



Research Paper

Feminism in Indian English Literature: Complete Research

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ABSTRACT

Compared with western society, eastern society enjoys a disparate developmental process and a distinct conformation system of consciousness, as well as different cultural traditions. Among the eastern national cultures, India's culture remains deeply significant. By studying Indian women's literature through research on international literature, it is possible to define the characteristics of feminist writing in India, and make a comparison between eastern and western criticisms of women's literature. Entering the 20th century, as the Women's Liberation Movement was being developed worldwide, Indian women (especially female intellectuals) began to awaken and to struggle for the basic privileges of equality between male and female. Going with the tide against the feudal ethical code, the voice of women's liberation, of the equality between the sexes, and of the freedom for both self-chosen courtship and marriage became louder and louder. Breaking away from the outdated traditional modes of thought, women tended to walk out of traditional families, and to step towards a newborn society. This research article to be analyzed Investigation on Feminism in English Literature.

Keywords: Feminism, Women Liberation Movement, Female Characters, Traditional Colonial Clutches, Literary Women Arena, Orthodox Formal Habits Feminist Literary Criticism.

I. Introduction

The Renaissance of 14th - 16th century broke various anti-women stereotypes and presented them in more positive light. A large number of literary gems were written during the age in which women images were humanized to a great extent. Their roles were still greatly limited to the inspirations and guiding force of the colossal protagonists as well as the catalysts of major actions. But now, they were able to feel, think, and react and that too, in a positive sense. The virtue and beauty of female images is epitomized in the image of Virgin Mary, who still remained the model of femininity. Notwithstanding, the women images in literature were getting more natural as they were endowed with more human attributes, Wife of Bath and the Prioress reflect the only ways in which women could achieve independence and status whether in the Church or in a trade. The former symbolizes those women, whose skills like weaving, gave them financial independence. The Wife is depicted as a champion of female rights and her tale brings out the idea that women should have mastery over men, but the Wife of Bath is a character in a story written by a man. The reappearance of drama in the late 16th century allowed the presentation of female roles on stage. The roles of women were enacted by young men which meant there were fewer parts written for them and they often had less to say. For example, Romeo speaks much more than Juliet. The seventeenth century literature witnessed a wide range of female representation although the common stereotypes were still prevalent. These included the coy nature of mistresses such as in the poems of John Donne, Herrick, and Marvell.

The ideology also —privatized women's option for education, for work, for supporting reform or voicing opinions. The advocates of women's rights like Frances Wright, Harriet Martineau, and Mary Wollstonecraft were charged of disrupting the natural order of things and condemned as unfeminine. During the progressive era, the ideal of the "New Woman" emerged as a response to the cult of true womanhood. The New Woman represented an ideal of femininity, which was diametrically opposed to the values of the cult of true womanhood. After World War II, the cult of domesticity was emphasized as American society sought to integrate veterans and emphasize the revival of family life. In the 1950s, television shows often presented serials that depicted fictional families, in which the primary work of the mother was to rear children and to run the household. The spheres of men and women were increasingly separated as many families lived in suburban settings from which men commuted to other cities for work.

At the same time, women had independent lives during the day and were often active in volunteer and community activities, particularly those related to children, education, health, and welfare. The cult of domesticity shaped an idealized myth of the family and paved the way for the nuclear family. Thus, feminism operates as an interdisciplinary tool for social and cultural analysis and as a political practice also. Feminism has transformed the precision of life and literature. Since feminism is seen as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist aggression, such oppositional definition projects feminism as the necessary resistance to the patriarchal power; then the goal of feminism as a theory of imagination becomes the ending of itself along with its opponents.

A feminine Perspective

For centuries human experiences have been synonymous with the masculine experiences, which made the collective image of humanity one-sided and incomplete. Woman has not been defined as a subject in her own right, but merely as an entity that concerns men either in his real life or in his fantasy life. This situation has continued to remain the same. What have shaped the feminine perspective differently from the concerned or parallel developments in the Western culture and in the Indian Continent are differences in dress, in attitudes, in cultural behaviour and family structures. In addition to this the feminist movement in its initial stages was submerged in the freedom struggle. And the freedom struggle liberated women from conventional social constraints and gave them Constitutional Rights. The changes that took place at the social level were the natural aftermath of the political upheaval. More and more women who joined the work force of freedom struggle were educated and became economically independent and even supported families. Despite this newly acquired power, they failed to question the accepted patriarchal and sexist oppression on them. In the early decades of the 20th century women took other women for granted and focused their attention on male-dominated spheres. In the typical Indian families of that period, father was the central figure governing or controlling female members of the family. In this way a male child plays a dominant role. As Anna Jameson points out, "Surely it is dangerous, it is wicked in these days, to follow the old law, to bring up woman to be 'happy wives and mothers' as if for woman these existed only one destiny one hope, one blessing, one object, one passion, in existence; some people say it out to be so, but we know that it is not so; we know that hundreds, that thousands of women are not happy wives and mothers, are never either, wives are mothers at all.

The Indian society believes that men have the power and cultural hegemony in the society. A peculiar feature of the Indian society is that men defend maleness and consider women not manly which is not basically human. Women are marginalised through cultural institutions and religious rituals. Feminist movements have been trying for removal of this marginalisation. The strong wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s helped theorize a woman's discourse. A feministically read text can lead to a better understanding of the woman's condition. Thus, the very basis of feminism which is reformistic in nature helps women to understand their position in a better manner. In this context Linda Gordon's opinion is that "feminism is an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out to change it deserves a mention". The women-centered perspective now locates specific virtues in the female experience. This should, conceptually speaking, take to a concentrated study of feminism so as to place in the proper perspective whatever is vital about woman in life and literature. Preferably this should be apart from whatever the 'ism' stands for in the history of ideas. "In the present context, the rise of women's awakening and of ripening consciousness causes the consequent battle against a tradition formed by male-dominated society. Yet the fact remains that feminism is essentially a movement social in basics and socio-political in proliferated dimensions, and is primarily directed against the sufferings of women at the hands of wicked men". An ancient lawgiver of Hinduism, Manu says, "The father looks after her during childhood, the husband protects her during youth, and the sons take care of her when she becomes old. Woman is never fit for freedom". This form's Indian view of womanhood that relates primarily to the Indian fabric of living. It is necessary therefore, for the feminist to remember that the Indian society has provided a very complex picture of womanhood. In the modern times we have great political luminaries as Kasturiba, Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi who took leading part in making India free. Services of Tara Bai, Ahalyabai, Razia Begum, Rani Durgavathi, Jhansi Laxmi Bai etc to our nation are rare and remarkable in nature. Women like Gargi, Mitreyi of ancient times enriched our spiritual heritage. They are also examples of emancipated women.

Western Feminist Literature

Virginia Woolf was indeed a revolutionary feminist. A critic / Elizabeth Hard Wycin wrote, "Virginia Woolf had a feminine mind different from the masculine".⁴ Woman since ages has been under man's subjugation and her attitudes have changed under the influence of masculine standards. Now she has to find out ways of her own, without yielding herself to the criticism of any taskmasters. Woman should be able to live her own life. Woman has been living in darkness of ignorance and negligence since ages but now she is moving towards light by slow degrees. "Virginia's feminism is positive, constructive and deep. She opines that purely masculine or I purely feminine mind is dangerous". The feminist movement began in the West with the French Revolution.

Mary Wollstonecraft published 'The Vindication of The Rights of Women', only three years later. The first event symbolized the beginning of liberty, equality and fraternity for the whole of mankind, the second stood for freedom from the trammels of tradition forequality to women with men for the better half of the mankind.

In 1869 John Stuart Mill published 'Subjection of Women', a very Persuasive and well-reasoned book which exerted great influence on feminist movement. However, the movement developed rather by slow degrees. Charlotte Bronte condemned extensively the social system, which brought up girls to regard marriage as their sole destiny. In a letter dated 1st April 1845, addressed to her friend Ellen Nessey, Bronte wrote, "not that it is a crime to marry or a crime to wish to be married - but it is an imbecility which I reject with contempt - for women who have neither fortune nor beauty to make marriage the principal object of their wishes and hope the aim of all their actions - not to be able to concern themselves that they are unattractive and that they had better be quiet and think of things other than wedlock".

Today feminism is more or less a worldwide phenomenon though it began in England. The American women were probably the first to wage a hard long-fought battle for equal rights and break into previously barred professions and with the right to equal education with men, to speak in public to vote for, to hold office, and to own property. It is surprising and note-worthy that despite its wide popularity in Europe and America and with the younger generations of the moneyed classes in cosmopolitan cities in India, feminism has not been defined in precise terms, though most people have an idea of what it means, i.e., emancipation of women in three fields, namely political, economic and social. Political emancipation means the power to vote as well as the right to assume office. This kind of emancipation was attained long ago. Now women have attained economic emancipation too. They have the right to hold property in their names and claim an equal share in father's property with their brothers. Social emancipation covers more than one thing. It includes freedom from outdated traditions and meaningless customs, which act as shackles against what they want to do.

Education – Consciousness of Feminism

Today there are no constraints on the courses in the field of education that they take up. They are free to leave their parents' home and lead an independent life. However, Women are not completely emancipated from sexual taboos. In the Scandinavian countries free sex before marriage is allowed. In some other countries occasional, extra marital love affairs after marriage take place. A rational solution is yet to be found to the problem of determining what kind of sexual morality would be best from the point of view of general health and happiness. This is no doubt a problem for sociologists to find solution for double standards. "Most people would agree," says Bertrand Russell, "that a sex relation is better when it has a large physical element than when it is purely physical, most moderns would agree that love should be an equal relation". If this is accepted, polygamy will have to be ruled out. If not, at least it can be considered as an ideal system. Women were looked upon as temptresses by Christian fathers. But the decay of the idea of sin in modern times has again begun to give freedom to women. The social emancipation of women is of primary importance as far as their morals and marriages are concerned. The demand for social equality between men and women naturally concerned itself with sexual morality. The feminists wanted to impose on men the moral fetters under which women had chafed so long. The World War I provided women greater opportunities to work with men under the exigency of war conditions particularly in England and America. Modern feminists are no longer so anxious as the feminists of thirty years ago to curtail the 'voices' of men are. Their predecessors sought equality in moral freedom. Primarily the modern Indian feminist movement may be said to have begun with Raja Ram Mohan Roy's success in making the East India Company Government pass a bill making it illegal and punishable for a widow to bum herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. Later, the Brahma Samaja and Arya Samaja worked for the upliftment of women. In Maharashtra, Ramabai Ranade did laudable work for upliftment of women. Later, into the political sphere stepped women like Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalaxmi Pundit and others who fought shoulder to shoulder with men for political freedom under Gandhiji's leadership.

Suppression on Women

Socially woman's voice became mute, the term silence is a part of the constitution of female identity, that subjectivity is a crucial factor to women. Sophocles says silence gives the proper grace to women. Women speak on sufferings in the patriarchal order. That is why culture prefers them to be silent. The concept of silence recurs in women's writings. Women writers have proved themselves as silent protesters. They have given vent to their feelings of protest in their poetry. In pre - independent India, Toru Datta, Sarojini Naidu and a host of other poets produced the best kind of poetry. Toru Datta, a pioneer of Indian English poetry, whose first years of writing poetry were years of estrangement between the family and the Orthodox Hindu community, treated Indian epics and mythologies. Her poems are more than mere poems of action and character. Her heroines of epics and mythologies like Savitri, Sita etc. display a feeling of revolt. As Rajaji comments "The tenderness and purity are the untold sufferings of women take shape as in the Uttar Ramayana are like an un-flickering lamp. It throws light on the equality of their hearts". Toru Datta observes "sufferings of women but does not extricate the

feelings of women. Sarojini Naidu, the woman, the mother, the patriot, looks into the buried and broken heart of woman. She sees there a new vision of the chained mother and vowed to break the bonds". Her two collections of poems, namely, 'The Golden Threshold', and 'The Broken Wing' consist of sensitive beauty, and the beauty of living, beauty of holiness. There is no distinction of woman's suffering in her poetry. For, Naidu is a patriotic poet, freedom struggle is the main motto of her poetry. Meena Alexander, Sujata Bhatta, and other modernist poets have written poetry on their surroundings, whereas Gouri Deshpande's 'Beyond the Slaughter House', a collection of poems, provides enough proof of her disinterest in Hindu ethos. It is the duty of a Hindu woman to bear children to destroy ancestral darkness. But Gouri rejects babies. Foetus was aborted by her for economic, legal and social reasons. Gouri was able to differentiate the hierarchy between male and female and come out with the injustice she faces in the society. Kamala Das, one of the most aggressively individualistic of the new poets is a new phenomenon in Indo-Anglian Poetry, Kamala Das, a fierce feminist dares without any inhibition to articulate the hurts she received in an insensitive and largely man-dominated world. Her poems in 'Summer in Calcutta' and 'A dozen Poems' describe the heat of Summer, urban sophistication, urban males, and the contrast between desire and spasm. She exclaims: 'Who can help us who have lived so long and have failed in love? The heart an empty cistern, waiting Through long hours, fill itself with coiling snakes of silence... She pours out in the above lines the cauldron of her personality, her sensual longings, frustrations, humiliations and triumphs. Kamala belongs to the Nair Caste, of which she makes a few pejorative remarks such as, "The Nair males are violent in temper and they are crude when sexually aroused. She seems to have not loved anyone including her. She is the type of an unhappy soul who wants the whole world to turn on the axis of her personality, and when it refuses, she condemns it. Feminism comes naturally in her poetry" Other women poets like Monika Varma, Margaret Chatterji, Tapati Mookelji, Tilottama Rajan, Sujata Balasubramaniam express their views about the vitality and variegated richness of the current output in Indo-Anglian poetry. The touches of feminism have played the vital role in their poetry.

Feminism On Indian Perspective

Feminism in Indian Short Stories: The publication of stories from *Indian Christian Life* by Kamala Satthianandan in the year 1898 marked the beginning of the short story in English, by the Indian writers. But the tradition of the short story in India may be traced back to the 'Panchatantra', the Jataka Tales, Katha Sariotsagara. When the Indian short story came of age in the 1930's its possibilities as an art form were realized. Anita Desai - with Desai, the Indian short story attains a certain degree of maturity, especially in her psychological portrayal of the inner self. In her collection of short stories entitled 'Games at Twilight and other Stories' (1978) she pleads for an attitude of moderation and adaptability of changing circumstances in the virtue of her successful characters. Looking at Indo-English literature of the 1970's it appears that the contribution of female authors has markedly increased and that a greater awareness is also to be found, with many critics to direct their attention at the literary depiction of the modern women's problems, be they of a psychological, emotional, a social or an economic nature. Women's literature is solely or overwhelmingly concerned with comprehensive investigations of a more fundamental nature i.e., common themes like the clash of cultures, East Vs West, Spirituality Vs Materialism, the ideas of India Vs the Externalized goals in the West etc. Most of the young female writers preferred short form of narration to express their ideas. Majority of the writers of the 1970's belonged to the middle class. Life of this class in India does seem to offer the opportunity, the challenge and the material means to a woman to sit down and write her own stories. The experience of life seems to have been much more predictable to them because of their own traditional roles as 'woman in the family' and 'woman in society'.

Thus, female writers, accordingly, chose their themes within the confines of the clearly drawn 'sphere of women'. The short story writers awoke to the question traditional images by way or probing into meaning of a single experience; a mood or a sentiment based on a moment or moments of rebellion. The use of the long narrative form by a generation, as it were, is in the midst of working out for itself new vistas, new approaches to master one's life and experiences would not meet the authors' requirement to give adequate expression to these probing. This is once again 'wrestling with reality'. The use of short story indicates, as it was, the development of the 20th century woman. In the stories of the 20th century women, a woman is given primary importance, and her relationship with man, in many cases her husband, is most touched upon. Besides, a number of stories depict experiences of girls or young women on the brink of womanhood. These constellations, no doubt, do not differ very much from those of earlier writers but there is a significant difference, more often than not the relationship of man and woman is portrayed as being strained or woman is portrayed as being disturbed or even questioned, what we call a feminist trend, and quite frequently this disturbance arises out of the woman's attempt to discover for herself a meaningful life in society, be it in her profession or in her social activities outside her home. For example, in Raji Narashimhan's 'The Last Embrace', the narrator's wife decides to leave him, 'to retire from life'. Similarly, their daughter decides to live her own life, having turned her attention away from home towards a young man with whom she is in love. Little is being said about the motive of his wife's decision in this story. Joshi, the narrator, feels his supremacy as man being questioned and the only thought he can think of is

how to reaffirm it once again by a 'Last Embrace'. From Joshi's reaction it becomes clear that to her, he has become unimportant, a non-entity, who perhaps never in their married lives, fulfilled her deepest desires and needs as an individual. In the same writer's 'A Village Story', a woman leaves her husband to take up teaching in a village. When he visits her to coax her into coming back home to him, she sends him away. Quite similar in theme is Sunita Jain's 'The Landing' talking about a woman's and her children's return from the United States to India leaving husband behind in search of a meaningful life. In Shashi Deshpande's 'Rani', a young woman makes love to her doctor, while her husband is dying. Having married her lover, the past to the woman seems a closed chapter not meant to disturb her decision to live a new life.

Ideological Criticism

As an important member of the developing world and the major representative of eastern culture, India is exerting more and more obvious influence on the growing tide of world feminist literary criticism. Compared with that of Britain, America and France, the course of Indian feminist literary criticism presents the following features: - Indian feminist literary criticism has a strong sense of approval of its own national culture. As stated above, although Indian women's experience is full of hardship and suffering, women's contemporary literary works have not fundamentally negated the traditional role of good wives and loving mothers. Modern female writers unveil the difficult situation of women, and then more often than not, they give the heroine a personality of traditional virtues. At the same time, they try to transcend the traditional personality in every aspect. That is, they try to create a new female character who has both traditional virtues and shows modern consciousness. Feminist literary criticism also presents a moderate attitude which does not thoughtlessly and completely negate the historical and cultural tradition of its own nation, but always tries to find a point related to, or consistent with, the new era while assimilating a brilliant cultural tradition so as to refresh and develop Indian women's traditional virtues and fine characters.

The sense of approval of its national culture reflects not only on the contents of women's literary works, but also on its expressive methods as well as on the focus of feminist literary criticism. Indian feminist writings mainly put the woman's fate into a cultural environment of family and society, the marked point of which is not necessarily the individual consciousness of the heroine, but the collective consciousness which represents women's fate of the particular time and place. As compared with that of Britain, France and other countries, Indian feminist literature is less individualist, and much stronger in the common agreement with collectivism based on the approval of traditional culture. It is also the same with literary criticism. Indian feminist literary criticism tends to value works from the angle of historical source, collective generalisation and social influence, instead of exploring the relation between female characterisation and female discourse from the angle of female body politics and desire-satisfaction, which French feminist critical theory has practised.

Feminism in Indian English Literature

Indian feminist literary criticism has a close relation to political ethos, which keeps a certain distance from the activities organised by the women's associations. Both women's awakening to personal identity in the 20s and the climax of women's literary creation in the 80s were directly connected with the open ethos of active minds and diverse opinions. When society develops to the stage of the old being substituted by the new, the basic social contradictions tend to deepen. And the most serious problems are often women's position and living conditions, which are also the easiest areas for a new power to destroy the old and build up the new. Marx recognised this when he said: 'The progress of society can be accurately measured by women's social position.' Indian feminist literary criticism pays much attention to the social, propagative function of feminist literature. The writers directly expose the various difficulties of women, accuse and criticise the patriarchal system and patriarchal culture for their long-term suppression of women, thereby inspiring women to wake up and to fight against their oppressors. In this sense, Indian feminist literary criticism has a clear political significance and is full of the unyielding spirit of struggle. It always corresponds to realistic political activities and itself often becomes the vanguard of the political wave. The problems revealed in feminist literature and criticism usually draw the notice of the whole society, and the resolution or relief of these problems can usually become a new starting point of social improvement. However, after Indian feminist literature has developed to a certain stage, it will tend to return to the women's virtues found in the traditional literature, and at the same time lessen the strength of struggle against the present social system in which androcentrism still exists. When this happens, female intellectuals need to strengthen their more independent consciousness in order to mediate and find a path in the cultural field. As a result, the pure political organisation of the women's association, subordinated to the leadership of a superior, can hardly become their proper form of organisation. At this point, Indian feminist literary criticism is different from that of America.

American feminist literary critics like to express unique personal opinions by debating in small groups, while Indian critics prefer to act independently and unilaterally (most Indian female writers and critics still don't admit they are feminists), though their opinions are quite identical. Apart from that, India has extensive

geographical and economic, as well as cultural, gaps between the south and the north, town and country, eastern coastal areas and western inland areas. The social convention and living habits of women in different places varies greatly, and the development of modern travel and communication networks is also uneven. In such varied environments of time and space, Indian feminist literary criticism will develop at a rather low level for women in poor villages while women in highly developed areas, especially in big and middle-sized cities, have relatively high material and spiritual demands. Modern Indian women are in a complicated situation, containing great variations which have been richly and deeply presented in feminist literature and criticism.

Combining comparative literature and feminist literary criticism will allow an exploration of a new field in two ways. Analysing it from the view of comparative literature, we can more clearly see the different artistic features of eastern versus western feminist literary criticism, and more easily understand the different theories of the two. Analysing it from the view of the long-term development of world literature, Indian feminist literature, with the background of Indian culture, has created a large number of eastern female characters, whose 'meekness-outside' but 'sturdiness-inside', uprightness, diligence and kindness indicate the primary factors of an ideal human spirit. They are not aristocratic as are French upper-class women, so that they do not have the luxury of empty conversation, nor are they excessively politicised, so that they avoid the extremes of thorough revolution. They are influenced by western values, but still maintain eastern virtues, pursuing friendship with the world's women, keeping in step with their own brothers and sisters, and advancing with a moderate attitude. The question of what the future of Indian feminist literature will be can only be answered by history. But we can be sure of one point. Indian women, with a literary tradition of several thousand years, will never follow in other people's footsteps. Instead, they will advance in their own unique way.

Summing Up

The status of women in modern India is a sort of a paradox. If on one hand she is at the peak of ladder of success, on the other hand she is mutely suffering the violence afflicted on her by her own family members. As compared with past, women in modern times have achieved a lot but in reality, they have travel a long way. Their path is full of roadblocks. The women have left these secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armoured with their talent. They had proved themselves. But in India they are yet to get their dues. The patriarchal society prevalent in India had jeopardized and crippled the Indian mind to such an extent that men thought that no woman was found worthy of education. Men considered themselves independent, superior and even almighty. A man was invariably the breadwinner whereas the woman was supposed only to share what the man had earned with his sweat and blood. It looked as though, a man's world would continue even without a woman. Traits are visible, that in ancient India, women though having an enormous potential, were being unutilized and underutilized. Customarily women were treated as „*abla*“ which means a weakling, dependent on men and confined to the four walls. Thanks to some courageous and daring women, today the table is being turned upside down. As the civilization changes, the societies go through transformation, Indian women too are on a crossroad not to prove themselves but to get out of the shadows of men. Today, women dare to walk shoulder to shoulder with men. They are ready to expose the splendour and beauty of the world in which they live have a better role to play than remaining mere spectators within the four walls of the house. The men who thought they were superior to women have now recognized the potentialities of women; women are not just spectators but partners and coworkers. Women are not inferior to man in rank or performance in anyway. This is true in the field of literature too.

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