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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PLOTS, CHARACTERS, THEMES AND CULTURES IN *THE POSTMASTER* AND *PYGMALION*

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Abstract

A comparison can be made between two or more written stories from every field. They can have more similarities than the dissimilarities. These similarities can be intentional or unintentional and conscious or unconscious. They can be in the disguised form by altering the contexts (plots), subjects (themes), persons (characters), names and/or motives. In “The Postmaster” (1891), a short story by the eminent Indian Nobel Laureate, Ravindranath Tagore and *Pygmalion* (1912) a play by another eminent British Nobel Laureate, G. B. Shaw, there are several similarities. The dissimilarities are also justifiable if one studies them under the light of cultural disguise. Therefore, the present paper attempts to find out the similarities and dissimilarities in the plots, characters and themes of the mentioned works.

Keywords: *Similarity, comparison, disguise, difference, culture*

Similarities

The major characters – Dadababu, Ratan, Prof. Higgins and Eliza – in both the texts have great similarities. The short story “The Postman” begins with the arrival of a debut postmaster,

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Dadababu, from Kolkata to a village named Ulapur. He has very less work to do. Therefore, he writes poems. A small “dark thatched shed” is his office cum residence (Tagore, Ravindranath, ‘The Postman’, 2020: 01). He lacks social skills. It does not mean that he does not have any refined skills. The only problem with him was how to deal with unfamiliar rustic people. He is unmarried. He is helped by Ratan, a thirteen years old girl (Tagore, R. 01).

The play *Pygmalion* begins with Prof. Higgins making sarcastic comments on the improper pronunciation and structures of the people gathered at a place of prayer in London. He is the professor of Phonetics and therefore always takes down the live models of speeches of various dialects. He also works to develop the accuracy in pronunciation and syntactical structures. He is harsh mannered and short tempered. He has a mother, but he lives separately with Mrs. Pearce, his attendance. He is an old bachelor. However, he takes help of the flower girl, Eliza for his personal work. In *The Postmaster*, Ratan is an orphan. She remembers only a little of her father who loved her more than her mother (Tagore, R. 02). Both of them are dead now. She is the illiterate and insignificant girl (Tagore, R. 03). She is brought up by no one. She has no house of her own. Therefore, she seeks shelter in the post-office. She helps bring hookah, cooking food and other household works for Dadababu, the postmaster (Tagore, R. 01). There is no one who can look after her and get her married or make arrangements for it. In *Pygmalion*, Eliza or Liza or Elizabeth is the ‘horribly dirty’ girl from ‘gutter’. She speaks a low unsophisticated dialect (Shaw, G. B., *Pygmalion*, 2020: 20 & 35). She is young and unmarried. She is still raw, and needs learning standard forms of language and manners too. She is neglected by his father and step mother too, and so her condition is not less than an orphan (Shaw, G. B. 30 & 35). She is also loved a little by her father, but her original mother is dead. She helps Higgins in his personal works like fetching slippers, finding spectacles and so on (Shaw, G. B 71).

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The similarity is also found in the plot construction of the texts. Dadababu, in the plot of “The Postmaster”, teaches the poor Ratan to read and write (Tagore, R. 04). He makes her work for him. She takes care of him like a family member. When he has been on the sickbed, she looks after him. This all creates affection for Ratan. But when Dadababu’s application for transfer has been rejected, he resigns from the post. While going back forever to his home in Kolkata, he does not take her with him either as his wife or as his sister (Tagore, R. 07). He cares about his prestige in the sophisticated society of Kolkata more than taking the orphan with him.

Prof. Higgins, in the plot of *Pygmalion*, consciously takes the challenge of transforming Eliza into a sophisticated lady (duchess) by teaching her good manners, proper accent and structures. He works for several months, and finally succeeds in his attempts (Shaw, G. B. 20 and 52). She becomes what he wants. It is proven in the Garden Party. But he has nothing to do with her future. However, he does not overtly show any affection for her; on the other hand, he insists on staying with him. It is his unconscious love for her. He is nearer to her age. What may come, but he will never think of getting married to her. He says, “There can’t be any feelings between the like of you and the like of me” (Shaw, G. B. 56). Still he offers her to ‘come back’ to him (Shaw, G. B. 72). He controls his emotions to save his high-class prestige.

In both, the main female characters work for the main male characters. They assist the males in the personal works of the males. The males are accustomed to their company for their assistance. The themes of the texts are the female exploitation (use-and-throw masculine mentality) and class consciousness. They also deal with the education of women.

Dissimilarities

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The dissimilarity is in the genre of the texts. The former is a short story while the latter is a play. Their lengths are different as their genre. The former has seven pages (in the referred text); the later has eighty five pages (including prologue and epilogue in the referred text). The plot of the former is evolved around four major events with minimum characters. The plot of the later is evolved around several incidents with many characters in full five Acts. The dissimilarity is found in the context of the narrative and action. The context of the former text is the joining of duty of the postmaster in a village and after sickness resigning the duty. The context of the later text is the transformation of a rough and illiterate girl, Liza, into a duchess-like lady.

The dissimilarity is also found in the profession of the main characters. In the former, the main characters are Dadababu, the postmaster, and a thirteen years old orphan girl-assistant (Ratan). There is more difference in the age of these two characters. In the later text, the main characters are a Professor of Phonetics (Higgins) and an illiterate flower selling girl (Eliza). There is not a very long difference in their age. In India in the beginning of the twentieth century, teaching Phonetics as an individual subject was not in practice. So the profession of Dadababu is Postman, and the profession of Higgins is Professor of Phonetics.

The difference between age, character, profession and context are in accordance with the cultures represented in the texts. In the Western culture, in the early twentieth century, girls married after adolescence. But in Indian culture in the same period, the girls got married as soon as they became mature. In some parts of India, girls got married in their childhood or sometimes in the womb of the mother. The age of men to marry had not any difference in both the cultures. They could marry at any age with a girl of half of their age or even smaller than that. "In the British colonial times, the legal minimum age of marriage was set at 14 for girls ..." (Wikipedia, retrieved 30 March 2020). In both, the main male characters are dominating, and main female

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characters are male's puppets. However, in the end, Eliza cuts her strings from the hands of Higgins. This can also be justified as the effect of socio-cultural aspects.

The dissimilarity is also found in the endings of the two texts. In "The Postmaster", Ratan earnestly urges, 'Dadababu, will you take me home with you?' (Tagore, R. 05). His careless reply to it is 'How can I do that?' (Tagore, R. 05). He neither explains the reasons for that. When Dadababu gives her money, she bursts into tears saying, 'Dadababu, I fall at your two feet, I fall at your two feet, you don't have to give me anything; I fall at your two feet, no one needs to worry about me' (Tagore, R. 06). He thinks of taking the girl with him only when his boat on the river goes far from the village. He thinks, 'let me take that world- abandoned orphan child with me.' (Tagore, R. 07). The feeling may be honest and greatly compassionate, but it is useless. The reality is that he never takes the girl with him. There, Ratan always wanders around the post office thinking of his coming back to take her with. As a true lover she only imagines his arrival or his calling her. She does not believe in reality that Dadababu has deserted her and will never come back. "In fact, being a naïve she misunderstands the whole situation and treats Dadababu's bid to teach her enthusiastically as his effort to prepare her to be a wife of his worth" (Tiwari, Abha, "Commenting on the Feminist Perspectives of Rabindranath Tagore Based on Some of His Fictional Works": 08)

The play, *Pygmalion*, ends rather optimistically. Prof. Higgins refuses to marry Eliza. He always bullies her emotionally. However, in the end, Eliza also learns to reply to him with the same attitude. Against the wills of Higgins, she marries Freddy and runs a flower shop (Shaw, G. B. 79, 83). "Eliza is (was) just a poor flower seller who speaks Cockney English, but possesses self-respect and dare to pursue her own happiness" (<http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/download/10788/11011> Retrieved 29 March 2020).

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Eliza and Higgins have affections for each other, although they dislike their separation. They take diverse ways and become happy.

Conclusion

Thus, the plots of the story and play run parallel in the middle, although they have some dissimilarities in the beginning and the end. In both the plots, the girls are poor. They humbly respond to the demands of the main male characters. They are outsiders, yet serve the males as their family member. However, they are given bad treatment. As per the wish of the males they are brought home and then abandoned. The males let them become the part of their lives, but let not accept the girls forever as their life partners. The emotions of the girls are not considered. Therefore, the plots, characters and themes bear more significant similarities, despite their insignificant dissimilarities.

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