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Feminism in Indian Literary Milieu: With Special Reference to Major Indian Women Writers

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Abstract:

Feminism means allowing the same privileges to females as those experienced by men. Feminism does not particularly talk of equal rights and privileges of females, but it is more about sympathy, regard and understanding of the male alternatives. Across the world females are deprived of their social and economic rights. The twentieth century has experienced a growing attention among females regarding their desires, sex, self-definition, the existence and destiny. Female's initiatives to seek their freedom and self-identity started a revolution all over the world which was known as by experts and critics as 'Feminism'. The contemporary writers are still attempting to provide freedom to the woman's world from the devastating socio-cultural restrictions and oppressive misconceptions of their specific countries. In post-Independence India, where knowledge of females had already started, the new women also had started to appear. Education had inculcated a sense of personality amongst females and had turned on an interest in their individual privileges. It was then that the feminist trend in Indian literature had appeared on the horizon and women came into conflict with the double standards of social law through ages and the conventional moral code. To change the traditional image of women constructed by the traditional community it is necessary to prevent the addiction of interpreting woman as an substance whose characteristics is determined naturally and whose only identification is to produce individual varieties. Although the feminists and feminist authors have been successful in accomplishing the legal rights for females, yet much has to be done at the social level.

Key words: *Feminism, Education, Women, Feminist, Literature*

1. Introduction

The term feminism coming from French and has its origin from the Latin word 'femina' which denotes women. According to the Oxford British Terminology, the term 'Feminism' was first used in the latter aspect of the Nineteenth century and it was described as having the qualities of females. In common, feminism is the ideology of women's independence in all its approaches as a woman who recognizes herself and is identified by others as feminist. The feminist attention is the attention of victimization. As a perception of life, it is in contrast to women's subordination to men in the family and society, along with men' claims to find out which is best for women. To vastly oversimplify, the goal of feminism becomes to eliminate sexist oppression imposed by the patriarchal society which it was thought; would end discrimination against women on the job, in the home and in all areas of Women's' lives. Equity of opportunity was the objective, and sexism was the enemy. Even nowadays an average woman feels uncertain about her identity as a social being. It emphasizes the value of women as they are. Elaine Showalter in her book *A Literature of Their Own* calls women writing a sub-culture. She traces the development of this "subculture" from the times of the Bronte's to the present day. She detects the history of women's writing, very well, in three phases:

- Feminine Phase (1840-80): In which women writers imitated dominant male artistic norms and aesthetic standards.
- Feminist Phase (1880-1920): In which radical and often separatist positions are maintained.
- Female Phase (1920 onwards): In which particularly female writing and female experiences are looked.¹

2. Feminism in the Indian Framework

To understand and sympathizes the sensibility of feminism it is important to observe that Indian feminists present different picture sequence. The long and painful suffering of women, the bitter struggle for the exception of the idea of equal pay for equal work, the continuing battles on behalf of woman's right to abortion and to practice of birth control are some of the visible marks of the gender inequality that has persisted and that woman had to fight for inspire of the commitments they were made under circumstances. It was

only towards the end of the century the women joined the fray. The list of those who did a lot for women—Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Matahari, Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, Karve to mention a few. The record of the reform they undertook to achieve is impressive. It reveals that their efforts spanned action to abolish the practice of *Sati*, the custom of child marriage, custom of distinguishing widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu widows and many other civil practices that affected women.²

The feminist thought and feminist movement in the west have some impact on the woman's movement in the developing country like India also. In the Indian context several feminist have realized that the subject of women's invasion in India should not be reduced to contradiction between men and women. The woman in order to literate herself and advance needs to empower herself to confess different institutional structures and cultural practices that subject herself to patriarchal domination and comfort.

Indian writing in English is now gaining a sound ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and earned many laurels both in the country and abroad. Indian woman writers have started questioning upon the prominent old patriarchal domination. Today, the works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur and many more have left an ineradicable imprint on the readers of Indian Writings in English.

Many other Indian women writers have also explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity, which is imposed as a patriarchal society in their respective writings. The theme is from childhood to woman-hood- developed society respecting women in general.

2.1. Shashi Deshpandes' Writings

Feminism, in its literary sense is the physical and the psychic emancipation of women from the cruel traditional clutches of a man. Since time immemorial in the world, particularly in Asian countries and in India the social custom and creeds have overall control of man. Shashi Deshpande has earnestly been accepted as a significant literary figure on the contemporary literary scene.

Shashi Deshpande's novels represent the contemporary modern women's struggle to define and attain an autonomous selfhood. Her female protagonists are at great pains to free themselves from stultifying, traditional constraints. The social and cultural change in the post- Independence India has made women conscious of the need to define themselves, their place in society, and their surroundings.

Female quest for identity has been at pet theme for many a woman novelist. Shashi Deshpande has also been one of such writers and she makes an earnest effort to understand the inner dimension of the female characters. For the portrayal of the predicament of middleclass educated Indian women, their inner conflict and quest for identity, issues pertaining to parent-child relationship, marriage and sex, and their exploitation.³

2.2. Shobha De's Writings

Shobha De, a celebrity journalist and the well-known author stands as a pioneer in the field of popular fiction and ranks among the first to explore the world of the urban woman in India. Her way of narrating every aspect of human relationships is wonderful. Really, she is frank in narrating the incidents and situations with a touch of open heartedness. She has given importance to women's issues and they are dealt with psychology in her style of intimate understanding. Her novels indicate the arrival of a new Indian woman, eager to flout rebelliously against the well-entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. Her female characters break all shackles of customs and traditions that tie them in the predicaments and rein in their freedoms and rights. Her female characters are modern, strong and take bold decisions to survive in society. This secures her position in literature as a feminist novelist.⁴

2.3. Manju Kapur's Writings

The other, noted novelist in the paper is Manju Kapur; she is a professor of English at Miranda House in Delhi. Her first novel, 'Difficult Daughters' received the 'Common Wealth Award' for the Eurasian region. Her novel 'A Married Woman' which is a seductive story of a love at a time of political and religious upheaval, told with sympathy and intelligence. It is the story of an artist whose canvas challenges constraints of middle-class existence.

In her writings, Manju Kapur has emphasized on the issues of patriarchy, inter-religious marriage, and family bond, and male-female bond, co-existence of past and present.⁵ She has narrated her woman protagonist as a victim of biology, gender, domestic violence, and circumstances. Kapur thinks:

*"There is a man within every woman and a woman in every man. When manhood is questioned and womanhood is fragile."*⁶

A major pre-occupation in recent Indian women's writings has been a delineation of inner life and subtle relationships. In a culture where, individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the women's role at home is a central focus. It is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural diversion.

2.4. Arundhati Roy's Writings

The other famous and renowned novelist is Arundhati Roy, born in 1961 in Bengal. Arundhati grew up in Kerala. She trained herself as an architect at the Delhi school of Architecture but abandoned it in-between. Roy seems to be iconoclast in 'The God of Small Things'. The stylistic innovations make the novel unique and this variety brings vitality and exuberance to the novel. The international community knows Arundhati Roy as an artist with her debut novel *The God of Small Things*. It bagged the coveted Booker Prize for fiction in 1997. Roy is the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to have won this prize. This novelist and human rights activist was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004 for her work in social campaigns and for her advocacy

of non-violence. Arundhati Roy is now chairperson of the “*Jury of Conscience of the World Tribunal on Iraq*”. In her opening statement on behalf of the *Jury of Conscience of the World Tribunal on Iraq*, Arundhati Roy says, “*We truly do live in the Age of Irony, in an age when satire has become meaningless because real life is more satirical than satire can ever.*”⁷

Now, women in India have started questioning the age-old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hands of man. They have shown their worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it to them today without any hurdle.

2.5. Nayantara Sahgal's Writings

Nayantara Sahgal has identified popularity both as a news reporter and an author. She has launched an outstanding huge of English books – *The Day In Night*, *Rich Like Us*, *A Situation In New Delhi*, *Shock In Chandigarh*, *A Time To Be Pleased* and two other books namely *Freedom Action in India* and *Indira Gandhi's Overall look and Style*. Her books show an authentic picture of India after Independence. She has also revealed the concept of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and as she herself was a little woman of well known independence fighter Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. She was normally linked with the team, government and philosophical perspective of Nehru and Indira Gandhi. As a fictionist she staunch realist who revealed the contemporary scenario of Indian in her novels she is described as “one of our best socio-political authors nowadays.” Nayantara reveals the need for a new morality in which women are handled as an individual's comparative and the relationship to be proven with common believe in, love and understanding.

2.6. Anita Desai's Writings

Anita Desai smashes a new floor on the globe of Indian British encounters by moving the focus from the external to the inner globe. She mainly “illustrates the inner situation of personal way of way of lifestyle in her encounters, and concentrates on its primary facts... her amazing workers to discovering the further user-friendly and emotional declares of the protagonist.” Her books determine the inner way of lifestyle of delicate women who are in durable wish for meaning of way of way of lifestyle. Anita Desai declares that all her composing is “an impact to find, to underline and display the true significance of factors.” She represents the amazing launch of the fashionable feeling, which started to appear after the Second World War. Desai's books can be examined with the emotional motivations of her books as user-friendly situation through flashback, diary-entries, self - analysis, ruminations, rumbling of dialogues and details of locations and individuals. Her primary concept is the existential situation of an individual, which she tasks through not appropriate associates, very delicate associates and ill-matched associates. Anita Desai is one of the most popular and identified Indian British authors composing nowadays. Her dual heritage, both national and team has had a very efficient impact on her way of way of lifestyle and has also affected her composing at the thematic as well as stylistic level. Anita Desai is a recipient of many awards in Indian and worldwide. Her novel *Fire on the Mountain* for which she won the Stylish Community of Literature's Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize and the Sahitya Akadami Prize for British for the year 1978. Her novel, *In Custody* has been taken by Source Pale yellow Shows in British and Hindi (titled “*Muhafiz*”).

2.7. Kamla Markandaya's Writings

Kamla Markandaya in her novel '*The Coffer Dams*' (1969) delineates the theme of East-West enchanter in the farm of a clash between the human values of India and the technological views of the west. Like Markandaya several Indian fiction writers realized that the subject of woman's emancipation in India should not be reduced to the contradictions behead man and woman. Women in order to liberate themselves and need to empower to confront different institutional structures and cultural practices that subject herself to patriarchal domination and control.

A major preoccupation in recent Indian Woman's writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the woman's role at home is a central focus. It is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. Women are more assertive, more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the women of the past are. She has started asserting her substantive identity in action not in words but through her creative writings.

The authenticity of feminine sensibility and feminine experiences would demand a brief scrutiny of the changing position of women in India. The study of the Indian feminine psyche evolves a change from tradition to modernity. Critics have proposed various methods to define these patterns of change. Shri K.S. Iyanger, divides the history of Indian writing in English in three general periods - '1875 to 1900', the new flowering of the creative Indian genius, 1900 to 1947, the Gandhi an Era 1947 onwards the post-Independence period.⁸

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper highlights that feminism is a struggle for equality of women, an effort to make women become like men. The agonistic definition of feminism sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexiest aggression. This paper reveals the growth of Indian Feminism and its development. Indian women writers have placed the problems of Indian women in general and they have proved their place in the international literature.

4. Future Scope

Feminist concept & viewpoints are for worldwide attention. Here are a lot of positions for the analysis. As feminist there is need to analyses as well as to give suggestions to overcome new & relevant problems like pressured desertion by women, sex dedication, amniocentesis, wife beating, assault against mature women in family associate's members, marriage gape, abuses and so on.

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