

Representation of Gender Roles beyond Oedipal Complementarities in Daughter Characters in Shakespeare's Selected Works

Hemalatha Kannan

Ph.D., Department of English, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, India

Email: kannan5hema@gmail.com

"[A]ll human individuals, as a result of their bisexual disposition and of cross-inheritance, combine in themselves both masculine and feminine characteristics, so that pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content". —Freud, 1925

ABSTRACT

All over the world, especially in developing countries, the condition of women were or are not in par with men. The predicament of women has undergone a considerable change, which can be seen every part of the globe. Creating labels as well as nomenclatures to identify women has become a common phenomenon, which is found all over the world. At this juncture, when a new nomenclature is created, again that would add another set of features to the identity of women. This has serious issues if it has been done with hidden purpose, which may or may not be seen at the outset. The real fact is that this sought of stigmatizing of women is created in such cultures, which is aiming for liberation and self-identity from the dominant forces. William Shakespeare lived during the Elizabethan era and wrote all his works based on the society of that time. The Elizabethan era was a time when women were portrayed to be weaker than men. During that time it was said that -"women are to be seen, and not heard." In this paper an attempt has been taken to explore Shakespeare's presentation of women in his works demonstrating his feelings about women and their roles in society.

KEYWORDS

Oedipal complementarities; culture; feminine difference; masculinity.

The position of women in the society reveals that were in the miserable position, they occupies inferior position and also depressed. In literature, image of daughters are everywhere, although it is exclusively in works by women writers. But the male representation of daughter is completely differing from the female representation. The fictional representations of daughters are complex and loaded with contradiction. As in Marianne Hirsch's seminal study *The*

Mother/Daughter Plot (1989), she finds – "mother-daughter relations are particularly ambivalent, as daughters (and writers) negotiate their way through the fluctuations of symbiosis and separation" (1) in their relationship with their mothers, in a quest for their own sense of self. (2)

Thus the gender development of a daughter is the result of the social-relational experience from her later childhood. Shakespeare, the great English

dramatists represent the gender role which is beyond the oedipal complexities especially in his daughter character in his dramas.

In Shakespeare's plays, many of the daughter characters are portrayed as submissive and easily controlled. Shakespeare showed his play daughters as meek, obedient and silent daughters. Early modern England was a highly patriarchal and male dominated society, where the father controlled his wife and children, inheritance went through the male line, and men, in general, held a disproportionate amount of power. The relationship between a father and his child was highly wrapped up in this gender ideology of early modern England. The daughter life begins with obeying her father. The daughters who are obedient of their fathers typically have all the traits desired in a woman: she is meek, submissive, and strikingly silent. These types of daughters are seen mostly in comedy plays.

The development of daughter's gender identity is different from that of a boy. In the preoedipal stage, both male and female identify themselves with their mothers. The boy's oedipal crisis speaks the issues of rejection of the feminine and identification with the father later in his life. Moreover, a daughter cannot and does not completely reject her mother in favour of men, but continues her relationship of dependence upon and attachment to her. In addition, the strength and quality of her relationship to her father is completely dependent upon the strength and quality of her relationship to her mother. The daughter's relationship with her father is not only of the same exclusively as that of the boy towards his mother, because both of them are same kind of parent, their nature and intensity differs. The daughter does not receive the same kind of love from her mother as boy does.

Thus the daughter's turns to her father looking for this kind of

conformation and create a sense of separateness from her mothers, and cares especially about being loved. Thus girl's situation in which the father and men, if erotically primary, are most likely affectively secondary, continues into adulthood. Thus Deutsch expresses that

Let us recall that we left the pubescent girl in a triangular situation and expressed the hope that later she would dissolve the sexually mixed triangle...in favour of heterosexuality. This formulation was made for the sake of simplification. Actually, whether a constitutional bisexual factor contributes to the creation of such triangle or not, this triangle can never be given up completely. The deepest and most ineradicable emotional relations with both parents share in its formation. It succeeds another relation, even older and more enduring- the relationship between mother and child, which every man or woman preserves from his birth to his death. It is erroneous to say that the little girl gives up her first mother relation in favour of the father. She only gradually draws him in the alliance, develops from the mother-child exclusiveness towards the triangular parent-child relation and continues the latter, just as she does the former, although in a weaker and less elemental form, all her life. Only the principal part changes, now the mother, now the father plays it. The ineradicability of affective constellations manifests itself in later repetitions. (Nancy Chodorow: 99)

Shakespeare's treatment of Ophelia in *Hamlet* also reveals the consequences of a patriarchal system upon the character. Ophelia, it would seem, is totally at the mercy of the male figures throughout her life and is indeed a victim figure. Ophelia is a victim to her father and brother where they are the two ruling powers in her life. By obeying their remonstrance without questioning about her relationship with Hamlet, she believes it to be her fault. Thus, her speech replicates her deep

genuineness: "And I of ladies most deject and wretched / That sucked honey of his music vows / O woe is me" (III.i.157-62).

Ophelia, the dominated daughter, is completely dependent. Although a flash of her potential self-will shines through at the beginning of the play, when we learn that Ophelia has entertained Hamlet without paternal permission, this is stifled very rapidly by Polonius and Laertes - the twofold voice of the patriarchy. Ophelia frightened by their saying that she has mistaken Hamlet's love, assumes that her father and brother necessarily know better and replies simply 'I will obey'. Shakespeare shows, however, that it is this obedience of Ophelia that leads to her own destruction

While Ophelia silently and obediently acknowledges the oppression of male power, turning her distress in upon herself in her madness, Desdemona, in her choosing of Othello as her husband, exercises her own wish, undermining the female role of passivity within the patriarchy, and marries him without parental approval. This is a rather courageous act of determination, which could have resulted in much conflict. When her father questions her about her marriage she answers forcefully, first appeasing him and then justifying her disobedience on the very argument of patriarchal obedience and duty:

My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.
To you I am bound, for life and education;
You are the lord of my duty
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband,
And so much duty as my mother show'd
To you preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor, my lord. (I. iii.180-89)

Miranda in *The Tempest* has only one female character. Miranda is characteristically viewed as being utterly depressed of freedom by her father. Her only responsibility in his eyes is to remain chaste, pure and innocent. Ann Thompson argues that Miranda, in a "manner typical of women in a colonial atmosphere, has completely internalized the patriarchal order of things, thinking of herself as subordinate to her father."

Both in comedies and tragedies the daughter characters were put into silent or made them to die. Using Silvia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Kate and Bianca in *Taming of the Shrew*, Jessica in *Merchant of Venice*, Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia in *King Lear*, we see the ways in which intensity of submission to a father is intrinsically linked with intensity of voice in the daughter. For instance, daughters in comedies are silenced simply through a lack of lines or a controlling marriage, but the rebellious daughters of tragedies are contained through the more tragic element of death. From the simplified silencing of Silvia to the extreme rebellion of Goneril and Regan, Shakespeare created a wide spectrum of daughters trying to negotiate the strict rules present in their society. In tragedies the daughters were very rebellious and they go against their father to fulfil their needs. They were not given rights to choose a life partner. For Silvia in *Two Gentleman of Verona* till Miranda in *Tempest* the daughters were controlled or controlling by their parents for them freedom is unfruitful. So the idea of good enough daughter's role has changed over the years.

Daughters feels that her mother identification continues starts from pre oedipal stage to oedipal stage, from that she turns to her father who occupies superior power in the society but she wholly not rejects her mother's identification. This is the result of socio-cultural construction that deconstructs the

gender categories. Therefore she is unable to retain her relationship in both the cases. Social and psychology oppression is perpetuated the structure of gender role. The social equality between men and women and their relative freedom are from certain sorts of psychological conflicts. Daughters and sons must be able to develop a personal identification and develop strong sense of self as well as positively valued and secure gender identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

This research paper was presented in the one-day students' national seminar on –Shakespeare in the 21st Century organised by Cuckoo, an international literary magazine, V. O. Chidambaram College, Thoothukudi on 20 September, 2014.

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