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Conceptualization of Love...A Comparative Study with Reference to *Devdas* and *Madame Bovary*

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Abstract:

Love is, by all accounts, the most popular and the most fascinating emotion in life and thematic concern in literature. This proves beyond any doubt the obsession of poets and writers with the theme of love. No other subject has been so exhaustibly dealt by the creative writers and critic alike as the theme of love. There are different ways to perceive, express and enjoy the edge and emotion of love this implicit myriad characteristic of love imparts itself to variety of styles and modes in which it can be expressed in literature.

When love is examined from the point of view of nature and nurture controversy most support the argument that love is something innate and instinctive in human nature. This statement is more misconstrued than understood. Love is innate and instinctive in the sense all humans have the potential to experience and enjoy it. The environment...socio cultural factors have their decisive role to play in perception, expression and its subsequent enjoyment of love. Why the emotion which is so innate to human nature is perceived and expressed in different ways remains to be studied till this date. This study makes an attempt to examine the conceptualization of love with reference to two immortal literary characters Devdas and Madame Bovary who belonged to two different socio cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: conceptualisation,love,socio cultural impact, perception, modes of expression.

1.1 Introduction

Love is, by all accounts, the most popular and the most fascinating emotion in life and thematic concern in literature. This proves beyond any doubt the obsession of poets and writers with the theme of love. No other subject has been so exhaustibly dealt by the creative writers and critic alike as the theme of love. There are different ways to perceive, express and enjoy the edge and emotion of love. This implicit myriad characteristic of love imparts itself to variety of styles and modes in which it can be expressed in literature. Love is a double edged sword that can make or mar once life and personality depending upon ones temperament. One can argue in its favor or against with an equally matched army of literary allusion and references. Much has been written about the complexities and mysterious nature of this emotion.

When love is examined from the point of view of nature and nurture controversy, most support the argument that love is something innate and instinctive in human nature. This statement is more misconstrued than understood. Love is innate and instinctive in the sense all humans have the potential to experience and enjoy it. The environment...socio cultural factors have their decisive role to play in perception, expression and its subsequent enjoyment of love. Why the emotion which is so innate to human nature is perceived and expressed in different ways remains to be studied till this date.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this study is to understand the conceptualization of love in a comparative situation with a reference to two celebrated novels namely Devdas¹ by Saratchandra Chattopadhyay (first published in Bangla 1917) Madame Bovary² by Gustave Flaubert (first published in French 1857).

1.3 Devdas at a glance

Devdas the eternal love story of Devdas and Paro is considered to be the epitome of love in Indian society. The story is set in 1900 where Devdas a young, handsome son of a renowned lawyer belongs to a Brahmin family. On the other hand, Paro belonged to a middle class Brahmin family. The families lived in a small village in Bengal where Paro and Devdas grew up sharing their memories of childhood together.

After few a years, he was sent to Calcutta by his father for higher education. During this period, the comfort and friendship between them reached another level where Paro realized that her Dev Da has taken a different place in her emotions .In a way, they both realized they were not the childhood mates anymore and their love has taken a romantic note. Paro like every woman started weaving the patterns of her future life in her mind where they both are leading a life together and their love consummates.

As Paro's family came to know about their love, her grandmother approached his mother. But Devdas' mother being skeptical about this alliance as Paro's family had a custom of accepting dowry from the groom's family and moreover they were next door neighbors, she couldn't transform her love towards Paro as for a daughter-in-law. Due to Devdas mother's prejudices against the family's custom considering the trading of daughter practiced in low caste families, this alliance was rejected by her. In fact, Devdas' father who loved Parbati like a daughter rejected this marriage on the grounds of Devdas being too young to enter into the institution of marriage. Paro's father taking this rejection as an insult decided to find a match richer than that of Devdas' family.

As Paro became aware of her father's decision, she met Devdas at night surreptitiously, believing that Devdas will accept her as his bride against the wish of his family .Though Devdas loved Paro but he was not prepared to enter into wedlock but was quite astounded and glad to see Paro inside his room in the middle of the night. He decided to confront his father. But his father being adamant in his decision said no to this alliance.

Baffled Devdas decided to go back to Calcutta, from where, he wrote a letter to Paro, saying that this relationship was just a friendship for him. But after a few days he realized that his love for

Paro was not friendship but had taken a romantic turn. Realizing how much he has aggrieved Paro and that if he would have been a little stronger towards his love she could be his wife. He went back to his village thinking that he would tell Paro how much he loved.

But destiny had other plans, Paro's marriage was fixed by her father and she decided not to go against her father's wishes as Devdas ran away according to his father's insistence when Paro asked him to marry. However she took one promise from Devdas that he would come to her before his death. Devdas returned to Calcutta and Paro was wedded to a rich, old zamindar widower having three children who was still in the reminiscence of his dead wife but looking at his house which was in need of a female care, he decided to remarry.

Aggrieved Devdas met Chunnilal whilst his stay in Calcutta, and was introduced to the courtesan Chandramukhi. Devdas became alcoholic during this time and Chandramukhi fell in love with him. She nursed him when his health deteriorated due to excessive drinking, which he deliberately did to destroy himself. As he felt his life is not worth living without Paro being a part of it. He took to heavy drinking in Chandramukhi's place. His health deteriorated because of a combination of excessive drinking and agony. Devdas in his mind entered into a continuous comparison between Paro and Chandramukhi. At one time he felt betrayed in love but Chandramukhi convinced him that it was Paro who made him realize the beauty of love. When Devdas was in his normal state he hated Chandramukhi and detested her presence. But in the love saga of Devdas and Paro, Chandramukhi was the silent sufferer who loved Devdas but was aware of the fact that he could never reciprocate her love. She was there when Devdas suffered but could never help him out.

As soon as Devdas realized that he was about to die he caught a train to meet Paro, but unfortunately he died at her doorstep. When Paro ran to get a last glimpse of her love, her family members prevented her to go and thus the story of Devdas becomes a tale of unfulfilled love, where Devdas couldn't meet his beloved even in his death bed.

1.4 Madame Bovary at a glance

Madame Bovary written by Gustave Flaubert in 1856 was his earliest published novel and is considered to be a masterpiece by many critics. The story revolves around a dull compassionate man Charles Bovary lacking in ambition and ability. The novel starts with Charles as a teenager, shy, peculiarly dressed arriving at a new school. Later on, Charles gets a medical degree after much struggle and is appointed as an officer in the Public Health Service. Heloise Dubuc, a rich widow is chosen by Charles's mother to be her daughter-in-law.

One fine day, Charles visits a farm in the village as its owner had a broken leg where he meets his daughter Emma Rouault. Emma a young, beautiful, convent educated woman who is so much inspired by the novels she has read that she wants to escape the ordinariness of life and lead a luxurious life as depicted in the novels she has read. Charles so fascinated by her beauty and charms that he falls in love with her. Heloise knowing about her husband's attractions towards Emma becomes very jealous of her. But as soon as Heloise dies one day Charles marries Emma. The charm of married life comes to an end when Emma meets Marquis d'Andervilliers. She gets disillusioned and bored of Charles boring life but Charles assumes that Emma's indifference will

vanish if they shift to some other place. Emma gives birth to a baby girl called Berthe but even after entering into motherhood Emma couldn't adjust to the life she was leading. She is attracted to another young gentleman León Dupuis, Emma tries to hide her relationship with León and plays the role of devoted wife and mother. At last, León departs from her life assuming that she will never be a part of his life.

Rodolphe Boulanger rich, dashing landowner, brings his servant to Charles and had a glance at Emma. With an aim to seduce Emma he invites her to go for riding. After that a four year long relationship grows between Emma and Rudolphe. Finally Emma decides to elope. Rodolphe, however, has no intention of carrying Emma off and ends the relationship on the eve of their elopement with an apologetic letter. Unable to bear the shock Emma falls ill and turns to religion for a while. When Emma comes out of her illness Charles takes her to an opera where she meets her old lover Leon who has become a lawyer. Old love blossoms again and they meet each other in a hotel room, alluding it to be a home for them under the pretext of Emma taking piano classes. Emma being a prey to luxuries takes up heavy loan from a shrewd merchant Lheureux who later on makes arrangement for her to get her the power of attorney of Charles assets. But when the debts becomes too heavy to pay off she goes on asking money from Leon and Rudolphe but only to be returned bare handed. In dejection, she consumes arsenic and dies a painful death.

Charles under the grief of Emma's death preserves her room to keep her memories, where one day he discovers Rodolphe and Léon's love letters but tries to understand and forgive Emma. Soon he starts leading a solitary life and dies leaving his unsold assets under Lheureux to pay off his remaining debts. His daughter Berthe is sent to her relatives' house where she was asked to work at a cotton mill.

1.5 Conceptualization of love... A comparative study

The perception and expression of love is governed by socio-cultural factors. This accounts for differences in response given by the individuals to this emotion. Long standing social traditions, customs, norms and overall cultural patterns determine how an individual would perceive the emotion of love and would choose appropriate modes to express it.

Devdas published in 1917 tells us how its protagonist Devdas perceives and expresses his love for his beloved Paro. In his case the conceptualization of the emotion of love to a very great extent conforms to the prevailing socio cultural concerns in India. He is drawn to his childhood mate Paro even before teens. When they realize that their friendship is turning into love they conform here to the prevailing tradition of child marriage in India. Although it is not materialized and met with opposition on grounds of different norms and tradition in their families. The soul of the protagonist is burdened by the age old Indian tradition which views marriage (which is inclusive of love and doesn't allow it to operate outside its boundaries) more as a family affair rather than an individual's choice for his satisfaction and happiness. Despite the shower of praises that the character of Devdas has been able to get from the critics and common man alike, Devdas as an individual fails to view love as a matter of happiness and contentment for his own personal life. Deliberately or not, his choice at this critical point of life shows that he assigns subordinate place to his passion for Paro. He goes to Calcutta fully realizing that it would mean

losing Paro for good. His passion though genuine in its own accord does not generate adequate emotional strength to enable him to take arms against prevailing social norms of his family and defend his love for Paro.

Madame Bovary a young, beautiful, educated woman who falls in love with Charles, who comes to treat his father in the capacity of a doctor. Upon the death of Charles first wife, he marries Emma for love. After initial excitement the charm of romance begins to wear out for Emma. She is the product of western society where materialism reigns the supreme. She has a taste for luxury and comfort Tony Tanner³, argues "[Emma's] sickness must be connected to the vagueness of her position in society: after being a daughter (and thus entirely defined by the father . . .), she exists on the threshold in a sort of pronominal limbo." Being disillusioned with her love with Charles, she gets attracted to another man Marquis d'andervielles. Even motherhood does not hold Emma back from her passionate affairs with men. She then becomes infatuated with one of the first intelligent young men she meets in Yonville, a young law student, Léon Dupuis, who seems to share her appreciation for "the finer things in life", and who returns her admiration. Out of fear and shame, however, Emma hides her love for Léon and her contempt for Charles and plays the role of the devoted wife and mother all the while consoling herself with thoughts and self-congratulations of her own virtue. Finally, in despair of ever gaining Emma's affection, Léon departs to study in Paris. Emma doesn't stop here she has intense affair of four years with another man Rudolph. Till now Emma concealed her affairs and continued to play a devoted wife but now she is so under the enchantment of her present lover that she decides to elope with him. But her plan is backfired by the deceit of her own lover. She is so shattered that she turns to religion. Janet Todd⁴ has perceived a conflict between Emma Bovary's conventional feminine role and increasingly powerful "masculine" urges which ultimately undermine her social position and contribute to her suicide.

The character of Madame Bovary shows that in western culture the emotion of love is given utmost importance by an individual in his or her life. It is more a personal and less a family matter. Character like Madame Bovary is more faithful to her own happiness and contentment rather than to the notions of family prestige, social traditions or duty to husband. Ironically, her relentless pursuit of happiness does not make her happy in life. Her transition from the world of romance to religion is another attempt to hold on to happiness.

Devdas shows exemplary commitment not to his emotions but to Paro. He is great not as the person committed to the passion of undying love but in his loyalty to Paro. Practically, Paro is out of his reach, he clings to her memories; he lives perhaps to fulfill his vow to come back to her before death. His would have been a great sacrifice if he could have conducted himself well even after his separation from Paro. He indulges in self-destructive practices. He becomes addicted to excessive drinking and visits wanton women.

The difference in the behavior of Madame Bovary and Devdas can be understood by understanding the way in which both the characters conceptualize love. Their process of conceptualization is the product of the complex interplay of socio-cultural conditions prevailing in western and eastern cultures respectively. In oriental culture, individual happiness is subordinated to collective happiness; even romantic love requires socio cultural sanction. Love is person-oriented, for example, Paro is the essence of love for Devdas. Once separated from her,

he doesn't feel love for anyone any longer. It is a sanctified emotion, it is almost a kind of worship offered by the devotee (lover) to divine (beloved). Sharing love with many is not only an act of profanity but it is considered to be a stigma by society. Upon careful examination of how Devdas handles and responds to the passion of love clearly brings out all these ramifications that have gone into the conceptualization process of his love.

Now it is easy to understand the different way in which Madame Bovary responds to her passion of love. Love is perceived as medium of individual happiness and contentment in occidental cultures. It is more a matter of personal delight and less of a collective good. It is not installed on superhuman pedestal. It is not a worship to divine, it is perceived as human affair. Fallibility is implicit in any human interaction. Madame Bovary is more authentic in her perception and expression of love. Her first marriage is a result of her liking for Dr. Charles. Love like any other emotion wears out after the passage of time. Madame Bovary gets attracted to few more lovers in her life as western culture recognizes the importance of marriage and family. Madame Bovary outwardly continues to play a role of devoted wife, her commitment is not towards any individual person but to her own passion of life. Various men who come in her life are not the objects of her passion but are instruments through which her passion is realized. Her response and handling of the passion of love is governed by the socio-cultural force which is responsible the way individual acts.

1.6 Conclusion

The analysis of the two famous novels from the point of view of the conceptualization of love takes us to the conclusion that love in spite of its universal appeal is governed in its perception and expression by socio-cultural factors. The appropriate modes of its expression do differ from culture to culture. The writers writing in the different cultures consciously or unconsciously adopt these socially sanctioned ways in which this universal passion finds expression in their creative writing. It would be myopic to term any mode of love's perception and expression as right or wrong. Very often character in fiction become agents to articulate and execute that invisible social code which sets boundaries to this most glorified and sanctified emotion as well. Meticulous study of cross cultural components would enable the scholars to understand and analyze the patterns of responses of different characters in the creative world.

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