

Society Versus the Desires of Women in Madame Bovary and Grihadaha: The Scandalous Woman Conundrum

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Abstract

This research paper attempts a comparative study between Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya's novel *Grihadaha* and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The exploration involves a comparative analysis of the dreams and desires of the female protagonists in relation to the social and cultural norms of the times in which the novels are set with an intention to evaluate how the respective societies treat these women. Initially, both texts were closely read and analyzed separately for better understanding. Then the texts were read comparatively to identify the similarities and the differences. The study led to the discovery that be it the conservative Bengali society or the comparatively lenient French society, the pursuit, and fulfillment of the dreams and desires of women are always restricted in favor of patriarchy. Men enjoy privileges that are not offered to women and societies are often inherently hypocritical and unjustifiable.

1. INTRODUCTION

"But how could she give voice to an elusive malaise, that melts like a cloud, that swirls like the wind? She didn't have the words, the opportunity, the courage." (Flaubert, 1992, p. 31)

Desires, especially physical desires, of women have always been regarded as taboo by society. Desires, which are equivalent to intense yearning for possessing or doing something as well as wish for sexual involvement with someone according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (p. 411), are intimate attributes of human beings/bodies and should be treated as such as long as they're consensual. In reality, however, society denies women power and control over their own desires and sexuality. Traditionally men are appointed to introduce the sexual, both as love and as desire, and fulfill their desires within the demarcations of marriage (Alghamdi, 2021). Women are expected to find satisfaction and fulfillment in being 'a good wife' and 'a devoted mother' and any slightest digression from these roles results in scrutiny, judgment, and punishment, i.e., Scandal.

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What makes a woman scandalous? At the very base, the pursuit and fulfillment of her desires against all odds tends to make a woman scandalous in front of her society. Are the parameters that allow such terminology neutral or biased? Does the term ‘scandalous’ apply only to women? Is it a gendered expression? The answers to all these questions can be traced back to society’s double standard treatment of women. A woman is treated as scandalous when she defies social and cultural norms, gender roles, of the society she belongs to. But her male counterpart is not rebuked for the same actions.

Gustave Flaubert’s novel *Madame Bovary* (1857) and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay’s novel *Grihadaha* (1920) revolve around two middle class married women Emma and Achala who cannot fit into preselected roles for gentlemen’s wives and suffer from loneliness and lack of satisfaction in the institution of marriage due to their husbands’ ignorance of their romantic and sexual desires. When these women try to find comfort elsewhere, one willingly and one against her wishes, their respective societies make no delay in condemning them. While the conservative Bengali society goes all in rebuking and rejecting Achala in the form of father figures of the novel, the comparatively lenient French society only implies ‘fall from grace’ for Emma, and yet she is never treated or sympathized the same by the people around her. Like Anna Karenina (Tolstoy, 1978), Emma’s absolution can only be found in death and Achala is forced to live an uncertain life worse than death.

This paper aims to point out that, in both cases, only the women are punished for extra-marital affairs and men who were equally responsible in such acts are given easy ways out of scrutiny from both societies. Women are marginalized and demoted to a compulsory “inferior” position. Their individual identities and voices are hardly recognized by the patriarchal societies around the world (Sarhan, 2021, p.70). This paper utilizes Emma and Achala’s stories to critique the power of patriarchy and cultural prejudices that treat women as lesser beings and deny women the same rights, actions, and pleasures that men get- hence in consensual affairs, women become ‘scandalous’ while men are often praised for their philandering.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Traditionally men are given superiority over women on the basis of presumptuous binaries like masculine/feminine, male/female, strength/softness, provider/provided for, rational/emotional, dominator/dominated, positive/negative, etc. The emergence of feminist literary theories, since the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1794, has paved the way for counter-narratives that advocate equality and exploration of the silenced voices, desires, and sexuality of women. This chapter delves into the works of some feminist theorists and writers whose contributions have enriched this paper.

Despite abundant depictions of unrestrained male sexual desires, lust, seduction, rape, incest which lead to the birth of demi-gods and male heroes, Roman and Greek mythologies portray unrestrained female desires as destructive trouble-making that brings the downfall of men (Rowland). Greek and Roman myths exhibit double standards for men and women. While male gods regularly perused mortal women often without consent through seduction and rape, “it was altogether shameful for a goddess to consort with a mortal man” (Powell, 2015, p. 210). The Greek goddess of desire and sexuality Aphrodite’s (Venus in Roman mythology) control over her body, her adherence to fulfilling her bodily pleasures and her ability to encourage desire in the opposite sex are depicted as deceitful, manipulative, and degrading character traits (Meehan, 2017).

Hindu mythology goes further in dominating and repressing women’s desires and sexuality within the conservative boundaries of marriage, where a woman’s desires are limited to satisfying the husband’s desire for female flesh and finding fulfillment of existence in reproduction and motherhood. The initiation and affirmation of a woman’s desire for a man is

rebuked and condemned by Hindu mythology through Surpanakha's desire for Rama in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. Unlike the handsome ideal human avatar of 'male' god Vishnu, the woman Surpanakha is depicted as an ugly, extremely wicked monster with a giant stomach, malformed eyes, and horrible voice (Debroy, 2017, p. 39). She is depicted not as a love-sick woman desiring affection but as a fierce demon who, motivated by sexual desires, is "intoxicated with the smell of human flesh". While the depiction of "malevolent identity for Surpanakha is a patriarchal strategy to justify her social rejection" (De), the mutilation of Surpanakha's nose becomes a metaphor for the punishments awaiting women who succumb to their desires and sexual whims.

The early Christian *Book of Genesis* provides ambiguous information as some practitioners believed desire for sexual intercourse, conception, labor, childbirth are forms of corruption destined to mankind as punishments for the original sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden which contradicts Genesis' "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). In the New Testament, Paul the Apostle opined in the *1 Corinthians* that satisfaction of women's sexual desires should only be pursued in the context of marriage while also valuing female virginity over gratification. He also forbids adultery and preaches self-control. In the 13th century, the catholic church acknowledged marriage as an act of love towards and any dereliction of the sacred bond of marriage such as infidelity was considered an act of sin not only against the partner but against god himself and there was no divorce.

Islam encourages marriage and pleasure in sexual activities (perversive acts are prohibited and masturbation is discouraged) between husband and wife. According to a hadith, husbands are advised to fulfill wives' sexual desires and not leave the bed until women are satisfied. Additionally, Islam prohibits sexual intercourse with women during the menstruation period. Islam also provides women with the right of the dissolution of marriage- commonly known as Khula, i.e., divorce for the first time in the history of mankind even though it is advised not to go through a divorce (talaq) for both men and women. However, pre-marital sex, free mixing with the opposite sex, and adultery are prohibited in Islam. Anglo-Saxon society treated sexual desires as demonic and sinful, hence, denies women sexual gratification. Women were treated as peace-weavers, i.e., means of transactions between enemy clans through marriage in the hope of ending conflicts. Therefore, the so-called husbands and wives could hardly find gratification and sexual encounters would turn into marital rapes devoid of pleasure for women.

During the Elizabethan, Age of Enlightenment, and Victorian periods, women have been considered their husband's property and were dependent on men socially, economically, and sexually. In the Victorian era, women belonged to the domestic sphere while men reigned in the public sphere. Marriage robbed women of the right of consent during sexual intercourse with their husband, they had no ownership of their own bodies and bodily desires due to objectification of women. Women were even denied the right to divorce on the grounds of husbands' infidelity.

Beauvoir (1997) states in the introduction to *The Second Sex* that despite being born as "free and autonomous beings", women are denied the status of the Self by Men. She states, "The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego) – who always regards the self as the essential – and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential" (p. 29). Like any other living being, women too desire to assert control of their body and life which goes against the self-satisfying interests of patriarchal society. She also opines that by attaining her desires, a woman can fully be liberated and form a meaningful relationship with the opposite sex as she sees fit. As long as she is denied her 'own element', is defined by socially constructed "myths", and is seen as the "Other" of the masculine "self", she will continue to nurture anguish due to the loss of her own identity (p. 292).

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Irigaray (1985) states in her essay “The Sex Which Is Not One” after criticizing the phallogocentric theories regarding female sexuality dismisses Freud “Indeed, woman’s pleasure does not have to choose between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity”. While males have only one sexual organ, i.e., the penis, a woman’s sexual pleasure is not limited to one organ and can be felt everywhere in her body.

In “Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire”, Judith Butler points out that often an individual’s desire is influenced by the internalization of enforced sexual and gender orientations of the society. For her, both sex and gender are performative and cannot provide a complete identity. Only through the assertion of the desires of ‘the body’, be it heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality, can a woman be liberated. She believes every living being deserves the right to own its ‘bodily desires’ without interference from any outward forces, be it social or cultural ideologies.

To sum up, this paper argues that desires and sexuality are properties of individual bodies and, therefore, are gender independent and should be treated as basic human rights. Socio-cultural ideologies have robbed women of their rights to voice their desires and sexuality in language for a long time. Moreover, the double standard treatments have only extended their suppression at the hands of patriarchy and society.

3. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study is primarily inspired by feminist and psychoanalytic feminist literary theories to formulate arguments based on a close reading of the texts. The ground-work involved five main stages. The preliminary study of selected texts revealed similitudes in the thwarted conditions and vulnerability of women in a male-dominated society. The following step was to review literature on comparative studies, feminist and psychoanalytic feminist theories on the novels. The third step involved close readings of both texts to analyze the desires (psyches) of female protagonists in contrast to their respective societies and how the societies viewed these women in their particular timeframe. The fourth step was the juxtaposition of the findings of the individual analyses of these novels in order to expose the hypocrisy and duplicity of societies as they clearly deny women’s desires and wishes that they willingly grant men, regardless of time and place. Finally, the fifth step involved investigating the ‘scandalous woman’ enigma based on the juxtaposed finding of this study to determine whether it is undue or not to put these women in such a spectacle given the respective circumstances they were in.

4. DISCUSSION

A man, at least, is free; he can explore each passion and every kingdom, conquer obstacles, feast upon the most exotic pleasures. But a woman is continually thwarted. ... Her will, like the veil strung to her bonnet, flutters in every breeze; always there is the desire urging, always the convention restraining. (Flaubert, 1992, 70)

These words of Emma Bovary hit the bull’s eye of the conditions of women in male-dominated societies all around the world. Despite belonging to two different societies in two different time frames along with carrying distinguished personalities, both Emma and Achala became victims of the double standard treatments of their respective societies.

4.1 Society and the Conscious Desires of Women

Both Achala and Emma are seen making conscious desires in the novels keeping in mind the obligations set by their respective societies. For example, Emma’s hasty decision to marry Charles derives not only from her desire to escape from the monotonous farming life but also from the societal pressure to get married at an early age. Achala’s insistence on marrying

Mahim is rooted in her desire to not lose her self-respect and love for the man considering that if she had chosen Suresh as her husband, she would have betrayed Mahim solely based on his financial status (পৃ. ২৭). However, in both cases, the ages of the men they married did not matter; neither did those men experience any pressure for marriage.

Emma's material desires include reveries of leading a luxurious life much like the heroines of her favorite novels- she wished for a 'manly' husband, dreams of spending vacations in Scotland or enjoying scenic beauties from "the balcony of a Swiss chalet". She "yearned" to travel. She wished to live in cities, in Paris. She desired that Charles would grow ambitious to do better and provide a better life for Emma. That is why when the prospect of performing surgery on Hippolyte that can make Charles famous and successful arrives, Emma's treatment of her husband changes:

"... Charles went home, where Emma, in great anxiety, was waiting for him at the door. She flung her arms round his neck ...The evening was delightful, full of talk, full of dreams to share" (Flaubert, 1992, p. 143).

The extract reveals that Emma could be happy with Charles if he had at least one redeeming quality. Her greatest misery in life was to be married to a man "who understood nothing, who felt nothing" and there was no way to retract her mistake. Moreover, Emma desires to have and use things/objects that bourgeois women enjoy and hates that the middle-class income of her husband cannot fund such luxuries. She desires a husband who could finance all her expenditures. However, while societies worldwide have set qualities of "ideal wives", men are put under no obligation to become "ideal husbands". Hence, Charles never knows about his wife's frustrations with him because he was not taught that women could have any.

There's a striking contrast between Achala and Emma here that the former's desires do not involve material luxuries even though the poverty-sickened atmosphere of her husband's house becomes the key element that destroys her sense of "marital bliss, happiness, and dreams of a happy future with Mahim" (44). In fact, it is Achala who wholeheartedly offers to sell her pieces of jewelry (স্বীধন) for Mahim- first, when Mahim's house burns down to the ground, and the second time when he is advised to change environment due to health issues. Achala, in her ignorance, also had desired to find the 'poetic image of village life' that she had read in books. She also desired to have Mahim only to herself and more than anything, wanted Mahim to be vocal about his love for his newly married wife. The moment when Mahim boldly defends her honor in front of the villagers blame that the catastrophe was brought on by marrying a Brahma girl, all of her dissatisfactions in married life, her wish to leave Mahim, vanishes like Camphor. As the narrative represents:

অচলা সমস্ত শুনিতো পাইয়াছিল; ... মহিম কাছে আসিয়া দাঁড়াইতে চোখে আবার জল আসিয়া পরিল। সে হঠাৎ ঝুকিয়া পড়িয়া তাহার পায়ের ধুলি মাথায় লইতেই মহিম বিস্মিত ও ব্যস্ত হইয়া উঠিল। হয়ত সে স্বামীর হাত দুটো ধরিয়া কাছে টানিয়া বসাইত, হয়ত আরও কিছু ছেলেমানুষি করিয়া ফেলিত; কিন্তু কি করিত, তা সে তাহার অন্তর্যামীই জানিতেন; কিন্তু সকাল হইয়া গিয়াছে, চারিদিকে কৌতূহলী লোক; অচলা আপনাকে সংযত করিয়া লইল। (গুপ্ত, ২০১১, পৃ. ৭১)

This extract reveals Achala's passionate desire for her husband, Mahim. The tragedy of her life could have been avoided at this particular moment. The misunderstandings between the couple

could be ended if only Achala could act on her desires. But the thought “লোকে কি বলবে” (what the society would think), the social conditioning that women should control their emotions and desires, even the married woman cannot be candid with her own husband in the public sphere is what stretches the communication gap between the couple which ultimately destroys their marriage.

Notably, Emma too had sold her father’s wedding gift to her in one of her rendezvous with Leon, but definitely, that is a completely different context. While Emma feels more surface-level basic desires, Achala’s desires are more psychological. While Emma seeks the satisfaction of impulses in material objects, Achala desires meaningful connections and has no desire for material gains. Sadly, in both cases, the husbands lack understanding of the real problems despite deeply loving their wives due to the double standards of social conditioning.

4.2 Society and the Unconscious Desires of Women

To begin with *Grihadaha*’s Achala, she develops distinguished feelings for both Mahim and Suresh due to their different personalities but represses her attraction towards Suresh. It is Mahim whom she actually desires but fails to realize the depth of her desires, especially after marriage due to Mahim’s impassible, passionless attitude and inability to profess love. Achala’s feeling of “not loving” Mahim is her defense mechanism to repress her burning jealousy of Mrinal who Achala thinks also loves Mahim. Her conscious wish to return to her father’s house with Suresh was never what she desired, definitely was no green signal for Suresh, and her mental state at that time can only be expressed by the Bengali word “অভিমান” (a mixture of intense love, passion, jealousy and anger) towards her husband.

If Achala loves her husband, then questions arise why does she not revolt when Suresh abducts her or why does she succumb to the situation? The answer is provided in Achala’s reflection:

নিরবরুদ্ধ সমাজের অবাধ স্বাধীনতায় চোখ-কান খোলা রাখিয়াই সে বড় হইয়াছে। নিজের জীবনটাকে সে নিজে বাছিয়া গ্রহন করিয়াছে, এইছিলো তার গর্ব, কিন্তু পরীক্ষার একান্ত দুঃসময়ে এ-সকল তাহার কোন কাজে লাগিলো না। তাহার বিপদ আসিলো অত্যন্ত সঙ্গোপনে বন্ধুর বেশে; সে আসিলো জ্যাঠামশাইয়ের স্নেহ ও শ্রদ্ধার ছদ্মরূপ ধরিয়া এই একান্ত শুভাকাঙ্ক্ষী স্নেহশীল বৃদ্ধের পুনঃ পুনঃ আতিশয্যে যে দুর্যোগের রাতে সে সুরেশের শয্যায় গিয়া আত্মহত্যা করিয়া বসিল, সেদিন একমাত্র যে তাহাকে রক্ষা করতে পারিত, সে তাহার অত্যাচার্য সতীধর্ম। ... কিন্তু সেদিন তাহার বাহিরের খেলসটাই বড় হইয়া তাহার ধর্মকে পরাভূত করিয়া দিল। তাহাদের আজন্ম শিক্ষা ও সংস্কার ভিতরটাকে তুচ্ছ করিয়া, কারাগার ভাবিয়া বাহিরের জগৎটাকেই চিরদিন সকলের উপর স্থান দিয়াছে; যে ধর্ম গুহাশায়ী, সেই অন্তরের অব্যক্ত ধর্ম কোনদিন তাহার কাছে সজীব হয়ে উঠতে পারে নাই। (গুপ্ত, ২০১১, পৃ ১৪৬)

Achala’s submission to Suresh, therefore, is her acceptance of the defeat of her desires and keeping up appearances because that’s what the social and cultural ideologies had taught her. She had no choice left, nowhere to go. It cannot be denied that she had felt attractions for Suresh from time to time. But her feelings for Suresh cannot be called desires and can be traced back to two different phases – before and after her abduction by Suresh. Her feelings towards Suresh before abduction is rooted in a complicated blend of physical attraction, empathy, and friendship due to Suresh’s passionate personality and rich but generous social status. Then again, the attraction is rooted more in Suresh’s passionate, all-consuming, burning desires and expressions of them in words (which no woman can ignore) for Achala than in Suresh himself. After the abduction, she also loathed Suresh but could not completely hate him due to Suresh’s self-sacrificing nature towards his poor patients. Then again, Achala’s request to Suresh to take her somewhere after being forced to share his bed to continue their live-in arrangement where no Bengali people would know them is the suppression of her fears of the loneliness and scrutiny of society that will befall her if she loses Suresh’s protection. Therefore, she submits

to Suresh's kiss even if it feels equally insulting and unbearable to her as before and tries to persuade Suresh to live with her by showing affection by holding his hand.

Emma's unconscious desires include her loving the idea of love, the idea of being in love more than loving her lovers, and loving the idea of motherhood more than her child. She consumes the concepts more than the reality which is proved by her boredom in her relationships with both the lovers. Emma too exhibits repression when she tries to fall in love with her husband Charles, refuses to profess love, and get involved with Leon despite falling in love as the extract reveals:

But she was filled with lust, with rage, with hatred. That elegantly pleated dress concealed a heart in turmoil, and those lips so chaste told nothing of her torment. She was in love with Leon, ... Emma trembled at the sound of his footsteps; and in She was in love with Leon; ... Emma trembled at the sound of his footsteps; and, in his presence, the emotion subsided ... (Flaubert, 1992, p. 85)

Emma's suppression of desires is more painful as it involves both physical and mental afflictions. Two nervous breakdowns occur due to suppression of her disgust in living a monotonous married life and the heartbreak from Rodolphe's betrayal. Emma's re-embrace of Christian faith and finding momentary "rest in Christian humility" is also the suppression of her desires for Rodolphe. However, the most prominent example of suppression is her overwhelming clinginess for showing affection to Rodolphe or Leon which spurs from her suppression of the hatred towards her husband as the novel reveals "This tenderness was, indeed, steadily nourished by the disgust she felt for her husband" (p. 151).

To sum up, it can be said that age-old cultural conditions have designed such situations for women where they fail to find words to voice their innate wishes or desires. Women are shackled by the identity of a mother, sister, daughter, or wife to the men and are denied the "essentiality" of their own self. Her desires are expected to revolve around the interests of men. That is precisely why Emma and Achala are dissatisfied in their conjugal lives, and their husbands' indifferences towards women are no major sin on the men's part while the women's seeming betrayals are seen as the cause of the downfalls of these women.

This study attempts to show that only women are encouraged to repress or suppress their desires. Acting on desires or fulfillments of impulses are privileges not available to women. Her willing participation in adultery which can be taken as the assertion of the desires of Emma, apart from momentary distraction, cannot provide her satisfaction or fulfillment in the long run, just as Achala's unwilling participation torments her. None of the men in their lives tries to understand the women's desires – these men only love the women just as a child loves and uses his lifeless toys in whatever ways he wants and for how long he wants. The reason for this objectification of women and her pre-destined dissatisfaction in life is caused by social and cultural conditioning.

Then again, both novels depict women who do not have any career prospects. Therefore, they are bound to depend on men- be it a father, husband, lover, or even an abductor in Achala's case. This inferior social and financial status of women contributes to their victimization at the hand of patriarchy as both Emma and Achala's desires - regardless of their nature - are objectified by the desires of men in their life.

Apart from that, even at the hands of the most sympathetic male writers, women's desires are condemned to unfulfillment. That is precisely why Flaubert's Emma cannot rise to emancipation, cannot divorce Charles to live a life free from dissatisfaction, and seeks escape in suicide. Again, Suresh's desires for Achala, as it overpowers Achala's desires for starting a new life with Mahim, force her to submit to an undesirable and unbearable live-in arrangement.

The conservative Bengali writer, Chattopadhyay also cannot help but idolize Mrinal over Achala on the basis of the former's adherence to her wifeness ("সতীত্ব") and despite having impressive personality, Achala's life is thwarted in unfulfillment. What's more is that Suresh is given some sort of forgiveness as Mahim does his "Mukhagni" (giving fire to Suresh's dead body) and accepts the responsibility to manage Suresh's properties. If it were not for the coincidental arrival of Mrinal and Achala's father, Achala would have been all alone in an unknown land- left at the mercy of her fate as Mahim simply leaves her to catch a train. Mahim cannot stand his own wife, cannot forgive her apparent discretion even though Suresh is forgiven.

4.3 To Be or Not to Be a Scandalous Woman

Any incident of adultery has always been scandalous whether in literature or real life. But what complicates matters is the attitude of society towards people who commit it. It takes two equally responsible individuals to commit adultery. However, it is always the women who are condemned as "scandalous" or "compromised" or "heinous". If adultery is a "repugnant" crime, then why is it only the women who are criticized vehemently? If men are spared for committing such a crime, why are women always punished severely by societies? In a society where women were denied the rights of divorce, what were these women supposed to do if they married the wrong husbands?

In both *Grihadaha* and *Madame Bovary*, both Achala and Emma, are treated as 'scandalous' even though only Achala is called names by Ram Babu- the clear spokesman of patriarchal society in the novel. Adultery was committed by both these women but close readings of the novels reveal that both women did not take the first initiations. If Rodolphe did not seduce Emma with his eloquent word-play, despite having repressed desires, she might not get involved in adultery as she didn't act on her desires with Leon earlier. Achala's abduction, and her subsequent feeling of committing "suicide on Suresh's bed" are pieces of evidence of her unwilling participation in the act of adultery. Therefore, how much is it justified to condemn these women for their supposed scandalous acts?

The treatments of the society around these women, including the tax collector's offer of prostituting Emma for the money she owned to Lheureux or Ram Babu's terming Achala as "কুলটা" expose the unforgiving attitudes. However, the fact that both Rodolphe and Leon get away without any disturbance in their so-called respectable life and the fact that Mahim forgives Suresh and accepts his request of watching over Suresh's properties for the sake of helping the poor while he had previously refused to accept his own wife's offer of selling jewelry expose the hypocrisy and double standards of treatments towards women. Mahim's inability to forgive Achala while he forgives Suresh is a classic example of the male-ego that can never bestow equality to women.

Hence, one cannot help but ask- do Achala and Emma deserve to be looked down at as scandalous women? Do they deserve the end that the novels provided to these characters? Are Suresh, Leon, or Rodolphe treated as scandalous men? The answers to these burning questions remain as vague as ever and are up for further investigations.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper manifests that despite belonging to two different societies with distinguished values, lifestyles, and realities, Emma and Achala's experiences reveal that women, universally, are provided with fewer opportunities to take control of their lives. Internalization of cultural conditionings and sexual orientations only adds to the marginalization of women in an unsympathetic world that legalizes satisfaction and fulfillment of desires, dreams, wishes, ambitions, passions, adventures, etc. as properties of men only. Women's awareness of their

desires is important for their personal, political, and economic empowerment. Women can no longer be what or how men want them to be.

As individual living, breathing beings; women deserve to follow and fulfill their desires- they deserve to be given the opportunities to satiate their desires. Women's awareness of their desires and sexuality is important for personal, political, and economic empowerment. Time has arrived to retract the double standard treatments of society. If a man is not blamed for seducing or kidnapping a married woman, then giving in to temptations should not be blamed either. If there is no scandalous man, there should not be any scandalous woman either.

This comparative study is intended to be a gateway for further research works on the gender dynamics, Marxist feminist, historicist or post-structuralist aspects within the framework of comparative studies or cultural studies on these masterpieces *Grihadaha* and *Madame Bovary*. The researchers expect that the present research will contribute to previous studies on these novels and open new doors for comparative studies in Bengali literature.

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