Journal of ELT and Education (JEE), an international refereed quarterly
ISSN: 2618-1290 (Print), 2663-1482 (Online); Volume: 2, Issue-3 & 4, July-December 2019, Page: 96-101

Citation:
Mahbub-ul-Alam, A. (2019). A Study on Feministic Relevance between Jane Austen and Sharat Chandra Chatterjee. *Journal of ELT and Education*, Volume-2, Issue-3 & 4, 96-101.

Article info:
Received: 25.10.2019; Accepted: 09.12.2019; Published: 12.12.2019

Website:
JEE is unconditionally available online at **www.jee-bd.com** with neither subscription nor any membership required.

Copyright © Center for Academic Research and Development (CARD), a concern of Hello-Teen Society, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Comparative Literature

A Study on Feministic Relevance between Jane Austen and Sharat Chandra Chatterjee

***Ahmad Mahbub-ul-Alam[1]**

Abstract

Feminist novelists Jane Austen and Sharat Chandra contributed to English and Bangla literature in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively through their unique representation of contemporary women conditions. Their novels are well appreciated by a large number of readers and researchers of both the West and the East not only for academic reasons but also for pleasure in getting the flavor of female experiences of two different times and spaces by the authors of two different sexes. The study has been developed as a critical review of literature on them showing relevance of female representation in the respective contexts.

Keywords

Women, novels, Jane Austen, Sharat Chandra, feministic relevance

1. Introduction

The present study attempts to examine and explore the representation of women and their social condition as revealed in the novels of Jane Austen (1775-1817) and Sharat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938). As a woman, Jane Austen could better understand the problems of women in her society, and these have been portrayed vividly in all the six novels she wrote. On the other hand, Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay, also known as Sharat Chandra Chatterjee, is generally considered the most leading novelist in Bengali, figuring prominently the women's issues in most of his novels out of the total twenty-three novels he wrote. However, although there are some writings such as articles, reviews, etc. individually on these two novelists, no significant literary discussion, criticism and research has been found on the relevance of female representation by these two authors. The present study, therefore, has been an attempt to review on relevance of representation of women by these two novelists.

Women experience and feminism have been the points of high focus not only in the present century, but also in the past two ones, though the Feminist Movement has been in its virgin

***Corresponding Email:** pialbd@yahoo.com

[1]PhD Research Fellow, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) & Associate Professor, Department of English, Manarat International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

appearance within the recent hundred years. As history moves, reflections are there in the contemporary literary works. So are the cases for Jane Austen and Sharat Chandra; while one being in the West reflects the women experiences of the late 18th and early 19th century English society, the other addresses the same in the East upholding the female issues of the 20th century Bengali society. Interestingly enough, there remains a common passage of relevance in the art of female characterization and the characters' going through the experiences throughout their lifespan, as observed in the novels of these two selected authors of two different regions and eras.
The study has addressed the features of feminism, through the historical passage of two different spaces, by two celebrated novelists of two different languages and genders, whose novels are not only read in academic courses and for pleasure, but also their texts are now being popularly considered for commercial feature films.

2. Objective

The general objective of the present study aims at making a critical review on the relevance of female representation in the writings of Jane Austen and Sharat Chandra Chatterjee. However, the specific objectives are to review the representation of women in the novels of Jane Austen and Sharat Chandra and to assess the feministic relevance in the novels of the selected authors in the study.

3. Literature Review

Barry (2009) opined about feminist criticism in his book Beginning Theory that the women's movement of the 1960s was not of course, the start of feminism, rather was a renewal of an old tradition of thought and action already possessing its classic books which had diagnosed the problem of women's equality in society. The feminist literary criticism nowadays is the direct product of the women's movement of the Nineteen Sixties, that accomplished the importance of the pictures of ladies disseminated by literature. In this sense, the women's movement has always been so significantly apprehensive with books and literature, that the feminist criticism should not be seen as an 'off-shoot' or 'spin-off' from feminism which is remote from the ultimate aims of the movement, but as one of its most sensible ways of influencing everyday manners and attitudes.
McInerney (2010) praises Austen's portrayal of female characters stating that the basis of affections of an Austen reader has become entirely cerebral in real life emotional scenario. He (McInerney, 2010) further depicted the spell of beautiful minds – though it could not be otherwise, since the readers seldom get a very precise physical description of Austen's female protagonists, and they are never the prettiest girls in the neighborhood.
Roy (2018) believes that Sharat Chandra's fictions epitomize life, as it is lived and thus, is realistic in his portrayal of different characters particularly the women. Maternal fondness is one of the key features of Bengali women and thus Sharat has created adorable motherly figures in many of his fiction works.
Therefore, the depiction of women in their literature can be considered as one of the most important forms of 'socialization'. Feminists pointed out that in the nineteenth-century fiction, very few women work for a living, unless they are driven to it by a dire necessity. Instead, the focus of interest dwells in the female protagonist's choice of marriage partner, which will decide her ultimate social position and exclusively determine her contentment and fulfilment in life, or her lack of these. Whatsoever, considering the modern readers and audience, the present study has tried to cover the range of feminism, as well as, focused on the interest and presentation of the two selected authors encompassing the individually significant contextual and stylistic features of the authors with a view to making a comparative study through textual evidences in their novels supported by a critical literature review.

4. Methodology

The research, being qualitative in nature, has been conducted through critical review and interpretation with feministic approach through content analysis with reference to time and space. To accomplish the aims and objectives of the study, available critical studies and comments on the selected authors and their texts have been considered, studied, understood and interpreted critically to make the study original. Finally, the study has been presented in the format of APA style.

5. Discussion and Interpretation

5.1. A Feministic Review on Jane Austen

Jane Austen holding up the mirror to her time must be remembered when she is charged with want of delicacy in dealing with the relations between the sexes, and especially in speaking of the views of girls with relevance of matrimony. Women in those days obviously took into account a cheerful wedding. They desired it for themselves and they sought it for their daughters. They had not thought of professions or public life, nor had it entered into the mind of any of them that maternity was not the very best duty as the crown of womanhood. Apparently, they additionally confessed their aims to themselves and to every different with a frankness which might be deemed indelicate in our time. The more ambitious and worldlier of them sought in marriage, rank and money, and affirmed that they did, whereas they would not affirm it at the present day. Gossip and speculation on these subjects were common and more unrefined than they are now, and they naturally formed a large part of the amusement of the wealthy and idle category from that Jane Austen's characters were drawn. Sometimes, too, she is ironical; the love of irony is a feature of her mind and for this also allowance must be made. She does not approve or reward matchmaking or husband-hunting. Mrs. Jennings, the great matchmaker in *Sense and Sensibility*, is also a paragon of vulgarity. Mrs. Norris's matchmaking in *Mansfield Park* results in the foremost disastrous consequences. Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* unblushingly avows that her object is a husband with a good income (Smith, 1917).

If we consider power relations in Jane's society, we can have a clear idea from the best of her novels, that is *Pride and Prejudice*. While social succession for young men lays in the military, church, or law, the chief method of self-enhancement for women was the occupancy of material comfort. Women could only pull off this goal through affluent marriages. Though the contemporary young women of Jane had more liberty to choose their spouses than in the early eighteenth century, Jane wanted to convey that realistic concerns tried to limit their options. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet seems to be the most powerful character and Mrs. Bennet evidences as the chief character of the Bennet family. As a result, Mr. Bennet becomes a secondary Shakespearean fool. Lydia elopes and returns, but we find no guilt feelings in her behavior for the misdeed. We find Miss. Bingley and Lady Catherine as the dominating characters. The power relations of feminine identity become exposing. Thus, feminist attitude discloses in *Pride and Prejudice* (Khan, 2014).

At the point of status, the future of a woman depends only on a good marriage. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we find such a picture that Mrs. Bennet was so worried about their daughters' marriage. She wanted rich and powerful husbands for her daughters, like Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy. The class consciousness was also vivid in the novel. A woman is predicted to behave in sure ways that stepping outside the social norms makes her vulnerable to exclusion. This theme lays within the novel; when Elizabeth walks to Netherfield and arrives with muddy skirts, it shocks the reputation-conscious Miss. Bingley and her friends. At different points, the inappropriate, outrageous conduct of Mrs. Bennet gives her a bad status with the more sophisticated and snobbish Darcys and Bingleys. Austen pokes mild fun at the snobs in these examples, but later in the novel, when Lydia elopes with Wickham and lives with him out of matrimony, the author

treats reputation as a very serious matter; Lydia clearly places herself outside the social pastel, and her disgrace threatens the entire Bennet family. Lydia's judgment, however appalling, would likely have denounced the other sisters to unmarried lives seeming hideously unreasonable. Yet the happy ending of *Pride and Prejudice* is so sensitively pleasing, but in many ways, it departs the matter of status, and the magnitude placed on status unexplored. We find severe feminism through the antagonists in *Pride and Prejudice*. There are no heavy-handed lectures about women's rights in Jane Austen's time. More powerful is the incontrovertible fact that Jane Austen takes it as a right that ladies are mortals no more and no less in comparison to their male counterparts. Jane Austen exposes her feminism with her antagonists. Women passes through Jane Austen's delicate whole of feminism long before the term was in common use. Feminism is, at its root, the easy assertion of women's equality. Snobbish class-conscious Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Miss. Bingley are the antagonists of the novel. The two major antagonists are all female characters. Jane does not allow male at all to play any major role in her novels subtly (Khan, 2014).

Austen's moral message is infused with philosophic insistence on the merits of fine conduct and courtesy, leading to wedding as an admirable social establishment. She never disrespects love, but she balances its disconcerting and disruptive nature with a firm advocacy of the complementary qualities of self-knowledge, self-discipline and practicality. Her heroines are as energetically intelligent as Elizabeth Bennet and as witty, egotistic and independent as Emma Woodhouse, but both, like the essentially retrospective Elinor Dashwood or the passive and self-effacing Fanny Price, are finally brought to mature judgment and by proper extension emotional fulfillment (Sanders, 2005).

5.2. Sharat Chandra in Female Representation

Roy (2018) stated that Sharat Chandra presented the problems and questions in such a way that deeply stirred his consciousness in his fictions and short stories which ultimately impregnated his works with magnificence. Among all other features of his writings, one particular specialty that separated him from other authors is his glowing interpretation of women. He clearly expressed his disagreement with the religious beliefs in showing women as goddess. His women are real human beings who alike other individuals have their strengths and weaknesses. But they take their own decisions and are confident to step forward overcoming all personal and societal limitations.

Though Sharat Chandra, the feminist literary emperor of Bengal was born in the 19th century, his novels remain eminently popular even today. Women and love being his preferred themes, Sharat Chandra's influential works are the masterful embroideries of not just Bengali life but an exploration of noble and complex human emotions and relationships and the triumph of love suffused with pain and suffering. It is his respectful portrayal of women that makes Sharat Chandra a pleasant author with an appeal that transcends readers of all ages (Basu, 2005).

Sharat Chandra has enriched Bengali fiction with his large contribution of sensitive works. According to modern researchers there are 58 works of Sharat Chandra available, which include short novels, large novels, short stories, etc. All his novels are very romantic and tender. The writer has beautifully characterized the Indian women, especially the Bengali ones. There are about 178 women characters created by Sharat Chandra in his novels (Sankrityayan, 2010).

In all his works except *Charitrahin*, *Srikanta*, and *Grihadaha*, Sharat Chandra has followed the traditional style. The writer of *Kasinath*, *Devdas*, *Chandranath*, *Parinita*, *Borodidi*, *Mejdidi*, *Bindur Chhele*, *Ramer Sumati*, *Biraj Bou*, and *Niskrti* has in all of his works written the story of the struggle within Bengali families. In some of his works, he has clearly described the lack of importance for love in these loveless and strained families, and whenever love is being described, Sharat Chandra has excellently depicted what is pure, unexpressed and untold (Sankrityayan, 2010).

Sharat Chandra has tinted the appealing pictures of fallen widows, their mute sufferings, and their frustrations, and even their super subtle suppressed feelings. With his fine sensibility and depth of sympathy, which were inspired by his direct experience and intimate contact with the social conditions, he drew appealing portraits of the destitute young widows. Such pathetic portraits are seldom found in Indian literature before him and even after him. They are the products of his comprehensive observation, which was guided by innate uncommon sensibility. These compassionate portraits highlight his literature. The silent suffering of young widows, their suppressed instincts and feelings were vividly and realistically painted by him. They sprang from his deep experience of social life, which was hidebound by traditions. They were as inhuman as they were considered immutable. He made the mute pathetic creatures speak out their suppressed feelings with the strength of his creative art. A gallery of portraits, which he painted of these women, is the greatest achievement to the credit of his art of novel (Kshetramade, 2010).

The female characters of Sharat Chandra can be classified into five major types for further study as the loving mothers who are widowed in their middle age, the cruel natured women with harsh tongue, the simple hearted loving women of three categories: unmarried, married, and widowed, and the serious type of women who do not accept the depth of love and who think love a big sin and as the old, quarrelsome, talkative women (Sankrityayan, 2010).

Sharat Chandra points out that more the deprivations piled on the women, the more the Hindu men went about proclaiming them as goddesses. After the British outlawed '*sati*', the pundits came up with a replacement stratagem: every form of hardship was placed on the shoulders of the widow so that she becomes a '*devi*' (a goddess) daily at a slow pace. No ornaments, just one meal on a daily basis, back-breaking work, and the coarse garments. "But the *devi* is not allowed to attend weddings; they are not called for any happy ceremony; they are only called to cook the '*pind*' after funerals." Thus, our goddesses were worshipped (Deb, 2010). In such a condition, Sharat approached to give women proper attribute through his humanitarian philosophy and humanism as for that Sarker (1977) considered Sharat as the great humanist.

6. Key Findings

For its being a critical content analysis, the present research approves the existence of a number of research works on the female issues in connection to the female characters' representation through social shaping, referring to the condition, conditioning and social placement of women in the West and the East, as represented in the writings of the two selected authors of the study, respectively and separately, covering the 19th and 20th centuries.

However, the study has been specific on the following findings:

a) There is a relevant undercurrent of female representation and characterization through the handling of women experiences by both the authors as depicted in their fiction works.

b) Representation of female characters in the writings of the selected authors approves the social condition of women in the two consecutive centuries, in two different parts of the globe, which is almost similar in kind through the parallel illustration of patriarchal societies.

c) In connection to the social conditioning of females, it is often so clear that the female representation of women by Sharat Chandra in the 20th century eastern (Bengali) society resemblances the representation by Jane Austen in the 19th century western (English) society.

7. Conclusion

The present research has been an approach of critical review between the West and the East from the point of view of feminism as represented by the two selected authors in this study. The study not only reveals the authenticity of a number of researches with critical approaches towards the presentation of female characters and their experiences in the works of Jane Austen and Sharat

Chandra, respectively and separately, but also approves the testimony of both similarity and uniqueness of these two selected authors' handling of female issues in their novels. Such research as a reflection of critical literature is always expected to conclude with an open end, welcoming further points of arguments by the future generations of researchers; so is the concluding part of the present study. For being a new kind of work on the projected topic, the study had experienced different obstacles in its gradual progress for the development of the discussion and to come up with a conclusion to be made as the part of the anticipated findings. But still, overcoming and sometimes negotiating with all these for the sake of the nature of the study, it has been a new dimension in the field of comparative literature through practical criticism to figure out some of the relevancies on the feministic issues handled by the selected authors of two different genders, global positions, languages and eras.

References

Barry, P. (2009). *Beginning theory: an introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Basu, S. (2005). Masterful tapestries. *The Hindu*, March 06, 2005. Available at https://www.thehindu.com/

Deb, S. (2010). The Shadow of Shame. OPEN, [online] Retrieved 25 February 2018 from: http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/voices/the-shadow-of-shame

Khan, M. E. I., Rahman, S., Tahmina, F., Nishat, M. S. & Huqe, F. (2014). Contemporary Feminism and Love Affairs: A Critical Probe into Pride and Prejudice. *International Journal of Social Development and Information System*, *5*(2), 17-22, GRI: Dhaka.

Kshetramade, S. (2010). Women Characters in Sarat Chandra. [online] Available from: http://forum.banglalibrary.org/topic822-women-characters-in-Sarat Chandra-by-sumati-kshetramade.html, Translated by Y. G. Naik [Accessed 05 May 2018]

McInerney, J. (28 May 2010). Beautiful Minds: Jane Austen's Heroines. *The Telegraph*, [online] Available from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/7771367/Beautiful-Minds-Jane-Austens-Heroines.html [Accessed 5th March, 2018]

Roy, R. K. (September 14, 2018). An Insight Into Sarat Chandra's Depiction Of Dynamic Women. Retrieved December 05, 2018 from http://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/335823/2018/09/14/An-Insight-Into-Sarat-Chandra%E2%80%99s-Depiction-Of-Dynamic-Women

Sanders, A. (2005). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. 3rd edition. (Indian Edition), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 373-382.

Sankrityayan, K. (2010). The Women in Sarat Chandra's Literature. Retrieved June 05, 2018 from http://forum.banglalibrary.org/topic863-the-women-in-SaratChandras-literature-by-kamala-sankrityayan.html

Sarker, S. C. (1977). Sarat Chandra Chatterjee: The Great Humanist. *Indian Literature*, *20*(1), 49-77.

Smith, G. (1917). *Criticisms and Interpretations*. Retrieved 02 September 2018 from http://www.bartleby.com/303/2/1005.html