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**TOPIC: THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN
MOLIERE'S *TARTUFF* AND BERNARD SHAW'S *ARMS AND THE MAN*.**

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THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN MOLIÈRE'S *TARTUFFE* AND BERNARD SHAW'S *ARMS AND THE MAN*.

For centuries, human societies have tended to assign different roles, codes of behavior and morality, and even different feelings and thoughts to men and women. By doing so, they used the biological distinction of sex (between male and female) to construct and enforce the social distinction of **gender** (between masculine and feminine). It is also widely held that while one's sex as a man or woman is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender- of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in temperament and behavior are largely, if not entirely social constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization (M.H Abrams *A Glossary of Literary Terms*). By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as **active, domineering, adventurous, rational, creative**, the feminine by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be identified as **passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional**.

Therefore, we see that the feminine gender is quite represented much more differently from the masculine gender. We also see that most literary works that are

considered great focus more on male protagonist than female. Thus we experience the character of Oedipus, Hamlet, Faustus, Huck Finn, Tartuffe, Volpone, Jero to mention but a few.

There are various themes on gender in the two above mentioned plays. We can consider the theme of gender inequality, gender identity and gender roles. In considering **Moliere's "Tartuffe"**, we see the male character Tartuffe, as dominating the entire work. His actions and inactions determine the actions of other characters. Moliere creates a play that is interesting in so many ways. He reflects mainly on the role of women and men within a family. In the play, men held the power of decision making and a man's point of view is considered as the only view that matters. Thus we see in act I, scene IV, that Orgon places Tartuffe as the head of his household without considering the opinions of others,

"Tartuffe: He governs us all, and to protect my honor Bids my wife grant his godly rule upon her. He forewarns me of men who might give her the eye...."

Women were also considered to be inferior to men, thus they should be submissive. Arranged marriage was prominent in the era the play was written and the father figure played the most important function here. In this light, we experience the character of Mariane (Orgon's daughter). She does not object her father's decision to marry Tartuffe, she agrees completely until the intervention of Dorine's stoic behavior. We see this in act 2, scene 1. The conversation goes thus;

Mariane: To do so is the height of my ambition.

Orgon: Excellent well. What say you of—Tartuffe?

Mariane: Who? I?

Orgon: Yes, you. Look to it how you answer.

Mariane: Why! I'll say of him—anything you please.

This is the submissive nature required of females in the play. They were meant to be obedient and mostly submissive in their dealings with their male counterpart. Therefore, Mariane accepts her father's decision hook, line and sinker.

Elmire, Orgon's wife is a feminine character that explores her feminine nature as the supposedly second in command of the house. She tries in her capacity as a mother to ensure that her children be free from the holdings of Tartuffe; thus she plans a plot against Tartuffe to expose his true nature to the owner of the house- Orgon.

Dorine on another part is a character that is considered rude and disobedient because of her failure to out rightly obey Orgon's rules in the house. She is a maid but in her out right boldness, she acts as a foil to other female characters in the work. The household maid, is bold and opinionated; she is also perhaps the most intelligent and clear-headed member of the household. It is she who tries to foil Tartuffe's designs, open Orgon's eyes, and encourage the young lovers to remain steadfast in their devotions to one another. We see the conversation between her and her master Orgon how it goes in act ii, scene ii. Orgon is angry at Dorine's persistently rude nature to influence his opinions to his daughter, thus he says;

Orgon: ...You've taken on yourself here in this house a sort of free familiarity that I don't like, I tell you frankly, girl.

Dorine is considered rude because of the subordinate embargo that has been placed on the feminine nature in this work.

When considering male figures in the work, we see in the character of Cleante and Damis boldness in their opinions against Tartuffe. Damis, knowing the consequences for his actions and bold opinions against Tartuffe, goes on to tell his father against Tartuffe's hypocritical nature. And when he is driven out of the house by his father and his inheritance given to Tartuffe, he does not make a fuss about this decision and goes out of the house. He behaves thus because of the figure that has been given to males not only in this period but also in the world's society at large.

Cleante also appears to be bold in approaching Orgon with Tartuffe's issue. He is considered as the voice of reason in the work. He counsels Orgon about Tartuffe.

In **Bernard Shaw's "Arms and the Man"**, we see a difference in gender roles. Gender in this work, is also a major theme seen in this work. Women were regarded as subtle, gentle, soft, and submissive, they were expected to adopt a suitably modest behavior and a moral code of sexual purity and self-sacrifice, and avoid having strong desires and strong opinions. By assigning such roles to women in the society and in the world's literature, any form of deviation from these laid down principles, is seen as against moral etiquette. However, there are instances where women do not consider these as their fate in the society, thus, they go out of their way to make decisions and take actions against the domineering will of the male counterpart. From this point of view, let us consider the three female characters in Bernard Shaw's "Arms and the Man".

Riana expresses great confidence when she hides Captain Bluntschli from the searching officer in her room in act 1. She also shows courage in her conversation with Bluntschli. We see such conversation;

Man (with grim good humor). All of them, dear lady, all of them, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can, and kill as many of the enemy as we can. Now if you raise an alarm—

Riana (cutting him short) you will shoot me. How do you know that I am afraid to die?

Riana's show of confidence gives us another representation of the feminine nature.

However, Riana in act 1, scene 1, is seen expressing full time emotional outburst because her betrothed Sergius led the victory of the war in Slivnitsa. This emotional show is regarded as feminine and her action is opposed to the actions of Sergius on the account of his winning the war.

Another feminine character in the work is Catherine Petkoff. The way she tries to impress everyone with her social standing, tells us the feminine view of social wealth. Thus, she is considered as a great opposite with her husband Major Petkoff. We can consider their conversation in act I after the return of Petkoff from the war. Petkoff considers bathing as a total waste of time and by this, Mrs. Petkoff considers him outdated and old-fashioned.

Petkoff (over his coffee and cigarette) I don't believe in going too far with these modern customs. All this washing can't be good for the health: it's not natural. There was an Englishman at Phillipopolis who used to wet himself all over with cold water every morning when he got up. Disgusting! It all comes from the English: their climate makes them so dirty that they have to be perpetually washing themselves. Look at my father: he never had a bath in his life; and he lived to be ninety-eight, the healthiest man in Bulgaria. I don't

mind a good wash once a week to keep up my position; but once a day is carrying the thing to a ridiculous extreme.

Catherine. You are a barbarian at heart still, Paul. I hope you behaved yourself before all those Russian officers.

Catherine Petkoff in this work, is assigned the role of an organizer, she is in charge of major happenings and developments in the house. She is not fully subjected to her husband's commands in terms of taking direct orders from him. We see this as she acquires a bell in the house, develops a library and does not out of fear of her husband tell him about the visit of the strange man- Bluntschli.

Louka on her part is considered in this work as rude. She is bold in her dealings with the Petkoff. She gives out her opinion about the family without fear. And not minding her position in the family, she makes out with Riana's betrothed- Sergius.

Women in this work are considered to be those whose major function is to take care of the home while the men go out to fight wars. Also, women are considered to be meant for marriage and procreation nothing more, because at the same time, a young girl was not expected to focus too obviously on finding a husband. Being 'forward' in the company of men suggested a worrying sexual appetite.

Considering the masculine gender, their role is found in exercising great courage and rationality. However in the nature of Captain Bluntschli, he exercises fear during the war and his sense of rationality is devoid in his actions. His love for chocolates is considered irrational and so is his preference for chocolates over ammunitions.

In this period, if a young man was particularly pious he might manage to stay chaste until he married. Many respectable young men, however, resorted to using prostitutes. Thus we see Sergius though betrothed to Riana, still has a relationship with Louka. We also see Nicola, though a male, he considers himself subordinate to the dictates of the Petkoff. He does not outright give his opinions. He makes them reserved.

In discussing the theme of sexuality in the two above mentioned works, we see that while it is not a major theme in Moliere's *Tartuffe*, it is one of the thriving themes in Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. Sexuality has come to mean someone's ability to experience or express sexual feelings or desires. Sexuality has been a theme in literature since the origins of literature itself. Its role in literature is undoubtedly a reflection of how various cultures view sexuality and what its role is in those cultures. Sexuality can be as important and prevalent in a culture as money, power and time, or it can be so suppressed as to consider a taboo. Authors across time have explored the ideas of sexuality and expressed their own beliefs, often contrary to the culture in which they live, on its importance, advantages, and disadvantages.

It is a fact that in most cultures, the levels of acceptable sexual behavior are almost always unevenly distributed between genders. It is very typical for societies to allow men to be open with their sexuality, but to expect women to be modest and chaste. Thus *Tartuffe* expresses his sexual desire for Elmire in an open way neglecting his religious stands. This in fact, leads to his discovery by Orgon.

It can also be argued that there is a strong sexual feeling (**homosexual**) Orgon has towards *Tartuffe* in the way he treats *Tartuffe* to the detriment of the rest members of his household. We see that when he returns from a journey in act I, scene IV, his major concern is the welfare of *Tartuffe*. Even when Dorine brings to

his notice that his wife has been sick while he was away, he doesn't respond to this rather, he consistently asks about Tartuffe.

Orgon... Has everything gone well these last two days? What's happening? And how is everybody?

Dorine: Madam had fever, and a splitting headache day before yesterday, all day and evening.

Orgon: And how about Tartuffe?

Dorine: Tartuffe? He's well; He's mighty well; stout, fat, fair, rosy-lipped.

Orgon: Poor man!

We can also consider Orgon's decision to will his property to Tartuffe as a sign of homosexuality. 15

In Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, there is sexual activity between Louka and Sergius as mentioned by Louka in act II, scene I,

Louka: (avoiding him). No, I don't want your kisses. Gentlefolk are all alike—you making love to me behind Miss Riana's back, and she doing the same behind yours.

On a final note, the two plays studied cannot be said to be devoid of stereotypical roles given to the male and the female gender and thus, these roles have been critically explored in this write up.