

Feminism: Its Concept and Emergence

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Abstract - The term 'Feminism' is referred to a strong consciousness of identity as a woman and awareness in feminine struggles. Feminism came into existence later in 1960's and has become an evolving socio-political movement. It aims at accepting the power structures in the society, male dominance, social practices and social institutions, which are active in conveying a marginalized position to women. Feminist theory also devises the strategies to transform the social structures, which can help in the liberation. The powerful wave in the 1960s and 1970s facilitated to theories of a woman's discussion. Feminist criticism is the idea that women's experience is critical answer also draws its strength from the 'consciousness-raising 'groups so as to crucial to the development of feminist theory. Consciousness-raising was as cautiously structured a supporting implement as the 'speaking bitterness movement'. It worked by demanding and recasting and interrogates trustworthy interpretations of every aspect of social and personal experiences. The feminist reading has embattled to certain features of social reality as intolerable and need to be rejected. The subjects explored include patriarchy, sexual objectification and domination. In literary theory, it challenges the patriarchal canons and the 'third world feminism' is explored. Virginia Woolf in the book *A Room of One's Own* (1929) expresses the humiliation meted out by the omen. The storyteller was asked to offer lecture on 'Women and fiction'; the storyteller is being interrupted by the advance of Beadle, a university security guard. He implements the rule, by which women are not allowed to walk on the grass, "*Only fellows and scholars are allowed here, the gravel is the place for me*" (126). This quote of Virginia Woolf clearly expresses that women are not allowed to imagine liberally. The women had to experience many hardships to expose their individuality. Feminism stands demanding legal and political rights for women. The term denotes the movement for women's equality, legal rights and about women living on equal terms with man and not pushed down, by law or culture into a subservient role and heavy further rights to her 'body'. It is an anti-masculinise movement of the women, by the 'women' and for the 'women.

Keywords: Feminism; Womanism; exploitation; dominant

Introduction:

The term 'Feminism' is referred to a strong consciousness of identity as a woman and awareness in feminine struggles. The suppression of woman is the fundamental fact of history and it is the main reason of all emotional confusion in society. Janet Richards aptly denotes feminism as, "*Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that woman suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism*" (1).

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Emergence of Feminism:

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A universal current issue facing every country is the question of woman whether in Western or Indian literary tradition; the women are seen as introduction themselves for their distinctiveness. The pioneering woman today challenges the traditional notions of 'Angel in the house' and 'sexually voracious' representation. The 'innovative woman' is fundamentally a woman of consciousness and realization of her low position in the family and society. The feminist literary criticism has developed as an ingredient of the women's association and its collision has brought about an upheaval in literary studies.

Feminism in the literary arena searches for the plight of women in the existing social structure, thereby attempting to meticulously examine the portrayed gender roles that enforce social norms, expectations and traditions on the basis of gender discrimination in a weird manner. Feminism therefore attacks the age-old social practice of gender differentiation in the male prejudiced society. Relentless movement of Feminism against the male prejudiced society is the definite importance in the Indian context. Feminism is a philosophy against domination and mistreatment of women in patriarchal arrangement.

In fiction, some women characters have approach of refusal and cancellation of life while others have a confirmation and reception of life with a compromising approach leading to deep sense of completion. In this sense, the postmodern Indian women writers create a prototype of new study because they have dared to shatter the myth of a male dominated social system. They laid an unyielding foundation in the domain of female study in Indian Literature in English.

Feminism attempts to explore and enunciates a new social order to recognize relevant and determines to the real life problems in the light of traditionally gendered social setup. Woman has forever been projected as an inferior and substandard human being. This

prejudice against women can be seen precise from the first day of creation. In the ancient literature it is believed that, God is 'male', God after creating man made woman. Since Adam, the first man on the earth remarks Eve as, "**this is now**, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, because she has taken out of man". This involves woman to be the secondary position to man.

The woman of today stands poised on the threshold of social change in an unenviable position. She is intensely aware of the injustice heaped on her and unlike her counterpart a generation ago; she does not believe that woman is an inferior being who must remain passive and submissive. The **Manu Smriti**, a text laying down the rules of social behaviour declares the roles of women as, "Day and Night, women must be kept in subordination to the males of the family: in old age to her sons... Even though the husband be destitute of virtue and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be worshipped."

There were many great story tellers in ancient India than the novelists. Later the rise of fiction in Indian soil is associated with social, political and economic conditions of the country. Fiction came to India in the last hundred years and the Indian English writers have therefore made a significant contribution. **H. M. Williams asserts** that "the most popular vehicle for the transmission of Indian ideas to the wider English-speaking world" (109). The most important influential writers specifically Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao have recognized the Indian novel in English on a strong hold.

The male writers have extremely concentrated woman as substandard and weak. The male domination in woman's life is a natural phenomena in a patriarchal society and the consequent relegation of woman to a secondary position seemed to have prompted Indian woman writers to take up the cause of women as their western counterparts. They stressed their need for women to break free from the shackles of their traditional position. The new woman voices, a note of resentment as they fell stifled under the oppressive restrictions. She has her notions of life as portrayed by women writers

Raja Rao was the significant male writer who holds woman in high position. He is the first who brought out the intricacies of the inner psyche of women and made the men to realize himself through woman. Through the novels *The Serpent* and the *Rope*, it is very clear in Rama's relationship with Savithri and Madeleine. In *The Cat and Shakespeare*, through the character Shantha he declares that a true woman is the true sentinel of man. Mulk Raj Anand is more worried with the wretched dilemma of the oppressed classes than gender intolerance. His *Untouchable*, written under the profound authority of Mahatma Gandhi and therefore it is

a typical story about the most horrible nature of Indian societies' meaning of untouchability. Bakha, the main character of the novel experiences dishonour at the hands of caste-Hindus.

Anita Desai is considered as an inner psychological novelist as her prime concern is mingled with the nocturnal and nebulous atmosphere of the women's psyche. The motivations, the conscience and the psychic excitement and turbulent agitation of the storming psychology of the female community of their surroundings are dealt with the cardinal and exclusive incidences of Desai's oeuvre. A particular trace and trait in the women's characterization, a tragic downfall turns into a psychic malady making their mentality over neurotic and hysterical as Maya in **Cry, the Peacock** who suffers from the father-fixation.

The woman is always relegated to subordinate position, representing the depressed state, desolate and repulsive reality of Indian women has been deliberated upon in the wide spectrum of Indian English fiction. Many women writers have articulated the anxieties and concerns focussing on woman's issues thereby creating 'literature of their own'. Feminist issues exceed all limits of nationality, race, belief etc. Women writers have echoing the feeling of eccentricity and exposing their revolution against the purely male dominated world. Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1997) declares "One is not born a woman, one becomes one" (295).

The women writers in the nineteenth century endured many struggles to find their voice placed in the society. Many literary historians, critics and women themselves have worked hard to turn over the general feeling of antipathy toward women writers. This feeling of resentment took its strand that the women writers started articulating the concerns to various aspects of life similar to that of their male counterparts. These women writers have probed deep into the social injustice, the problem of identity, the role of art, the power of writing and later forced in to the feministic perspective that offer an unmarked vision. As Professor **Alphonso Karkala** precisely examines that these women writers, "tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts. . . (78) Indian women novelists have turned towards the woman's world with great thoughtful power and realism. They have launched a journey within to discover the personal awareness of their women characters and to calculate them.

Women novelists like Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Santha Rama Rau, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, etc. have been successful with their creative genius in exposing the discriminations of the suffering women

in almost all walks of life. The resemblance common to all the women writers of this period is that their subject is consistently the Indian suffering woman. The writers dealt deeply with the struggles of women. It is clear that in the Indian literary scenario, the core of feminism is that the Indian woman is caught in the ambush of evolution from tradition to modernity.

Elaine Showalter discusses of three stages in the increase of feminist convention: (1) Limitation (2) Protest and (3) Self-Discovery. Anita Desai's writings are honestly associated to the third stage. They summarize her personal dream that confine the long-smothered wail of a shredded psyche that tells the disturbing account of rounded human affiliation. In the novel of Anita Desai and Nayantara Sehgal, women are no more goddess or a machine; they are human beings and move from repression to freedom, from indecisiveness to self-assertion, from limitation to power. While these two women novelists deals with the urban upper class women, Shashi Deshpande defines the middle class educated women to show that what man has made of woman. Her women are anti-patriarchal central character.

Conventionally, right from the earliest days, India is a male prejudiced civilization. Indian women were drenched with broad, loose layers of discrimination, meeting and lack of knowledge in literature and in day today life. A woman was considered as a lifeless entity, who should follow five criteria which were dictated by their men. The woman should be moderate, enduring, cordial, and for generations together, Bengali women were hidden behind the barred windows of half dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, looking after the children, waiting for the husband kneading dough and murmuring alone the verses from "The Bhagavad-Gita and The Ramayana" in the dim light of sooty lamps.

Myths and legends are also the products of a male-oriented culture which play an important role in formulating the ideas on which woman is to find her life. Certain role-models in every society decide the attitudes and expectations of women and the intrinsic contradictions in culture make it difficult for women to pamper in their desires. The conflict for Indian women arises when they try to carve out a viable space for themselves in the society which is suffering from Sita to Savitri.

The world's two ancient great epics, *Ramayana* by Valmiki and *Mahabharata* by Ved Vyasa, both centre on the characters of Sita & Draupadi, who are the epitome of perfect womanhood from the male view point. The role women play in literature and life in the past and present in both parts of the globe is almost similar. In ancient Vedic literature, women were defied and there is a patron goddess for every aspect of life but in reality a contradictory state of affairs exists in India. Various questions arise regarding the actual status of woman such as who is the real woman? Where is the real woman - What is her real entity?

Though Anita Desai's novels focuses on the middle and upper middle class society, the difficulties of the "have-not" segment would be securely left out while allowing for the feminist issues in her writing. Measured as a whole, her novels disclose a succession in the spiritual realization of women about their location in a society. It is difficult to transfer to any direct foundation for any of Anita Desai's novels. The writer herself refers to none. However, her novels like *Cry the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Where Shall We Go this summer?* and her modern novel *Fasting, Feasting* discovers the issues of femininity from the Indian socio-historical standpoint. Desai's first three novels are a study of women's despair consequential from their incapability to wrestle with their family situations. The latest novel deals with the issues related to women's education and their ambition to attain independence and an important survival.

Conclusion:

The objective of feminism is to create and protect equal political, economic and social rights and equal occasion for women. It has been devotedly handled in the works of Indian English fiction particularly Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharthi Mukherjee, Githa Hariharan, Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De, Suniti Namjoshi, Arundhati Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Nayantara Sahgal etc. These Indian women Novelists have portrayed women's issues pragmatically both expressively and truly in their novels. They broke the legendary and social models of the past. They studied deep into intelligence of their characters and projected diverse images of women and their position in society. They have written about women in a different educational perspective and thus paving the way for the modern Indian women to live in a dignified manner.

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