

Gertrude of Shakespeare and Kaikeyi of Tulasidas Compared

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ABSTRACT

William Shakespeare and Goswami Tulasidas are like two stars in the Western and Eastern worlds. Both the contemporary poets spread the rays of enlightenment in their contemporary age. Their works are not confined to one place or a certain time rather it trespasses all limitations. That's why their works are read and studied with much vigour and interest even today. In this paper an attempt has been made to compare Gertrude, a female character of Shakespeare's famous tragedy Hamlet, with Kaikeyi a female character of Tulasidas's great epic Ramcharitamanasa. Both characters resemble in more than one way as both are innocent, naive, compassionate mothers and power-seekers. The Striking similarities between these two characters open vast ocean of Eastern and Western approach in women studies.

1. Introduction

Human society is peopled with characters, males and females. Both the genders are key elements to the world family. Women have been made subjects of studies throughout the history of human civilizations. But no study on living entity like women will ever be final. Therefore, this study is an attempt to approach women from twin perspectives that of the East as well as that of the West. Here in this paper I have undertaken the study of women from the universally acclaimed the best dramatist of the world- Shakespeare. Attempt has been made to compare the same with that of the representative voice of the East-Tulasidas.

Western Civilization has been pervasively patriarchal. Naturally it has been male-centred and male dominated. But this system is being questioned today. There are women writers who think they have been deliberately subordinated to men while there are others who believe that both the genders are part and parcel, and mutually inclusive. In this background Shakespeare's and Tulasidas's take on women are being treated to serve the backdrop of the research in question.

2. Gertrude and Kaikeyi Compared:

Gertrude is a significant character in the play Hamlet. She is the wife of the Late king Hamlet and mother of the Prince Hamlet's. Her relationship with Hamlet is somewhat turbulent because she has married her husband's brother soon after the death of her husband. Such incident hardly takes place in our lives. If a woman, in our society, undertakes this type of action she must be proclaimed as a whore and mean. She does not get respect in our Indian society.

Kaikeyi, to which Gertrude is being compared, is the wife of king Dasharatha and the mother of Bharata. She enforces the king to banish Ram for fourteen years which becomes main cause for his death. Thus she has brought turmoil for the citizen of Ayodhya and for many people. From a general point of view, it is observed that Kaikeyi of the Ramcharitamanasa and Gertrude of Hamlet reflect some striking similarities as following points clarify this;

(i) **Lust for Power:** Lust for power is a common demerit found in most of the human beings. When a person gets deeply

affected with this, he or she does not hesitate to take a wrong action. The intense desire of attaining the power blocks his or her mind and that is why he or she often fails to undertake a proper decision. This attitude may be seen in the characters of Gertrude and those of Kaikeyi. They fail to control this lust of power as is clear from both of the texts respectively.

Although she was the third queen of Ayodhya, Kaikeyi does not underestimate herself and never considered herself less important than any other queen of the king Dasharatha. That is why she whimsically promises Manthara not to serve her cowife at any cost;

नैहरजनमु श्रब बरु जाई।
जिअत न करबिसवतिसेवकाई।।

I would fain go and spend the rest of my life at my father's but would on no account serve a co-wife so long as there is life in me.

(G.P.G., 262)

This shows her sense of over-proud attitude and hunger of power. For quenching her thirst of power, she begs for two boons which comprise enthronement of her son Bharat and banishment of Ram for fourteen years. She does not care even for the soft behaviour of Ram and his family. Even she does not ponder over the drastic consequences of her boons and sticks to her rigidness. This illustrates her lust for power.

Similarly, Gertrude is also endowed with this feature. After the death of her husband she sees that her superiority of queen is in danger and she is going to lose the authority, so she takes a quick step of remarrying Claudius to maintain her identity as a queen of Denmark.

Kaikeyi and Gertrude both exercise lust for power to preserve the dignity and popularity of their sons. Gertrude uses lust for power in order to save the life of her son, prince Hamlet and to help him ascend the throne finally because she is not witnessed as a culprit in the whole play. It is true that her marriage to Claudius was overhasty but there might be countless reasons for why Gertrude married Claudius. One of them might be that she did it for her safety. Being a queen; it would have made her vulnerable to those who aimed for the

throne, obliging her to marry as quickly as possible to secure the throne. Both of them want to secure power for their sons. That is why she has become a nagging companion of the King Claudius. On the other hand Kaikeyi has the lust for power to preserve the throne for Bharat and for this; she pines for two boons which favour her son. She is enchanted by the spell cast by Manthara, the maid servant of hers.

These things help us to understand the similar perspective about the lust for power in Gertrude and Kaikeyi.

(II) Motherhood Quality:

Gertrude and Kaikeyi both are full of motherhood qualities. They do not want to see the agony of their sons. Although for attaining the throne Gertrude accepts Claudius as her husband yet this relationship does not produce distance between the relationship of a mother and the son. Kaikeyi and Gertrude both have maintained their motherhood quality which is reflected in the texts.

As to Gertrude, the weakness of her son is seen in most of the places which justify her motherhood qualities. It may be clarified from sc. II. of Act-I when he is tensed with the demise of the King Hamlet and the haste- marriage of his mother. Gertrude sees her son and so, she presents her condolence and tries to pacify her son;

**Good Hamlet, cast thy knighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not for ever with thy veiled lids.**(Act-I Sc. II.)

Kaikeyi is also found speaking in the same tone. This is reflected in the episode of Ayodhyakand when the King Dasharatha has died of the separation of Ram and Bharat has arrived Ayodhya after being called on by his Guru Bashistha. Here she tries to pacify Bharata to come out of the grief of his father's death. Her speech, here, seems like that of Gertrude;

*तातराज न हि सोचइ जोगू । विद्वइ सुकृतज सुकीन्हेउ शोगू ।
जीवत सकल जनमफल पाए । अंत अमरपति सदन सिधाए । ।
अस अनुमानि सोचु परिहरहु । सहित समाज राजपुर करहु । ।*

'You should not, my son, grieve for your father, for he not only reaped a rich harvest of merit and renown but also led a life crowned with happiness. During his life-time he obtained all the rewards of human existence and in the end ascended to the abode of Indra (the lord of heaven). Reflect on this and cease sorrowing; now assume the sovereignty of the realm with royal circumstance.'

(R. C. Pd. Ayodhyakand, 351)

Thus, we can say that Gertrude and Kaikeyi, both have lust for power but their desires lying behind the welfare of their sons Prince Hamlet and Bharat respectively shows their deep motherhood quality.

(III) Innocence:

Seeing the character of Kaikeyi and Gertrude, it may be clearly opined that both the women are innocent. Both have soft heart and childlike behaviour.

Kaikeyi is a very genteel woman. She loves Ram more than Bharat, her own son. This fact is known to all, as after the disclosing of banishment of Ram the people of Ayodhya say this;

सदारामु येहिप्रानसमाना । कारनकवनकुटिलपनुठाना ।

[R. C. P. Ayodhyakand, 279]

Rama used ever to be as dear to her as life; why has she now taken to such perversity?[R.C.P. Ayodhyakand ,279]

Furthermore, this truth is proved in the episode of the dialogue among the wives of the Brahmans and other venerable and elderly ladies of the royal family who were most dear to Kaikeyi. They are trying to remonstrate Kaikeyi to take back her words and set the king free from her two boons. They remind her of a forewords which has been said by herself;

भरतु न मोहिप्रिय रामसमाना । सदाकहहु

येहुसबुजगुजाना । ।

करहुरामपरसहजसनेहू । केहिअपराध आजुबनुदेहू । ।

You always used to say, as the whole world knows that Bharata was not as dear to you as Rama. You were wont to love Rama; then for what offence do you now exile him to the forest?

(R. C. Pd., 280)

So Kaikeyi has no ill-will against Ram but it is the bad company of Manthara who turns her in such a condition that compels her to contemplate over her identity in the kingdom. She follows the teachings of Manthara and decides to go in Korbhavan. So she is totally innocent.

Like Kaikeyi, Gertrude is also innocent. She is also a soft-hearted woman. She is not involved in the intrigue of murdering of Claudius because there is not any clue which can prove her guilt. Her innocence is seen in the episode of "Play Within Play" where Claudius departs in the middle of the play and he finds himself unable to tolerate his bloody act whereas Gertrude shows no reaction to watch this. She continues to sit there and entertain. So it may be declared that she is fully guiltless. This has been told by a great renowned scholar and critic A. C. Bradley also. The following lines declare this fact;

She was not privy to the murder of her husband, either before the deed or after it. There is no sign of her being so, and there are clear signs that she was not. The representation of the murder in the play-scene does not move her; and when her husband starts from his throne, she innocently asks him, 'How fares my lord?' In the interview with Hamlet, when her son says of his slaughter of Polonius,

**'A bloody deed! Almost as bad, god mother,
As kill a king and marry with his brother'**

The astonishment of her repetition 'As kill a king!' is evidently genuine; and, if it had not been so, she would never have had the hardihood to exclaim:

**What have I done, that thou darrest wag thy tongue
In noise so rude against me?**

Further, it is most significant that when she and the king speak together alone, nothing that is said by her or to her implies her knowledge of the secret. The Queen was not a bad-hearted woman, not at all the woman to think little of murder.

[Shakespearean Tragedy, A.C. Bradley ,166-67]

In spite of being innocent she repents over her mistakes whether it has been done willingly or unwillingly. This sense of repentance seems just like that of Kaikeyi;

**To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
So fully of artless jealousy is guilt,
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.**

[Act IV, Sc. V]

Kaikeyi also repents over her guilt and cries for death as well. This happens in the episode of Ayodhyakand when all family of Ram along with people of Ayodhya goes to Ram to persuade him to return Ayodhya. Here Sita, assuming as many forms as she has mothers-in law waits reverently upon each with equal attention.

She wins over all the queens by her services. Seeing her dealings Kaikeyi repents over her bad deeds and wants death;

लखि सिय सहितसरलदोउभाई |कुटिलरानिपछितानिअघाई ||
अवनिजमहिजाचतिकैकेई |महि न बीचुबिधि मीचु न देई ||

Perceiving Sita and the two brothers straight in their dealings, the wicked queen bitterly repented and prayed to earth and the god of death: 'Why does earth not open up and swallow me, and why does God refuse me death?

[R.C. Pd., 410]

Thus, there are many things which can be observed in both the characters. Many things more also can be searched after observing them minutely.

Now, the question may be raised that what is the factor which compel both the women to go against the will of their sons. Gertrude marries to Claudius which is not liked by Prince Hamlet and Kaikeyi has banished Ram for 14 years which is not preferred by Bharat. The solution of these puzzles may be like this. As we know that Prince Hamlet is a great thorn for Claudius. He wants to remove this hindrance for good but he does not do any harm to Hamlet because of Gertrude. He knows that Gertrude loves her son deeply, the son is everything for her and she can't live without him. That's why he does not kill him;

**"The Queen his mother,
Lives almost by his looks."**

[Act-iv, Sc.-vii]

Claudius has accepted this fact before Laertes. So it may be said that Gertrude marry to Claudius only for the safety of her son. She wanted to protect the post of her son and the life of her son as well.

The same thing may be applied with that of Kaikeyi also. She has asked for two boons only for the purpose of making her son the king of Ayodhya. So it is proved that both the women are completely innocent.

As it is a considerable statement that two entities are never is same, so there is some dissimilarity between the above mentioned characters.

(I) Gertrude is the wife of two husbands while Kaikeyi has only one :

Formerly Gertrude was the wife of King Hamlet. She enjoyed life with him and remained as the queen of Denmark but as the time passes, King Hamlet is killed because of the conspiracy of Claudius. After the death of the king, Gertrude realized loneliness and she saw that the throne was going to

be far off her hand so she soon took a decision to get marriage to Claudius. Thus she has two husbands, but as to Kaikeyi, it is not so. She has no two husbands. The one reason of getting marriage to Claudius, is said that Gertrude wanted to preserve and to protect her dear son. She was afraid that of the life of her son and wants to see him safe, so she gets marriage to Claudius. In this way she has become a powerful queen who has capacity to take a decisive step.

In the comparison to Gertrude, Kaikeyi is not a wife of two husbands. Although King Dashratha has many wives but as to Kaikeyi, she has only one husband and that is Dasharatha. She gets a lot of love and respect from him. She is regarded as the most favourable and lovable ladies among all the queens in her palace. That's why she compels him to send Ram in forest for fourteen years and make Bharat as the King of Ayodhya. This is the result of deep love and regard exercised by King Dashratha towards Kaikeyi.

So in this sense she stands apart from Gertrude.

(II) Gertrude is Characterless While Kaikeyi is not so:

Gertrude is a woman who has married two husbands. That is why Hamlet has famously said, 'Frailty, thy name is woman' (1. 2.150). By the sentence he is referring to Gertrude's character and her act of remarriage. He denounces his mother's swift remarriage and describes all of womankind as frail and weak in character. The haste marriage denotes her illicit relationship with that of Claudius. She regards him as her dear one as she instructs Hamlet also to respect him as his own friend;

**Good Hamlet, cast thy knighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not for ever with thy veiled lids.
(Act-I Sc.-II)**

But Kaikeyi's character is pious and flawless. Although she goes against the will of her husband later on and sends Ram to forest but it is the reason of her bad company with Manthara and Manthara has also been misguided hypnotized by Sarswati (the goddess of wisdom according to Hindu mythology) After the death of Dashratha she realizes her fault and repents over this as she tells Bharat after his arrival;

कछुककाजबिधि बीचबिगारेउ |
भूपतिसुरपतिपुरपगु धारेउ ||

God somehow upset my plans a little they could be completed; for the king has gone to Indra's realm.

(R.C. Pd., 350)

When she witnesses the hostility and the service of Sita in Chitrakuta, she realizes very ashamed of her deeds and asks for death to the earth;

लखि सिय सहितसरलदोउभाई |
कुटिलरानिपछितानीअघाई ||
अवनिजमहिजाचतिकैकेई |
महि न बीचुबिधि मीचु न देई ||

Perceiving Sita and the two brothers straight in their dealings, the wicked queen bitterly repented and prayed to earth and the god of death: why does earth not open up and swallow me, and why does God refuse me death?"

(R.C. Pd., 410)

Thus, it can be said that in the context of character and loyalty Kaikeyi is very different from Gertrude.

3. Conclusion

Shakespeare and Tulasidas, both of them undoubtedly possess the quality of universality in their works. Their characters do not belong to one country or one profession, but come from all lands and all walks of life. In this way the characters like Gertrude and Kaikeyi are not only confined to

one place but also prevailed to all over the worlds. Thus, this study would hopefully enhance our knowledge about women with the perspective of two representative poets of two cultures.

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