

Children Literature: Shaping Gender Identities

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Abstract - The aim of this paper is to analyze stereotype construction of gender roles in the text of children's stories which inculcate in the children's crude minds socially developed gender differences. For this purpose, the study followed Dell Hymes' speaking model. This model has sixteen components that can be applied to different types of Discourse (speech interaction): message form; message content; setting; scene; Speaker/sender; address or; the hearer/receiver/audience; addressee; purposes (outcomes); purposes (goals); key; channels; forms of speech; norms of interaction; norms of interpretation; and genres. Selected children's stories were analyzed to identify their role as primary thought developing sources in the mind of young learners thus shaping their gender identities. This study would be beneficial in drawing the attention of authors, editors and writers of children's literature to redefine gender roles in order to minimize gender differences.

I. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature has primary significance in shaping gender identities to develop a traditional set of differences between male and female. The aim of this study is to analyze stereotype construction of gender roles in the text of three selected children's children stories which inculcate in the children's crude minds socially developed gender differences.

This study would be beneficial in drawing the attention of authors, editors and writers of children's literature to redefine gender roles in order to minimize gender differences. This research will inspire the readers to conduct further researches related to the topic. Moreover, it will also facilitate future researches.

Individual and collective roles of male and female in the society are considered to be equally important for national development. The present study is based on the assumption that children's literature is used as an important tool for shaping stereotypical gender differences/identities of men and women in the society.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

From the viewpoint of objective, this research is applied and explanatory in nature and it will follow the narrative research method for the analysis of the data in the form of text taken from selected children's stories.

For this purpose given study follows Dell Hymes speaking/communicative model. This model has sixteen components that can be applied to different types of Discourse (speech interaction): message form; message content; setting; scene; Speaker/sender; address or; the hearer/receiver/audience; addressee; purposes (outcomes); purposes (goals); key; channels; forms of speech; norms of interaction; norms of interpretation; and genres.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rabindranath Tagore: Once There Was a King (1916)

Setting/scene: The setting of the story is purely domestic which has assigned traditional and stereotype roles to the mother and Grannie and the things they are usually expected to

do. Grannie has been to always tell stories to children and mother is a protecting shelter for his/her different real and fake excuses. Mother is portrayed as humble, meek and submissive guider for the children most of the time and the father has grandeur and power. So from the very early age child is infested with the difference of power role between male and female through characters found in their stories.

Participants: Regarding participants the present story has king, queen, son, daughter and mother and grannie's character to introduce. The *quality of linguistic interaction* between them has shown the different gender roles and differences that society has assumed on their part. For example King has to go outside. Queen has to work in the kitchen and feel worried all the time for her daughter to get married at the time. While the king has no direct concern with all this. But the final decision is always imposed by the king upon his family (daughter and wife). It specifies clearly gender differences. **Ends:**

This analysis has undertaken the defined features of gender identity oppositions in behavior. *Self-subjective* view of the king for having a son in spite of daughter which is adding power and prestige in his role in the society. Queen is having *self obsession* for home responsibilities as well as her daughters' marriage, but lacks the power and courage to accomplish them without interference of the king. That is why she is submissive to king's decision for her daughter's marriage with a brahman.

Act sequence: This analyzes the social and anthropological difference of men and woman's speech behavior. The queen has shown *passive server* in her speech attitude to the king who is willing to say yes to all fair and unfair commandments of king. While the king was shown strong and decision imposer. So both princesses have no question response to unequal match of marriage made by the king.

Key: Here the analysis has shown that the overall tone, manner and spirit of male and female characters' speech in the story has gender differences. As little queen cherishes her husband with great care. Mother Queen is serving the king with many dishes and accepts his decisions without resistance as she is blaming her fate and not the king for any inconvenience.

While the king and son have ruling force to exercise without any question.

Instrumentalities: It analyzed the *form and style* of the speech used by male and female characters in the story. King's speech is in ordering form and he is using powerful and *authoritative style* while treating the queen and daughter as nobody can interfere with king's command. Both queens are using passive speech responses which show *submissive style* in their speech. As they are bound to follow the decision of kings.

Norm: both male and female action and reaction in the story are governed by social rules. As it shows, cultural implication that the king is willing to marry her daughter with a son of a Brahman who belong to a higher social class. A seven year boy can be assigned power governing role. The king has more privilege for a son than a daughter. All this is part of social created gender differences.

Genre: The kind of speech act used in the present text is a short story. Apart from other analysis, it is observed that mostly female character like mother and grannie are traditionally associated with storytelling. This portrays women as unrealistic and imaginative while male as realistic and sound. The end of the story shows that such stories leave many questions at the end of the children, which answers they do not find in reality. It also differentiates female as confused personality.

Brothers Grimm (The Frog Prince)

Setting/scene: In this story the environment is male dominating and the princess is shown as a creature who has to obey the orders of male figure the story like the father and a frog in the story. The girl is presented as weak, selfish, sensitive, emotional figure while male figures are presented as faithful, realistic and factual in their doings.

Participants: The linguistic interaction of the participants is infested with tradition, gender differences as frog prince wanted to marry the princess because of liking and appreciation, but the princess is portrayed as passive one who is ready to marry without consent. She is shown as emotional server like traditional daughters. Likewise, Father has commanding personality and girl has to obey him without questioning. Her infinite love for petty things like 'ball' shows that she is given one identical personality that is of emotional type.

Ends: Here purposes and goals of female character in the story are determined by male as she is directed by father to fulfill her promise. Again she is directed by the frog prince to go with him into his father's kingdom and marry with him. While her own goals and purposes are shown as irrational like excessive love for the ball and her readiness to sacrifice everything to get this petty one back after losing. Males are portrayed as having factual ends, which are obvious gender discrimination in the story.

Act sequence: Form and order of male and female character in the story are also showing gender difference. Girl speech is full of emotional, ostentatious and meek words like cry, clothes, jewels, golden ball, while male characters' speech has powerful and ordering vocabulary like stay princess, fulfill your words, bitterly, go with me etc. It shows women

submissiveness and male domination. Similarly, in examining 'Key' the tone and manner of girl speech is self-subjective as she is emotional and easy to convince in fulfilling her words and marrying the prince while frog prince is self-objective and changed his words easily by showing the sudden change in attitude and wanted more than his demand as to marry her finally. In the same way female character in the story is passionate, submissive, and weak and convince able in her **style** while male characters are powerful, awesome and ordering in their style of speech. Social **Norms** are governing the speech of both male and female character and presenting clear gender differences as a father and frog prince has dominated effect on the girl as she is relying upon males for the fulfillment of her needs and desires (even for little ball) which denies self independence. They are decision maker of her life like when and with whom she should marry. In this 'Genre' (short story) different type of speech events are used which specify the gender difference through female emotionality, meekness, male ordering and dominant speech

BARBIE-Q For Licha by Sandra Cisneros

Setting/scene: The environment of the story raises gender discrimination. Girls whole world is signified with "sweet dreams" which can never be equivalent to (bitter) reality they have to face in the days to come. Like two "Mattel boxes" the girls in the story are living in the hard sell of their life which is constructed by their "dreamy word" that is hard to break because their minds have become conditioned with the gayness of *artificial glamorous ideals* (Barbies) which in turn forced them to live in 'cage' of their houses (built by men/ male ideology) like "show pieces" away from reality.

Participants: The linguistic interaction of the girls signifies the preference of girls for barbies that creates meek and dependent image of women in the crude minds of children. Even 'Barbie' an *artificial idol of modern women's morality* has not been shown alone, but along with a long list of dear and near ones that also include "pageboy" and "boyfriend". The very image of these boys inculcating in the minds of little girls the idea of *male sovereignty* and their due place even in the world of girl's toys. It also emphasis women dependence and desire of male gayness, which is pretended by the society as unavoidable on their part. All this has been designed by the society to work upon the mind of little girls to construct in child's mind *traditional submissive image of women* to be followed in their lives.

Ends: Here purposes and goals of female character (girls and Barbies) in the story are again determined by male as the narrator and her companion play with Barbies, two basic dolls, and an invisible Ken (again a comment on the absence of male figures in the culture) which is pointing that women (Barbies) have incomplete existence without male figure. The writer's depiction of Barbies quarrel regarding boyfriend is again an assumption of society about their stereotyped attitude and interest that is in turn *highlighting the importance and preference of male* and secondary and submissive role of females. Girls liking for babies, their costume and relation with her other relatives shed light upon their ostentatious view of

life and at the same time there appeared a *hollow image* of woman's personality as one of their greatest flaw of their personality for not succeeding in finding such ideals in actual life as the girls in the story, at the end, find reality topsy-turvy.

Act sequence: Form and order of words uttered by the female character (girls) remind the reader of *infantile glee* by repeating words, just like a kid would do. The words like "please, please, please," and "and there! And there!, And there!..." Making almost an alliteration of the words that realistically depicts the speech of a child. Apart from this, here repetition also depicts *pleading and requesting the nature of females* that men always like them to do being secondary creature. There struggle only continues till they get assurance from their counterpart as they are shown *dependent* upon men for acknowledgment and acceptance of their *desires and needs*. *Male words* have power and singularity of utterance while *female words* are used to be hollow, weak and at the same time plurality of nature.

In finding the aspect of 'Key' the tone and manner of little girl's speech is self-subjective as very depiction of this outward beauty shows attitude of women towards aesthetic appreciation that lacks rationality. It is a critical dilemma of male dominated society that a female has short sighted personality. In the last paragraph, the character of little girls is shown negatively by raising factor of women "jealousy" as they feel satisfied and contented that now everybody, like these, will buy smoky and damaged toys because big toy warehouse Halsted is burned down, here the story assumes biting satiric tone.

In finding **style** of thinking perspective the story signifies that all the time society have same *conventional roles* to assign women as portrayed in the form of Barbies. It's all is working as *mind conditioning* of little girls to accept such roles in their practical life which is enforced upon them not only by male dominated social ideology, but also by women (mothers) who not only buy Barbies for their daughters but also prefer to let their daughters appreciate and buy Barbies since beginning. The little girls love for Barbies and their glamorous life also shows their (female) male gayness that inspire in them a traditional desire to look attractive and good looking. The image of "pageboy" and "boyfriend" is portrayed traditionally strong, powerful and indispensable for woman's identity.

Social **Norms** are presenting clear gender differences as stereotypical girls should have mind conditioning to play with dolls. But even in this world of toys boyfriends and boy cousins have dominating privileges. This 'Genre' (short story) "Barbie-Q" ironically brings contrast between male

dominating society's artificial feminine stereotype Barbie for girls and actual reality that women have to face. It sheds light upon traditional gender roles, pretended morality, sexual and class differences.

Findings

The analysis revealed that children's literature is infested with such material where male and female gender differences are demonstrated through stereotype construction. In the light of Dell Hymes model it is found that environmental, behavioural, social, cultural, character and speech differences are responsible in generating gender difference between men and women. These are instruments to inculcate social made identities in the crude minds of children. In addition, Sudden and unjustified endings may also make children unrealistic and sometimes biased in their attitude towards life.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Children literature is an important source of *entertainment and learning for them*. Unfortunately, we are providing them literature which has been infused in their mind socially made gender identities. For this reason these stereotype identities have become part and parcel of our society. Such gender roles should be *reconstructed* for their positive character building and to nourish a healthy society.

Children are *the future builders* of any nation. The study suggests that children's literature is an important source for their *character building*. It is working as primary *social training* for the children to learn social and moral ethics. So, It is a great responsibility of authors, writers and editors make *positive amendments* in their work that can provide children with literature which minimize social and stereotype gender differences.

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