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**Miranda and Revati: A Comparative Study of Feminine Virtue and Agency
in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Senapati's *Chha Mana Atha Guntha***

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Abstract

This paper conducts a comparative analysis of Miranda in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) and Revati in Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* (1897-1899), exploring their representations as female characters within patriarchal frameworks. Despite their distinct cultural and historical contexts—Elizabethan England and colonial India—both characters embody feminine virtue and grapple with limited agency under male-dominated systems. Through a feminist lens, this study examines how Shakespeare romanticizes Miranda's passivity as an ideal of chastity and obedience, while Senapati critiques Revati's silence to expose the cruelties of feudal and colonial oppression. By analyzing their roles, thematic parallels, and narrative functions, this paper argues that both texts reflect and challenge patriarchal norms, offering nuanced critiques of gender dynamics in their respective societies. The study employs feminist literary theory and postcolonial perspectives to highlight the interplay of gender, power, and cultural context, contributing to cross-cultural literary scholarship.

Keywords: Miranda, Revati, *The Tempest*, *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, *feminine virtue*, agency, patriarchy, feminist literary theory, postcolonialism, comparative literature.

1. Introduction

William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) and Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* (1897-1899) are seminal works from distinct literary traditions—Elizabethan drama and colonial Indian realism. Despite their temporal and cultural disparities, both texts feature female characters, Miranda and Revati, whose narratives are shaped by patriarchal structures. Miranda, the innocent daughter of Prospero, embodies idealized feminine virtues in a fantastical island setting, while Revati, a marginalized peasant woman, represents the silenced victim of feudal exploitation in rural Odisha. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of these characters, examining how their portrayals reflect and critique gender norms within their respective socio-cultural contexts.

The study addresses three key questions: How do Miranda and Revati embody feminine virtue and agency (or lack thereof)? How do their narratives reflect the patriarchal constraints of their

societies? And how do Shakespeare and Senapati use these characters to critique or reinforce gender dynamics? By employing feminist literary theory, as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir, and postcolonial perspectives, drawing on GayatriSpivak, this paper argues that both characters, though constrained by patriarchy, serve as vehicles for their authors' critiques of gendered power structures (Beauvoir 428; Spivak 271). The analysis is structured as follows: Section 2 provides historical and literary contexts; Section 3 analyzes Miranda and Revati's characterizations; Section 4 explores thematic parallels and divergences; and Section 5 discusses the authors' critiques of patriarchy, concluding with implications for cross-cultural literary studies.

2. Historical and Literary Contexts

2.1 *The Tempest* and Elizabethan England

Written in 1611, *The Tempest* is one of Shakespeare's late romances, blending comedy, tragedy, and fantasy. Set on a remote island, the play reflects Elizabethan anxieties about colonialism, power, and gender. During the early 17th century, England was expanding its colonial ambitions, and gender roles were rigidly defined by patriarchal norms. Women were expected to embody virtues such as chastity, obedience, and domesticity, as outlined in conduct manuals like Juan Luis Vives' *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (Vives 45). Miranda, as Prospero's daughter, operates within this framework, her character shaped by Renaissance ideals of femininity (Shakespeare 12).

The play's fantastical setting allows Shakespeare to explore utopian possibilities while reinforcing social hierarchies. Miranda's role as a chaste, obedient daughter aligns with Elizabethan expectations, yet her interactions with Ferdinand and Caliban hint at tensions between agency and control. Shakespeare's use of dramatic conventions, such as soliloquies and staged spectacles, amplifies Miranda's symbolic role as a paragon of virtue, but her limited dialogue raises questions about her autonomy (Thompson 403).

2.2 *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* and Colonial India

Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, serialized between 1897 and 1899, is a landmark of Indian realist fiction, written in Odia during British colonial rule. Set in rural Odisha, the novel critiques the zamindari system and colonial exploitation through a satirical lens. Revati, the wife of the peasant Bhagia, is a minor but pivotal character whose suffering underscores the novel's social commentary (Senapati 112). In 19th-century Odisha, women, particularly from lower castes and classes, faced intersecting oppressions of gender, caste, and economic exploitation. The colonial administration's land revenue policies exacerbated rural poverty, while patriarchal norms confined women to subordinate roles (Bhabha 102).

Senapati's realist narrative, rooted in the vernacular tradition, contrasts with Shakespeare's romanticism. *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* uses irony and detailed social observation to expose the cruelties of feudal and colonial systems. Revati's silence and marginality reflect the lived realities of rural Indian women, whose voices were suppressed by both indigenous patriarchy and colonial economic structures (Spivak 280).

2.3 Comparative Framework

Despite their differences, both texts engage with patriarchal power structures, using female characters to explore themes of control, commodification, and resistance. A feminist literary approach, drawing on Beauvoir's concept of the "eternal feminine," illuminates how Miranda and Revati are constructed as "Other" within their narratives (Beauvoir 428). Additionally, a postcolonial lens, informed by Homi K. Bhabha and Spivak, highlights how Revati's marginality intersects with colonial oppression, contrasting with Miranda's privileged yet constrained position (Bhabha 102; Spivak 271). This dual framework enables a nuanced comparison of the characters' roles and their authors' critiques.

3. Character Analysis: Miranda and Revati

3.1 Miranda: The Idealized Virgin

Miranda, the sole female character in *The Tempest*, is defined by her innocence, chastity, and obedience. As Prospero's daughter, her role is tightly controlled: she is a pawn in her father's political machinations, destined to marry Ferdinand to restore Prospero's ducal status. Her dialogue, comprising less than 10% of the play's lines, underscores her limited agency. For instance, her first significant speech expresses empathy but is quickly redirected by Prospero's commands:

O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer! A brave vessel,
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
Dashed all to pieces. (Shakespeare 1.2.5-8)

Miranda's characterization reflects Elizabethan ideals of feminine virtue. Her chastity is central to her value, as seen in Prospero's insistence on her purity before marriage: "Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition / Worthily purchased, take my daughter" (Shakespeare 4.1.14-15). However, her interactions with Ferdinand reveal glimpses of agency. Her declaration, "I am your wife, if you will marry me" (Shakespeare 3.1.83), suggests a bold assertion of desire, though framed within patriarchal expectations of marriage. Conversely, her encounter with Caliban, whom she pities yet fears, reinforces her role as a symbol of civility against the "savage" Other, aligning with colonial discourses of the time (Thompson 405).

3.2 Revati: The Silenced Victim

Revati, in *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, embodies the silenced suffering of rural Indian women. As Bhagia's wife, she is a minor character whose presence amplifies the novel's critique of the zamindari system. Revati has almost no dialogue, her silence symbolizing the erasure of lower-class women's voices (Senapati 112). Her suffering is tied to the loss of the family's land, orchestrated by the manipulative zamindar Ramachandra Mangaraj. When Bhagia is imprisoned, Revati's descent into poverty and eventual death highlight the brutal consequences of feudal exploitation:

Revati, left alone, withered away like a plant without water, her life extinguished by the weight of loss and neglect. (Senapati 115)

Miranda, Revati lacks any romanticized portrayal. Her commodification is literal: she is part of the household "assets" destroyed by Mangaraj's greed. Senapati's realist style avoids idealizing her, instead using her marginality to critique the intersecting oppressions of gender, class, and caste. Her silence, as Spivak argues, positions her as a subaltern figure, denied agency by both narrative and societal structures (Spivak 280).

3.3 Comparative Insights

Both Miranda and Revati are defined by their relationships to male figures—Prospero and Ferdinand for Miranda, Bhagia and Mangaraj for Revati. However, their portrayals diverge in tone and purpose. Miranda's passivity is romanticized, aligning with Shakespeare's idealized vision of femininity, while Revati's silence is a deliberate critique of systemic oppression (Thompson 403; Senapati 112). Where Miranda's limited agency operates within a privileged context, Revati's complete lack of agency reflects her marginalized status. These differences underscore the authors' distinct approaches to gender within their cultural milieus.

4. Thematic Parallels and Divergences

4.1 Feminine Virtue and Patriarchal Control

Both texts present feminine virtue as a central theme, though interpreted differently. In *The Tempest*, Miranda's chastity and obedience are virtues that enhance her value in the marriage market, reinforcing patriarchal control. Prospero's manipulation of her marriage to Ferdinand exemplifies what Beauvoir calls the "eternal feminine," where women are defined by male desires (Beauvoir 428). Similarly, Revati's virtue is tied to her role as a dutiful wife, but her lack of agency is not celebrated. Instead, Senapati uses her suffering to expose the dehumanizing effects of patriarchy and economic exploitation: "Revati's life was but a shadow, cast by the men who controlled her world" (Senapati 112).

4.2 Agency and Resistance

Miranda and Revati exhibit limited agency, but their responses to patriarchal constraints differ. Miranda's moments of agency, such as her proposal to Ferdinand, are framed within acceptable boundaries, suggesting a negotiated compliance with patriarchy: "I am your wife, if you will marry me" (Shakespeare 3.1.83). Revati, however, has no such opportunities. Her silence is not a choice but a condition imposed by her socio-economic status (Senapati 115). While Miranda's narrative arc ends in marriage and restoration, Revati's ends in tragedy, highlighting the absence of redemptive possibilities for subaltern women (Spivak 280).

4.3 Commodification and Power

Both characters are commodified within their narratives. Miranda is a bargaining chip in Prospero's political strategy, her marriage securing his return to Milan (Shakespeare 4.1.14–24). Revati is indirectly commodified through the land her family loses, her worth tied to the household's economic viability (Senapati 112). However, Shakespeare's romantic lens casts Miranda's commodification as a necessary step toward harmony, while Senapati's realism portrays Revati's commodification as a tragic outcome of greed and oppression (Thompson 405).

4.4 Cultural and Historical Divergences

The texts' cultural contexts shape their portrayals of gender. *The Tempest* reflects Renaissance ideals of order and harmony, with Miranda's role reinforcing social hierarchies (Shakespeare 12). In contrast, *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* critiques the colonial and feudal systems that exacerbate gender and class inequalities (Bhabha 102). Senapati's focus on realism aligns with postcolonial critiques of subaltern marginalization, while Shakespeare's romanticism engages with colonial fantasies but does not challenge them overtly (Spivak 271).

5. Critiquing Patriarchy: Shakespeare and Senapati

5.1 Shakespeare's Ambivalent Critique

Shakespeare's portrayal of Miranda is ambivalent. On one hand, her limited dialogue and controlled role reinforce patriarchal norms, aligning with Elizabethan expectations (Vives 45). On the other, her empathy for Caliban and bold address to Ferdinand suggest a subversive potential: "I am your wife, if you will marry me" (Shakespeare 3.1.83). Ann Thompson argues that Shakespeare subtly critiques gender roles by highlighting Miranda's constraints within Prospero's authoritarian framework (Thompson 403). However, the play's resolution—Miranda's marriage and Prospero's restoration—ultimately upholds patriarchal and colonial order, limiting the scope of its critique: "O brave new world / That has such people in't!" (Shakespeare 5.1.183–84).

5.2 Senapati's Radical Critique

Senapati's portrayal of Revati is unequivocally critical. Her silence and suffering serve as a powerful indictment of patriarchal and colonial systems. By denying Revati a voice, Senapati

underscores the subaltern's erasure, aligning with Spivak's concept of the "subaltern who cannot speak" (Spivak 280). The novel's satirical tone and realist style amplify this critique, exposing the zamindari system's role in perpetuating gender and class oppression: "Revati's death was not just her own, but the death of countless women crushed by the same yoke" (Senapati 115). Revati's tragic fate serves as a call to action, urging readers to confront systemic injustices.

5.3 Cross-Cultural Implications

Comparing Miranda and Revati reveals how literary texts can both reflect and challenge patriarchal norms across cultures. Shakespeare's romanticized portrayal of Miranda suggests a negotiation with patriarchy, tempered by the need to maintain social order (Thompson 405). Senapati's stark realism, conversely, demands a reevaluation of gender and class hierarchies (Bhabha 102). Together, these texts highlight the universality of patriarchal control while underscoring the importance of cultural context in shaping literary critiques.

6. Conclusion

This comparative analysis of Miranda and Revati illuminates the complex interplay of feminine virtue, agency, and patriarchal control in *The Tempest* and *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*. While Miranda's romanticized passivity reflects Elizabethan ideals, Revati's silence critiques the brutal realities of colonial and feudal oppression (Shakespeare 12; Senapati 112). Through feminist and postcolonial lenses, this study reveals how Shakespeare and Senapati use their female characters to navigate and challenge gender norms (Beauvoir 428; Spivak 271). The findings contribute to cross-cultural literary scholarship, highlighting the enduring relevance of these texts in understanding gender dynamics. Future research could explore additional female characters from diverse literary traditions to further enrich comparative studies of gender and power.

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