psyche. Keeping in mind the female persona for comparative study novels of Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray are desired for research work.

Methodology

The inclusive and expanding multicultural approach by applying analytical research methodology of comparative literature will be the approach of the present study. For this purpose critical comments observations and valuable analysis of characters from the novels will be discussed. The comparison of the female persona in the novels of Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray is the main purpose of the study. Both the novelists use themes and plots of their respective novels to show the exploitation of women by male dominated society. The subject matter will be analyzed in the perspective of feminist theory.

Result

The research investigates various aspects such as themes, craftsmanship of Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray as to establish the nature of feminism in the works of the above novelist. The novelists portrayal in the perspective of Indian concept of feminism has been brought into discussion.

Further, both the novelist are recognised as milestones in their respective regional literature, also their literary work art is translated into many languages. There lies similarities and dissimilarities in female persona as depicted in the selected novels. It is observed that both the writers give importance to religious and cultural harmony as the need of Indian society. Besides social as well as regional differences Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray criticized the rigid norms of patriarchal and orthodox society through their novels. And they also focus on the protagonists freedom to choose. The heroines are free to decide on their future and to have a say in what happens in their life irrespective of demands laid by society.

Discussion

The proposed research paper 'revolting female characters in novels of Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray: a comparative study' focuses on the novels of Gyan Peeth and Sahitya Akademi awardees Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray with a critical approach to find the similarities and dissimilarities in female characters as depicted by them. Sobti is from Punjab whereas Ray belongs to Odisha. There lies a cultural diversity which can also be seen in depiction of characters especially female characters in the novels. Their literary work also differs. The woman characters of one writer can be seen in '*Daarh se Bichudi*'(1958), '*Mitro Marjani*'(1967), '*Surajmukhi andhere ke*' (1972), '*Dil-o-Danish*'(1993), '*Samay Sargam*'(2000) whereas of the other are seen in '*Samudra Swara*' (1982), '*Sheelapadma*' (1983), '*Yajnaseni*' (1984), '*Mahamoha*' (1998), '*Dehateeta*' (1986), etc. Although

the writing period of both the writers differ but the subject they focus on remains the same. Sobti started writing from '58 whereas Ray started writing in '74 and by mid 80s she was already established as a forefront writer.

Earlier Indian women writing was centered on subjects like love, devotion etc. Credit goes to these women (Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray) writers who took from a limited circumference to a broader perspective.

Krishna Sobti's mother, Durga was a strong woman and an excellent horse rider. Sobti inherited this trend, and thus have created some of the most assertive women characters in Indian literature. Krishna Sobti refused the Padma Bhushan during the UPA government and also returned the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship protesting rising intolerance in society. Pratibha Ray was influenced by her Gandhian father, who also protested against injustice and oppression which can be seen in her works as well. She has also attributed revolt, compassion, humanism and boldness in her characters. Apparently the hunt for social order based on equality, love, peace, non-violence and national emotional integration can be seen in her writings.

Even though there lies cultural diversity between the two writers but one thing that is common in their work is that the struggle is often of the single woman who has chosen not to have a child. Ray focuses on 'wife' Draupadi (*Yagyaseni*) as Krishna bhakt but did not attempt a mother to Draupadi who gave birth to child from all her husband.

In a way Krishna Sobti was a pioneer among Hindi fiction writers. Also, she was the first to define and establish the independent Identity of a woman exposing the mental disharmony of her heroine. Same way Pratibha Ray has also tried to expose the mental disharmony of her heroine due to polygamy. No one tried to show the problems faced by Draupadi. In every version of Mahabharata, always the hero and their heroism is greatly admired. But Ray's modern Draupadi is more aware of her potentials. Yagyaseni's author criticizes the leading heroes. The book ask question –

They have many wives for the kings during that time and even Krishna had many wives then why only question a woman when she marries more than one?

Seems like these women writers have taken a close look at the marital relationships in the Indian families, the disharmony the woman feel leading to failure and suffering. In a way their fiction presents a tragic view of the family life of Indian middle class society. Problems ranging from family exploitation to sexual abuse have been exposed in the novels of these writers. Pratibha Ray for the life story of mythical character Draupadi holds Yudhishtira, her husband, responsible. After swayamvar, when Draupadi and five Pandavas return to maa Kunti, she declares to divide the things brought amongst all. In a way this is also the indicative of male dominance which he (Yudhishtira) announces according to his own way as he thinks suitable. To call a woman a 'thing' or an 'object' is a disgraceful term used by Yudhishtira for Draupadi. Ray's modern Draupadi states that –

It seemed to me that the elder brother had deliberately uttered such equivocating sentence to convey the news of my arrival to mother. The elder brother knew that everyday the food and money obtained as alms was divided equally amongst themselves. Then why did he not say 'mother your third son, having won princess Krishna in the swayamvar, has brought her here and your third daughter-in-law is waiting at door for your blessings. (Yajyaseni 58)

Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray brings in the issue of marriage to indicate the injustice done to a woman. Notions of marriage is not the same to a man as it is to a woman. It is likely an imposed thing on woman, which she is forced to follow.

The novels of Sobti and Ray show a bold and innovative statement of modern femininity. The mythological characters, especially female characters in the novels is given a transformative dimension, celebrating the free soul of Ray's concept of a new woman. Their heroines are beautiful with a divine touch but are not a wax doll. Ray's characters are erudite, scholarly and their self esteem is beyond a parallel in Indian contemporary literature. Sobti's novel offer a combination of Punjabi slangs roughness, poetic lyricism and regional rhythm.

Sobti's Mitro married in a joint family of three brothers acknowledges her sexuality and even scolds her husband for not fulfilling her sexual desire. Mitro cannot understand why she can not do whatever pleases her at the level of the body. When mother-in-law receive the news of Suhaag's pregnancy she is overwhelmed with joy making Mitro wonders –

This whole business of bearing life... If your son sows seed, it's a virtue. If another does, a vice! (Mitro Marjani 64)

However, in the end of the novel Mitro comes to realise the importance of family life. The same husband she cursed day-in and day-out now appears to her an invaluable treasure she cannot afford to lose. Ray reinterpreted Ahalya as a modern women who had two persons in her life, one Indra, the king of heaven, and other sage Gautama, the crest jewel of Vedic learning. Ahalya always thought that she deserved a man like Indra for her beauty, wit, intellect and awareness of reality. But after being Gautama's wife she does not protest or rebel and accepts subjects of the attached order without regrets.

Moreover, Sobti's many novels talks about the key relationship between the mother and daughter ; that with every step the daughter takes not to repeat what she perceives as her mother's mistake, she found herself in the brink of a similar situation.

The women protagonists of these writers can be divided into two categories. The first group comprises of those traditional women who are powerless or lack awareness towards their rights as individuals. Their thoughts, behaviour and actions are largely controlled by male hegemonic power. They are presented as submissive and

victim of male domination as well as traditional dogmas. Suhagvanti, Sumitravanti and Phoolvanti of '*Mitro Marjani*', Shahani and Rabyan of '*Zindaginama*', Kutumb, Mehek and Chunna in '*Dil-o-Danish*' and Vimala and Vasudha of '*Dehateeta*', all exhibits this deep seated tendency to accept the four walls of household as their domain. The second category is that of those women who have got power in some form - economic, social, sexual, intellectual. Draupadi, Swaha, Mitro, Ratti, to some extent Mehak, Ammu can be placed under this category. Draupadi (*Yajyaseni*) and Swaha (*Dehateeta*) enjoys intellectual power, Mitro (*Mitro Marjani*) enjoys sexual power, Ratti (*Surajmukhi andhere ke*) and the unnamed girl (*Ae ladki!*) have economic power. These woman characters break shackles of patriarchal society for their identity and space. It is observed that both the writers keenly focus on inner feelings of abandoned woman who holds up the thought that a woman needs her space and her individuality. Every character shows unique and individualistic distinctive traits. Chhuna, Mehek, Kutumb, Pasho - all are so different from one another that there can be no comparison between any two of them.

Ray's reinterpreted Ahalya, a woman with her mind in its own place, acknowledges her feminine self with a bold statement of truth. Ahalya admits that it was not rape, but a union of love and Indra did not force her for lust, rather it was a love fulfillment for Ahalya. Whatever was done it was done with Ahalya's body and soul surrendering willingly, longingly for the first and the most graceful experience of love. She confesses that she was fulfilled as a woman and sage Gautama's scholarship and rights of husband-hood had never made Ahalya feel like a woman. But Indra makes the woman complete. Ahalya's bold assertion of her sexuality does not compromise with her feminine dignity.

On reading Sobti's and Ray's fiction, one gets the general impression that their characters do not justify the feminist nomenclature like other female characters leading a life of uncertainty with full of questions with their newly acquired consciousness. The girl of '*Ae ladki*' who has decided to stay out of matrimony does not process feminism anywhere in the novel. The time only when Sobti's and Ray's female character come to closer to feminist position is in their strong resentment for male hegemony and the resultant striving to carve their Niche by becoming self-reliant. These characters hold important positions in overall struggle of Indian women for her rights. Sobti has been criticized for her women characters by "their willingness to take a step or two, to see the world with their own eyes, to have a feel of it on their own." This observation may not be applicable to all of women's character but certainly there are some characters like Ratti who show these tendency.

Pratibha Ray's Draupadi is a reinterpretation of great Indian epic 'the Mahabharata' from Draupadi's point of view. The author of *Yajyaseni* successfully depicts the trails and tribulations of Draupadi as an ordinary modern women with a new approach whose story is often lost in the epic of Mahabharata. The narration of Draupadi's ordeal appears contemporary and relevant to present day gender issues that intimidates the existence and identity of women in society. The novel presents revolutionary thoughts of Draupadi. Draupadi is portrayed as modern revolutionary woman who is seen to be acting against dominance by birth. At the time of swayamvar, Draupadi questions her brother Dhrishtadyumna –

Can't the arrangement for swayamvar be stopped? (Yajyaseni 31)

The prevailing significance of marriage in Indian culture is 'security' , 'wife's security' by husbands. Therefore , Indian parents want to give their daughters to the safe hands of their husbands. But the question arises whether actually marriage gives protection to a woman? Does the husband support his wife till his last breath? Pratibha Ray questions the marriage Institutions through the mythical character like *Draupadi*. In the novel '*Yagyaseni*' , the novelist has emphasized that marriage does not provide security. Despite having five husbands , she has been humiliated in the heavy assembly. Ray has also called in-laws house as '*yampoori*.' The authors *Draupadi (Yagyaseni)* is a strong educated women in Indian literature. The character of *Draupadi* emphasize that the duty of ideal wife is not to keep silent but to correct her husband's mistake and supplement him.

Like every Indian girl Ray's *Draupadi* was also scared of this marriage ceremony. Normally when a person is in a state of puzzle, he/she lean towards deviation, that is, starts praying to God. Same happens with *Draupadi* as well. On the day of *Swayamvar*, *Draupadi* appears in front of goddess *Parvati* and prayed –

Devi! Preserve my honour...if the person I have accepted as my husband has been brunt to death, is that not an insult to me...if anyone other than *Arjuna* was successful in passing the test, father would accept him as son-in-law, but how can I take him as husband? (36)

Not only this, but the novelists have keen eye on family exploitation as well. A woman has to merge herself into others, experiencing a loss of boundaries like her mother, father, native places and so many memories. After a lady gets married, her identity is lost and she has to live according to her husband's wishes. Ray has successfully depicted this as - *Arjuna* follows his mother's views and his brother's decision and the same is imposed to *Draupadi* forcibly. Even when she complains, there is no solution. She complained saying –

You have won me. You could have said, 'No one else has a right to *Krishna*!' Why did you leave everything to me? (81)

The protest against child marriage and polygamy can be seen in Indian women writings. According to *Jagannath* of '*Sheelapadma*' , "There lies no difference between misalliance and rape." Twenty-eight years old *Jagannath* on honeymoon night finds that her wife *Prachi Prabha* is only thirteen years old considering this as tyranny leaves home overnight. In this context , writer made *Prachi Prabha* say that-

Men like this are not animals, rather, they are good humans.

Konark, *Draupadi* and *Ahalya* are the important aspects of Indian history and mythology. Pratibha Ray broke the traditional hypothesis related to these three. In '*Yagyaseni*' and *Mahamoha*, she has made a commendable effort in bringing justice to the humiliated and imputed characters of Indian mythology, that is, *Draupadi* and *Ahalya* respectively.

Krishna Sobti has been seen as radical feminist for her depiction of characters like Mitro of '*Mitro Marjani*' and Ratti of '*Surajmukhi andhere ke*'. Pratibha Ray has also used radical feminist logic to make characters like Ahalya of '*Mahamoha*' as a complete women biologically and a truthful icon spiritually and an eternal symbol of love experience psychologically.

Pratibha Ray's novel demonstrates the panoramic view of Indian Culture whereas novels of Krishna Sobti demonstrates a typical Punjabi culture. These writers have strongly opposed all the blind policies which have become rooted in the conservative Indian society.

Krishna Sobti uses distinctive language especially that of Punjabi street language unlike literary tongue of Pratibha Ray. Sobti believes that every word has a body

words derive power from usage and reference.

She further writes,

for writers words are the most important tool they command.

Compared with the males, women characters play dominant roles in the novels of these writers. In an interview Krishna Sobti says,

I don't like being called a 'woman writer, I would rather be called a writer who is also a woman. For me, men and women are very close to each other. Apart from the obvious qualities they share, both sexes do not have a different soul. Earlier women were confined to their homes but today women receive the same education and step out of their homes to earn a living. Love, sex and death remain the most intense experiences experienced by both sexes. (Sehgal)

Through their writings these writers (Sobti and Ray) have revolutionized womanhood and redefined the role of women in society. The protagonists of these narratives are the narrators just like Mitro, Draupadi, Ahalya. These women characters raise the question against patriarchy and demands justice. Keeping in mind the comparative paradigm, Female Persona depicted in the novels of Krishna Sobti and Pratibha Ray is studied. These women writers have striven to bring to the forefront the female voices suppressed under patriarchy. The protagonists of these writers reveals the underlying mysteries of society

Conclusion

Pratibha Ray's and Krishna Sobti's novel enable us to get an idea of women's struggle against this gender discrimination. Through the reading of these narratives one can be familiar with the idea that the objective of these writers to depict the story from women point of view is to clear the negative interpretations about the characters and give them the rightful place where they deserve. Thus, the ideal image of mythological Draupadi and Ahalya disappeared with the arrival of new Draupadi or modern Draupadi and modern Ahalya of Pratibha Ray respectively. This new Draupadi and Ahalya shatters the earlier ideal definition of Draupadi and Ahalya which was defined by patriarchy just to keep mum a woman through her examples. Despite facing oppression, stigmatization and violence for their free speech and sexuality, the protagonists of these writers fight the system through their brave, fierce and hypocritical conduct and they also do not reject tradition.

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