

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE PORTRAYAL OF GENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN INDIAN AND ENGLISH PLAYS: A STUDY THROUGH CHANDALIKA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

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Abstract

The study explores the issue of gender and the associated gender roles that the characters of the selected Indian and British plays portray in the modern period to their readers. Using narrative analysis to analyze the characters of these dramas will help us know what kind of messages these plays propagate about gender, gender roles, and gender behaviors.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Roles, and Gender Behavior.

Introduction

The majority of plays assign their characters to traditional gender roles and behaviors. These texts are a part of the curriculum around our country hence propagating a stereotype. The Indian-English plays of the modern period obviously change character portrayal; we can see an exchange of gender roles in Indian modern plays. We have strong and independent modern women characters in the Indian plays compared to the modern British plays but in every play, they never reach an equal stature. Pygmalion is a modern play with a woman lead character, but from a masculine point of view, even after education, she does not reach the equal stature of the male character. Indian theatre plays of the 18th -19th century like that of the characters of Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad has way stronger character portrayed in a better manner though these also have a masculine point of view. There is a traditional character pattern that still exists. Gender roles bring limitations to the characters in their actions, choices, etc.

For tracing the traditional patterns of the selected plays, we can divide them into four

categories for the study: behavior characteristics, sources of power, physical appearance, and communication patterns. Any scholarly-minded reader of these plays after reading any work for that matter may ponder upon a few questions like the bellow said after reading and enjoying these plays:

1. What gender roles did the characters enact in each play?
2. Did the play's dramatic personae of the male and female genders use certain patterns and were the gender patterns completely opposite?
3. Was there a difference in gender portrayal of characters in the plays that were Indian and British?
4. Did the gender roles fall into the traditional realm or did they take on roles that are outside traditional categories?
5. Did the gender roles determine the situations faced by the characters?
6. Were the problems and consequences faced by the characters based on the gender roles and their actions?

Works already existing in this area of study include, Bonny Ball Copenhagen from East Tennessee State University has studied gender and gender roles in American plays to name one of them. It was an interdisciplinary study based on an interaction theory of sociology. J D Ton has studied Judith Butler's notion of Gender Performativity, speaking against the theory saying that it excludes stable gender identities. Dattani's *Tara: A Reflection on Indian Society on Injustice and Inequality Bias towards Women* is an article written by Jayanthi Rajendran and Samina Musharraf from Jazan University Saudi Arabia, which also gives ample insight into this area of study.

The study is qualitative. It includes content analysis and observation. Analysis of the content was based on the notion that civilized humanitarian societies have institutions that specialize in creating and publicizing the functional rules of a society and that these rules ideas and thoughts are validated in the written communication of a particular society (Copenhaver, 2002). In essence, written documents of a society represent that society. It is a "cultural indicator" and is considered valid and reliable data for the study. The selected document here is the selected Indian-English and British-English plays written are the cultural indicators of our gender and gender role analysis.

Methodology

Gender Performativity is simply the performances or mannerisms of a gender that later get identified only with a particular gender. What happens here is categorization. Society plays an important role in it. Society ascribes certain actions to particular gender alone, which could be seen as a particular way of discriminating outlook. For Judith Butler, gender is always a performed entity i.e., bodily and non-verbal (Mambrol). The key to gender

performativity is the repetition of an action. Gender Performativity is easily visible in the genre of drama. We can see an obvious difference in the performativity of gender not only in the character portrayal of different nations but even from writer to writer of the same nationality, but it should also be noted that there is a universal similarity in the performance of gender. A piece of literature has the power to shape the conscience of its readers thereby constructing gender in a particular way.

The study will be analytically based on the plays selected. Various characteristics of gender performativity will be analyzed on the basis of theoretical lenses. The gender role and behavior will be analyzed based on the character's behavioral characteristics, communication patterns, power source, and the selected plays' physical appearance. To prove a systematic approach to the study, the plays are divided into two categories according to the period they belong to. One of the plays is 18th Century and the other is 19th Century. Does gender performativity vary according to the time period in which they are set? Gender performances are divided into four classes:

Behavior characteristics, communication patterns, sources of power, and physical appearance. By means of the narrative analysis technique, each play will be analyzed for certain traits or characteristics for each category. It is needless to say that for gender studies both genders have to be taken for analysis; one is taken as the exact opposite of the other like binary opposites.

- Behavior Characteristics: analyzes how women and men behave to each other in the play in microcosm and in society by large.
- Communication Pattern: analyzes how women communicated to each other and to the other sex likewise how men communicated to each other and to the opposite sex.

- **Source of Power:** The power sphere that would be at work here will be the domestic and the public. This would be the most desirable one and which is the least. Also why they are so will be answered through the analysis of these plays.
- **Physical Appearance:** accentuate how men and women were seen from a physical stance.

Characteristics of each of these categories will be analyzed from each and of play selected for the study.

Results

British drama essentially plays from the British Isles, historically England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. We have comedies, tragedies, tragicomedies, etc. included in these types of British dramas. This study takes a quick peek at the gender identity and gender roles portrayed in one of the most popular ones as an example. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is a play by Oscar Wilde in which apparently characters of different genders behave as poles apart. The male characters have very different behavior from that of the female characters. The female characters' dialogue is mostly concerned with their love life while the male characters live, think, and speak about a Bunburying life. Here maybe the writer wants to show the trivial life of Victorian society but he is knowingly or unknowingly, performing the females in a particular way different from the male gender. The source of power in the lives of the female characters, namely Cecily and Gwendoline, is their elderly. They have let their life decisions be taken by someone else.

We can see a rise in Indian drama mostly in the vernacular language itself in the beginning. Towards the 19th century, we can see Indians writing in English. The pre-independent English dramas were mostly written by the educated class like Sree Aurobindo, T P Kailasam, etc. who

concentrated on myth and religious themes. With the establishment of the National school of drama in Delhi, we started having more and more Indian English dramas performed on secular themes. The play *Importance of Being Earnest* in today's world is a highly acclaimed drama that opens in front of the audience the rigid social structure of the Victorian period which is portrayed in an excellent manner but while we propagate these plays inside the student circle it also acknowledges the young generation the manner of treatment and behavior of female characters in this play. Their behavior is most like those of dolls which is keyed by someone else, this can be the constraint of the social system that creeps into the personality. The trivial dialogues of the play which is the characteristic of the play are mostly done by the female characters. Needless to say, their economic stability is discussed only in the name of inheritance. Their heavy but aesthetic attire restricts their freedom of movement. This is a popular play performed in the year 1895 on the English stage.

In the period of 1891-1895, India had a brilliant literary artist Rabindranath Tagore. We have many outstanding literary works penned by him that portray women characters as capable and strong, besides the point that these plays also focused on social evils. Self-consciousness, up to a point, is required for self-development. Without self-awareness of self-worth, one cannot appreciate one's own role or function, one cannot give one's best to the world (Kriticulture 2020). Today, in this world of the new generation we see young lovers killing each other due to the disapproval of the love by one or the other due to some reason whatever it is. This play gives the students an opposite view to its readers. Here Chandalika loves Ananda, the monk. But towards the end of the story though she loves the monk she steps back and lets him free.

The gender performativity of the main characters of the play can be analyzed. Here Chandalika attains a self-dignity for herself.

analyze the male character, he forgives her for her ill actions and moves forward in his journey in life. In terms of communication, the heroine confides in her mother. There is no belittling status of women when a male and female communicate in this play the monk is the encourager of her life to gain equal status in every sphere of life. Her mother, though performing necromancy ethically wrong, is shown as powerful enough to help her daughter win her love. From a physical standpoint, Chandalika is attracted to the person who had helped her to gain freedom from the shackles of casteism. In the story, her feelings do not overpower her, because towards the end she sets the monk free.

Chandalika gives young readers comparatively a better view of gender performativity. There is the fact that the social power ruling a geographic area might be different for different countries. The views a reader gets on gender and gender roles are better on the Indian stage considering the case of the selected plays.

Conclusion

Thus, by performing a gender, the performer is creating gender roles that get inscribed into society if the performer's number gets multiplied by a particular gender. Both the male playwrights have shown gender roles in their plays. We can conclude that the intensity of portrayal was less in the Tagore play and there was a girl Chandalika gaining an equal stature to the opposite stature painted by the writer. Whereas the Oscar play portrayed the women in a trivial light when both the young women were stern on the decision to marry only a man named Earnest. One of the questions of study gives us an interesting answer, that is if there is a character pattern in the plays discussed, The American Modern and Postmodern Plays. <https://dc.etsu.edu/etd/632>

Though she felt feelings towards the monk, towards the end of the story she falls onto the right path. Now if we

selected plays do not have a similar character pattern to a large extent but there are traces. For instance, the female characters are seeking guidance from a male character. Here both Cecily and Chandalika seek the help of male characters in their life.

There was an obvious difference in the portrayal of gender when there is a change in gender portrayal. The Indian play of comparatively the same period as that of the British has strong characters discussed. The British play takes upon traditional gender roles while the Indian play Chandalika shows traces of tradition but has a revolutionary outlook that stands the test of time and has meaning and values discussed which are relevant even today. In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, the gender roles determined the situations faced by the characters but not so much is evident in Chandalika for the female characters. The gender roles of the male characters determined the situations of the characters in both plays. The situations and actions of the characters are determined by their gender roles by large in the British play but not so much evident in Tagore's Chandalika. The message given out to the audience about gender performativity and gender roles is demeaning in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. On a comparative basis, Chandalika which is a play written fairly in the same time period has a better outlook towards different gender behaviors.

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