

Original Paper

The Portrayal of Women in Shiga Literature from the Perspective of “Intersexuality”

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Abstract

Bisexuality is an ancient concept introduced into literature by Virginia Woolf in the 1920s, which breaks through the traditional framework of gender dichotomy and reaches a new level of feminism. According to Woolf's idea of bi-sexuality, the greatest minds are bi-sexual, i.e., masculine and feminine in one body at the same time. Shiga has long been regarded as Japan's "god of fiction", a man whose delicate and vivid writing, concise and powerful language has produced many classic works of literature and literary images. Throughout his life, the theme of women has been a major theme in Shiga's literary output. In modern Japanese society, which was centred on a patriarchal culture, women were one of the most oppressed groups. This paper focuses on the intersexual consciousness of the female characters in Shiga Naoya's literature, a study that has profound implications for modern women's awakening to their own consciousness in the face of gender inequality.

Keywords

intersexuality, Shiga literature, feminism, gender conformity

1. The Concept of “Intersexuality”

The concept of “intersexuality” is reflected in three aspects: the physiological perspective, the psychological perspective and the literary criticism perspective. From a physiological perspective, “intersex” refers to a third kind of person who is both male and female, implying a new level of development in human gender consciousness. In psychological terms, “intersexuality” refers to a person who is both distinctly masculine and distinctly feminine. Feminist pioneer Virginia Woolf first introduced “intersexuality” into feminist literary criticism, making it an important theoretical term and

core concept of feminist literary criticism. In *A Room of One's Own*, she explains: "There are two forces at work in each of us, a male force and a female force. In a man's head, the male is superior to the female, and in a woman's head, the female is superior to the male. The most normal and appropriate situation is when these two forces live together in harmony, in spiritual cooperation". Woolf's theory of "intersexuality" defines a state of harmony between the two opposing forces in the human brain, suggesting a spirit of harmony between the sexes, where men and women can understand each other, support each other, complement each other's strengths, and thus realize the pursuit of a perfectly harmonious personality and achieve the good purpose of harmonious human development.

In the view of contemporary feminists, the series of dichotomies based on male and female gender are tools used by men to oppress women under a patriarchal ideology, and are restrictions imposed on women by a male-dominated discourse. Binary oppositions place everything in a hierarchical relationship and give it a centre. In gender relations, the male occupies the centre and relegates the female to the opposing other. Breaking down the dichotomy between the sexes and deconstructing the male-centric system has become one of the points of emphasis of the contemporary feminist movement. As a result, the intersexuality, an archetype or symbol that has existed since ancient times, has entered the feminist scene as a weapon to subvert male-centrism.

2. The Consciousness of "Intersexuality" in Shiga Literature

Known as the "god of fiction" in Japan, Shiga Naoya's humanitarianism is multifaceted. His humanitarianism goes beyond the "fraternal" level, and involves both criticism of the privileged system and the imbalance of equality in society, and a sense of respect for the individual and for life. Women are a major theme in Shiga's literature, and in his works he reveals the shortcomings of the feudal patriarchal system and the oppression of women by patriarchal ideology, thereby advocating gender equality and female emancipation.

2.1 Naoko with Intersexual Temperament

Shiga Naoya describes the heroine Naoko as "a beautiful woman with a beautiful hair and a beautiful face" in *The Way of the Dark Night*. It is well known that Japanese women are known for their characteristic gentleness and softness. The lightness and softness of her features is a clear indication that Naoko is a woman of traditional Japanese beauty. Naoko is not only feminine in appearance, she also takes the initiative to show her love to her husband, joking and frolicking with him without fear, displaying a healthy dose of loverliness and wifely nature. Traditionally, Japanese women were introverted and shy, aware of the world but unmoved. Women in feudal society were considered subservient to men, and they were so crippled by traditional feudal ideology that it was considered unrespectful, or worse, unethical, to take the initiative to show their love to their husbands. Naoko, on the other hand, expresses her affection like a man, on an equal footing with her husband. More importantly, she respects her own personality and is brave enough to defend her dignity as a human

being. When she is confronted with the “sexual transgression” of her cousin’s seduction, Naoko is pained by the loss of her chastity as a woman, but refuses to let the patriarchal society use this as an excuse to insult her mentally. When she realizes that her sincere confession has not been met with her husband’s understanding, she does not hesitate to point out the self-interest and hypocrisy of his so-called “forgiveness”: “I think, as you yourself often say, that you forgive me because you think that hating me will make you more unhappy and that it is not worth it. I think you forgave me because you thought it would be good for you to forgive me. What does that mean for me?” The feudal morality of marriage required wives to remain chaste to their husbands, but gave men the privilege of having “three wives and four concubines” and of “seeking out women”. In *The Second Sex*, Simone Bova notes: “Patriarchal civilization consecrates women to chastity; it recognizes more or less openly the male right to sexual freedom, but confines women to marriage. Sexuality, if it is not sanctioned by custom, by the sacred texts, is a transgression, a degradation, a frustration and a weakness for her. She should defend her virginity, her honour. If she ‘submits’, if she ‘degrades’, she will be scorned”. Naoko in the feudal marriage is brave, even more self-respecting and self-assertive than the men. Naoko’s sense of “intersexuality” was one of the reasons why she was able to reconnect with her husband. Not only did she have the beauty of a traditional Japanese woman, who valued chastity as much as any woman of her time, but she also had the bravery and initiative of a man. Naoko, who was “intersex”, was not content to merely play the role of a dependent husband, but sought to be equal to him.

2.2 *The “Intersexual” Ayako*

When the husband returns from a date with his lover, he is surprised to see the lonely figure of his wife, Ayako, waiting for him “The wife was huddled in a corner, wrapped haphazardly in a thin nightgown, in the shape of a pile of rags that had been thrown outside”. In this detail, Shiga Naoya has created a very evocative picture of the misery of a weak woman who is about to be abandoned by her husband. Women in a patriarchal society, where men were inherently superior to women, became the custom and rule of the day, and they had to depend on their husbands for survival, often turning a blind eye to their cheating husbands in anger and fear. Feudal dogma and a pervasive social climate of contempt for women led to women’s self-deprecation, causing them to become accustomed to a subordinate social status to men, to identify with and to become intrinsic promoters of a patriarchal culture, and to lose their spiritual independence altogether. Ayako is not weak and stoic, but she does not allow her fate to be dictated by men. She does not allow her fate to be dictated to her by a man. She is confronted with the words, “If you didn’t know, it wouldn’t have mattered. Even if there was such a thing, it wouldn’t affect my feelings for you in any way”, Ayako fought back firmly, “There is no such thing. It’s like dividing one thing between two people, as long as you have feelings for her, you will naturally love me less”. Ayako set a deadline for her husband to break up with his lover and offered him a certain amount of money as compensation. After discovering her husband’s underhandedness, she angrily points out his self-serving nature: “He is unforgiving when he criticizes others, but completely

changes when it is his turn”. Although she is unforgiving of her husband’s mistakes, she later expresses her deep love for him and the grievances she has endured in this incident in a heartfelt letter to him, and ultimately uses her wisdom, will and true feelings to help him on his way “home”. In modern Japanese society, which was centred on a patriarchal culture, women were one of the most oppressed groups. Ayako, who is “intersex”, does her best to maintain the stability of her family and her dignity as a wife, and is a woman of reason in her thoughts and actions.

2.3 Afuko “Intersexuality”

The seemingly clumsy and timid nanny, Afuko, in *What Happened to Sasaki*, is a man who takes responsibility and gives her skin to the lady after the accident in which she was burned because she was dating her lover. She says goodbye to her lover and pledges to spend her life with her to make up for her unintentional mistake, embodying the self-sacrificing spirit of a humanitarian. With this highly moral work, Shiga Naoya celebrates the humanity that emanates from the women of the lower classes, who are humble but have integrity and goodness in their hearts. It is because Afuko is as moral and responsible as a man that she finds happiness and peace of mind in the silence of her days. Women in feudal society were cowardly, dependent on their families and husbands, and even more so at the bottom, where they feared the consequences and therefore preferred to live in the shadow of men forever. The “intersexed” Afuko has the kindness and consideration of a woman, but also the sense of responsibility and justice of a man.

3. The Reasons for the “Intersexual” Consciousness in Shiga Literature

3.1 Social Background

In early Meiji Japan, driven by Enlightenment ideas, the closed doors of the country began to open and Western civilization collided violently with traditional Japanese values. From the end of the Meiji period to the Taisho period, young people who sought themselves, respected individuality and were sensitive to knowledge began to look to the country and to the individual. In this environment of the pursuit of freedom and individuality, women began to gradually move from the home to society, and their sense of self slowly awakened. The issue of Nara’s running away in *A Doll’s House* was widely debated in Japanese society, and a series of female emancipation initiatives by the Japan Literature and Arts Association and the Aozora Society followed, making Nara a synonym for female emancipation that was widely discussed in Japanese society, and the issue of female emancipation became a topic of literary discussion.

3.2 The Experience of Growing up in Early Childhood

Shiga Naoya’s direct emotional understanding of the suffering of women comes from the tragic experiences of his biological mother and stepmother. Shiga’s birth mother, Gin, never really enjoyed being a mother. Her eldest son died young and her second son, Shiga, was taken away by her grandparents when she was three years old to be raised. When she became pregnant for the third time,

she tragically died with the child in her womb. Although she was a housewife of a large family, she had no say in the family and was discriminated against by her in-laws because of the decline of her mother's family. In contrast to her biological mother, her stepmother, Ah Ho, despite having many children, does not have the luxury of being a "mother to her children", and despite her respectful behaviour, she is still easily blamed. These two kind but unfortunate women, Shiga's birth mother and stepmother, were the first "teachers" Shiga had to learn about women and understand them, and the first prototypes of the suffering women in his many works. The pain and helplessness of these two mothers, who had no place to talk about their suffering, deeply stimulated Shiga and made him identify with their tragic fate in the depths of his consciousness.

3.3 Influence of Advanced Thinking

As a member of the Shirakaba school, which raised the banner of humanism, Shiga Naoya was exposed to the emancipation of women brought about by the "Western trend" when he was a student. He combined the advocacy of gender equality by Western writers such as Henrik Ibsen with his own life experiences, and his approach to women's issues was very distinctive and personal. Shiga breaks the limits of identity and "expresses his sympathy and preference for women with a distinctive attitude", and advocates equality for all people by criticizing the disparate social reality, which is rare in birch literature. It is worth mentioning that the equality he advocates breaks down the boundaries of hierarchy and traditional concepts, and is no longer limited to the privileged and the underclass, but includes equality between the upper and upper classes, the underclass and the underclass as well as the same class.

4. Conclusion

Known as the "god of Japanese fiction", Shiga Naoya's delicate writing is responsible for many classic works of literature and literary images. In many of his works, Shiga reinvents the traditional dichotomy of the female figure, expressing his compassion for women while also giving them a degree of self-awareness that is characteristic of the times. Shiga's relentless efforts to portray his characters and his distinctly feminine consciousness not only demonstrate his strength in criticizing feudal rituals, but also underline his humanitarianism. However, there is still a lingering sense of masculinity in Shiga's mind, which makes his thoughts both rebellious and conservative, and his expression of individuality in the face of a thousand years of psychological and cultural heritage, as well as the confusion and discomfort caused by the limitations of his own male perspective in the tide of the times, which also reflects the necessity and difficulty of women's liberation.

Men's social role is outside the home, active and aggressive, so men are "high, right and out"; women are passive, accepting and fit to stay at home, so women are "low, left and in", a silent group outside society. The feminist critics argue that the "double-edged" group of women is the most important one. Feminist critics see "intersexuality" as the perfect ideal personality, reflecting women's desire for a

harmonious relationship between the sexes in their quest for freedom and individual liberation. While men and women are born equal, traditional patriarchy prevents men and women from living in harmony, intersexuality helps to break the rigid gender dichotomy. Women should learn to be brave and strong in the face of adversity, while men do not need to be strong and brave all the time, but should learn to release their repressed emotions appropriately. The dichotomy places everything in a hierarchical relationship and gives it a centre. In gender relations, the male takes the centre and relegates the female to the opposing other. Breaking down the dichotomy between the sexes and deconstructing the male-centric system has become one of the focuses of the contemporary feminist movement.

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