

ROLE OF WOMEN AND GENDER REPRESENTATION IN WUTHERING HEIGHTS AND LOLITA

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the delineation and representation of women in Wuthering Heights and Lolita. It also draws attention to the fact that how women's education was not considered important in earlier times. The idea of females being showcased as nation-building individuals and the notion of Mother India is also touched upon in the paper in question. The primary texts mentioned above direct our attention to the reversal of roles of male-female and how women's voices emerged triumphant over male domination even in earlier times, particularly Romantic era. The women in question in the given texts emerged as female icons who rebelled against the dominating and burdensome autonomy of patriarchy. The paper also examines the pertinent and crucial role of women in family, society, religion, and nation-building. The women in earlier times were portrayed as goddesses and bhakti saints who showed common men how to lead a path of enlightenment and soul-nourishment by respecting the second sex and not taking it for granted.

The role of women in society is of impeccable degree and immense magnitude. They have always led society as leaders and stakeholders taking part in the decision-making process without any bias. Women have been given utmost importance in NEP 2020 by focusing on their education and the character that they have played in the society as conscious individuals.

Keywords

Role of Women in Society, Gender Representation, Reversal of Gender Roles, Nation-Building, Religion, Wuthering Heights, and Lolita

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Introduction

In Sumathi Ramaswamy's essay titled "Maps, Mother/Goddesses, and Martyrdom in Modern India", he mentions about the anchor image of Bharat Mata as represented in patriotic pictures or images produced in colonial and postcolonial India by various artists. One of the Images portray Mother India, or Bharat Mata, the female personification of the Indian nation and its territory.

Holding the Indian national flag in one hand, she stands on a partially visible terrestrial globe, on which is also perched a figure identifiable to the visually cued Indian viewer as Bhagat Singh, a young man from Punjab who was hanged by the British colonial state on March 23, 1931. He is handing her his bloodied head, presumably severed by the sword that lies next to him, while blood from his decapitated body flows onto the globe and onto some roughly marked territories that appear to be part of India and the adjacent country of Burma. In return, Mother India blesses him for his act of corporeal sacrifice.

The writer focuses upon the notion of a female portrayed as a nation-builder carrying out the process of nation-building while playing the role of Goddess. The idea of Maa Kaali springs forth as she blesses Bhagat Singh for his great sacrifice to the cause of freedom of the nation.

In the above-mentioned work, Ramaswamy also discusses with the readers that Bharat Mata literally occupies the map of India. It fills up cartographic space with her anthropomorphic form. In many inventive ways, her body blurs or undoes the carefully configured boundaries of command cartography. In such pictures the body of the mother goddess, distinct from the outline map of the nation, anthropomorphizes the map by moving in to occupy it. In other pictures, parts of Bharat Mata merge with the Indian geo-body, so that the two are, in parts, undistinguishable.

Aurobindo Ghosh once said, "What is a nation? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty female power composed of all the powers of all the millions of units that make up the nation."

Now comes up the conception of women as represented in the Indian religious context. In an essay titled "Mirabai: Devotee of a Noble Order" by B.V. Ramana in the textbook titled *Bhakti Movement and Literature: Reforming a Tradition*, he talks about Mirabai and her devotion to Lord Krishna. According to him, devotion or Bhakti to God is not only an intense love for God but also an emotion of the mind. Love of God makes the devotees lose their self. Mira's indomitable spirit and unwavering faith in Giridhara Gopal gave her strength.

Dedication to God is more vital and complete. She was a loyal servant to God and never cared for any scandals against her.

Mira was amongst the earliest Indian women to violate the laws governing her class and royalty in refusing to follow the convention of Sati, on the death of her worldly husband. She believed that in her previous life, she was one of the several Gopikas or milkmaids in Vrindavan, in love with Krishna. She pleads with the Lord to free her from the cycle of births and rebirths by helping her to cross the sea of the world. She well understood the veracity of the physical world as ephemeral and could not endure the miseries of the physical world. She was surrounded by “this samsara, this ocean of imperfection.”

Lord, take me across,
The uncrossable sea;
From births and rebirths
Make me free (Krishna 89)

In an essay titled, “Textual Authority and the Embodied Self”, Audre Lorde refers to women’s bodies being situated at the “intersection of the biological and the symbolic; as such it marks a metaphysical surface of integrated material and symbolic elements that defy separation.”

Women have always been viewed as subservient to men, even docile, dormant, and directly controlled by the dominating vein of patriarchy. Shalini Shah talks about the given idea in her work titled “On Gender, Wives and Pativratas.” She portrays how women who are subservient are considered as the glory of Hindu culture for more than a thousand years. Meenakshi Mukherjee directed her attention upon the notion that Sita, the self-abnegated wife, was at one end of the Indian cultural matrix, while at the other end was shakti i.e. woman as a life-giving force. According to her, Sita represented an incomplete ideal as she represented only one aspect and not the other. Mukherjee, on the other hand, praised and respected Draupadi in Mahabharata as she was powerful and vibrant. She burnt with anger and sought revenge.

The idea of women not considered to be worthy of education pops up through the portrayal of Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. Bronte reveals that women in the earlier times tended to be self-educated as it was not thought desirable to spend money on their education.

Body

Esther Lombardi, a renowned critic, mentions about the role of women in her essay titled “The Role of Women in *Wuthering Heights*.” She emphasizes upon the fact that women are represented as strong and passionate in the above-mentioned text. The main female protagonist is a motherless child. In the novel she is described as: “Her spirits were always high-water mark, her tongue always going—singing, laughing, and plaguing who would not do the same. A wild wicked slip she was she

had the bonniest eye, the sweetest smile, and lightest foot in the parish.” The protagonist is represented as having her own way in everything and a being of rebellious nature. She is passionate and stubborn.

On the other hand, Lombardi accentuates the notion that Isabella Linton, sister of Edgar Linton and sister-in-law of the original Catherine is shown as meek as compared to Catherine. She does not possess the head-strong characteristics of Catherine but she is the only tortured female to escape the brutal realities of the moors and its inhabitants.

We all know that *Wuthering Heights* was written in Victorian times which were characterised by rigid gender roles and societal obligations. Instructor and literature enthusiast David Boyles mentions about the gender roles in his work “Gender Roles in *Wuthering Heights*.” During the Victorian period, gender roles were rigid and women were depicted as embodying all of the stereotypes of femininity and being pure, caring, and submissive.

Catherine Earnshaw holds within herself extreme qualities of both the masculine and feminine. Boyles quotes “As a child and young woman, she is what we would today call a tomboy, tramping around the moors with Heathcliff. She’s outgoing, adventurous, and independent, all qualities traditionally associated with the masculine.”

Abhishek Chakraborty’s paper titled “‘*Wuthering Heights*’, the female version of the male form & ‘The Second Sex in It’” directs our attention to the fact that of all the principal women characters, the little Catherine, the daughter of Cathy is projected in a favorable light. At first, she hurls defiance at Heathcliff but later on she finds it futile and appeals to him for pity. It shows that even powerful women have to surrender themselves to the power of men.

Chakraborty puts light on the conception that Heathcliff symbolizes Catherine’s rebellious alter ego and Edgar the patriarchal principle and the ruthless employment of social and sexual powers and manliness. Her nature of love for both of them is vividly highlighted in the lines “My love for Linton is like foliage in the woods: time will change it, I’m well aware as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff. He’s always, always in my mind.”

Now coming on to the work *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov, we are going to discuss the significance of the titular character Lolita, as represented in the work. In an essay titled “*Lolita* Misrepresented, *Lolita* Reclaimed, Disclosing the Doubles”, Elizabeth Patnoe highlights that one of the primary debates about *Lolita* is whether we can believe Humbert’s claims about her. When Humbert recounts his first non-frotteuristic sex act with Lolita, he insists that Lolita seduces him, but a variety of

textual signs indicate that they did not see eye to eye throughout the event.

Humbert represents Lolita as a seductress who takes charge of their lovemaking act and seduces him even though she is a juvenile and it is unbelievable for readers to accommodate his views about her. Probably, her only intention was to kiss and fondle but not indulge in intercourse. Humbert grants her power and freedom to indulge in intercourse and dominate the lovemaking scene.

According to Patnoe, she was not interested in intercourse with him. She quotes

My life was handled by little Lo in an energetic, matter-of-fact manner as if it were an insensate gadget unconcerned with me. While eager to impress me with the world of tough kids, she was not prepared for quite certain discrepancies between a kid's life and mine. Pride alone prevented her from giving up; for in my strange predicament, I feigned supreme stupidity and had her have her way- at least while I could still bear it.

Lolita is an object of sexual gratification when seen from Humbert's eyes. He pretends to grant her complete autonomy while lovemaking. Though he emphasizes that she seduces him, the readers are forced to believe otherwise. It seems that Humbert pretends to subvert gender roles by granting supreme power to Lolita, but he fails to convince the readers. In fact, he plays the role of dominant power during foreplay and intercourse.

Conclusion

We can easily conclude from the discussion that women have played a significant role in both the above-mentioned texts. They have emerged triumphant by reversing male-female roles and have proved to be women of strong character with sterling qualities and indomitable iron-like willpower to have their own way. They have successfully portrayed roles of nation-builders, and passionate lovers, and defied conventional feminine roles thrust upon them by societal conventions. The women have outperformed their male counterparts in every possible way. Thus, they have stood the test of time and emerged as winners even during testing times. The so-called second sex is not to be seen as second to the males anymore. Lolita and Catherine personify and serve as epitomes of rebelliousness, supreme power, and indefatigable willpower to conquer the world.

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