

## Indian Feminism

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*Paper Received on: 11/08/2012*

*Paper Reviewed on: 15/08/2012*

*Paper Accepted on: 22/08/2012*

### Abstract

*The aim of the study is to consider the appropriate definition of feminism and to define 'Indian feminism' in order to create its own existence for those, who looks towards it through western eyes.*

*This paper will be a new glance to the readers who wants to update them in the study of feminism. The work done in feminism area mostly brings a kind of misconception of feminism. This paper will help readers to define feminism without any bias.*

**Keywords :** *Indian feminism.*

### Introduction

#### 1. Feminism

Feminism is a social movement that purposes the equal rights and opportunities for women in society. It is a movement, which established by a group of women, whom we may call the 'feminists.' This group believes that western civilization is pervasively patriarchal that is male-centered and subordinates women to men in all cultural areas like family, religion, society, politics, economics and even art. Feminism is not only the movement, which run by women for women but it is a kind of Human liberation movement, which encourages society to think that women are also human beings. Feminism is to look towards women as human beings and to think about their problems, dreams and needs. The debate between Western and Eastern feminism does not let you reach to the proper definition of feminism; rather it trapped us in an apple of concord of wrong and right. We should change our views to look towards feminism by thinking over it in an isolated way, which is very necessary today.

In order to reach to the proper definition of feminism, we should learn first to understand the co-concepts like 'patriarchy', 'masculinity', 'subaltern', 'others' and the history of woman's development. After reading all this, we could succeed to wipe up many prejudices, which we are carrying with us from a long time in the concern of feminism. We should learn to make difference between freedom and promiscuity. If we want women's freedom, we should know that at least from what we do expect it. Behaving like male is not freedom, but at the same time, we should know the differences between man and woman. We should know our

weaknesses and power. We should know it better that to oppose male is not the way to reach to the goal. Patriarchy is nothing but a social system. Therefore, if we want women liberation we should go through the history of man. We could easily get the answers of being a patriarchal one. If we go through the proper definition of feminism, we come to see that the purpose of feminism is beneficial to both men and women. Men also want liberation from the burden of masculinity. Therefore, if we succeed to apply feminism in society it works great and for that, we need to concentrate on different grounds like gender, cast, race, religion and disabilities.

From a long time, women have been considered as second-class citizens. The feminist literary theory is developed since the beginning of the contemporary women's movement with Simon de Beavoir, Kate Millett and Betty Freidan. In 'The Second Sex' (1948) Beauvoir wrote, 'One is not born, but becomes a woman.' Beauvoir asked what woman is and how she is constructed differently from men. Freidan analysed seductive images of women in American magazines. Millet wrote that the most fundamental concept of power in our society is male dominance.

Elaine Showalter identifies four models of differences between man and woman. The first is biological, second is linguistic, third is psychological and the fourth is cultural. In biological approach, we find many texts having explanation of woman's body. It means that if someone mirrors the body, he reduced it to a woman's body. Women usually have been featured as 'desired' rather than 'desiring.' On the linguistic, psychological and cultural ground, women considered subordinate one. Women were not allowed to write and speak publicly because they were considered always inferior in the society. In all the centuries up to the 20<sup>th</sup>, men wrote more than women and so it became impossible for women to reach to the goal of an authorship. Men were allowed to evaluate the particular work; when women were not. It created barriers in women's development. Their work always ignored on the grounds that, it was trivial, unimportant and uninteresting.

Many aspects of human life changed from fifth to the 20<sup>th</sup> century but one feature of considering women as second-class citizens never changed in the whole literature. The attitude towards women was very bad in the past. They treated merely as a toy, which used only for sexual pleasure. In Europe, women had been considered the cause of all diseases and calamities. Therefore, women were called witches and were burnt alive. The kind of annoyance of women compelled many feminists to re-define feminism. Through the study of literature, we can realise it very well.

## **2. Indian Cultural Aspects and the Role of Feminism**

In India, a woman has always been inferior in the society. India is a multi lingual country. Villages cover much of the land of the nation. The condition of rural Indian woman is very bad. The landless poor women spend about four to five hours every day in the forest in order to search fuel or fodder. In villages, women use 70% of their energy and eat only one third of the calories as compared to those consumed by their husband. One fourth of the twelve million girls born in India every year die before the age of 15. In the past, women were not allowed to learn, read and write.

Talking about Maharashtra, the first girl school was started by Mahatma Phule in 1848 at Pune and since then only girls have been going to schools. In due course, they proved that they were capable in talent and equally adventurous as boys. The education in English was far out of the reach of Indian women. We seemed to have had a wrong impact of Savitri and Sita on Indian women in Maharashtra instead of following the brave women like Rani

Lakshmibai and Jijamata. We seemed to have had an acceptance of the image of goddess, which had been given to them by patriarchal society. After getting freedom, we Indian people started to think about women's problems. Actually, the arrival of British provided an impetus in the upliftment of women. The British brought education and it changed the attitude of few thinkers like Agarkar, Maharshi Karve and Ranade in Maharashtra. Karve had started to write about women's problems and their situation in society and thus opened the door of freedom for women. In those days, women were facing social discrimination. They were victims of child marriage and child widow. The immature widow had to face many bad traditions like cutting hairs and making herself ugly in order to prevent her from the lust of cruel men. In that case, if she became pregnant, the only option remained for her to commit suicide. (Mangala Athalekar, 2004, p.10-11) Indian woman has to prove herself chronically a good daughter, a faithful wife, a devoted mother and at last a caring grandmother. In her married life, she has to defend herself against her in-laws and save herself from mental, physical and emotional annoyance. She prefers to be humble than to be an arrogant woman. She seems always devoted and kind and so regarded as a goddess. In Ramayana 'Sita', had to jump into the fire in order to prove her purity, but unfortunately, no one had doubted 'Rama', though he too had spent fourteen years in the same forest! Since a long time, the tradition of blaming women for various reasons continued. The Indian woman is still playing the role of 'Sita' and is still trying to prove her purity and innocence. Sita, Mira, Savitri, Draupadi are the names of those women whose story tells us the characteristics of the Indian women. A woman who devotes her whole life to prove her love for the husband found only in India. The male partners never suffer the same order.

### **Indian Literature and Feminism**

According to Bruce, 'A period in English poetry written by Indian women was moving from rewriting of legends, praise of peasants to writing about personal experiences. That was the time, when the poet like Kamala Das began to create her impact in literature. In earlier days, the subject matter of the women poet was often limited about romantic love, which was treated without depth, complexity and emotion'. (Bruce King, 1987) We find the strong evidences of feminine sensibility in Kamala Das's poetry.

Kamala Das and the women poets after her have brought great diversity into the feminine and feminist poetry. In fiction, Anita Desai portrays a woman's inner world, her sensibility and frustration. Her characters strive to find a balance between their inner and outer world. She portrays the woman who wants love, seeks for emancipation and embraces psychological pressures and mental disorders and even death. The woman is the most realistic and natural than the 'Sati-Savitri' and the 'Pati-Vrata' of her earlier novels. Bharati Mukharjee could not ignore her Indian origin though seems herself as an American writer. She wrote about one of her character in 'Wife'

'All her life she had been trained to please.

He expected her, like Sita,

to jump in to fire if necessary.'

Veena Paintal wrote about rebellious women. In 'An Autumn Leaf' (1976), she portrays a character named Charisma, who is an independent girl with her own views on love and marriage,

'I do not believe in arranged marriages. In today's world

they have little chance of survival. I have my own  
personality and my dreams. I refuse to be tied  
down like a slave to some rich man I do not even know  
and be treated like a piece of furniture.’

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a Diasporas feminist who says, ‘women are universally oppressed by men’.’ (Ray, Kundu, vol-2, 2005, p. 150-179)

The feminist writing in India starts to change a mask of Indian literature, specifically in the writings of Indian women Novelists like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Veena Paintal, Kundanika kapadia, Indu mallah, Mrinal Pande, Gouri Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai. The stride change in the Image of Indian woman comes to see in their writings. Anita Desai seems to have had a simple middle class upbringing with a German angle to it. Her mother, Toni Nime was of German origin. Perhaps that is why Desai has confluences of sorts in her writing. Shobha De has had a diverse career roles ranging from model to columnist. She writes mostly on women’s problems. Her emphasis is on extra-marital affairs. She has moved away from the beaten path and has actually undertaken a serious analysis of the man-woman relationship in marriages. She has made certain insights that will do the average Indian woman good. Kamala Das had her feet firm on the ground and could get to the brass tacks in no time. Her working table was the kitchen table where she would chop the vegetables, get the table cleared and then, start typing. Though this working timetable reflected on her health, it did give her time to manage home as well as woman’s idea of an essential pre-requisite for a job. Indian women writers like Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kamala Das and Shobha De, just to name a few, who hold their own in the woman writer’s world of initial rejection, dejection, familial bonds, domesticity. It is amazing to note that these writers and many more have climbed the ladder of success, the slow and painful way. These women writers have given literary work in India an unmistakable edge. Their women are real flesh-and- blood protagonists who make you look at them in fear with their relationships to their surroundings, their society, their men, their children, their families, their mental make-ups and themselves. They have been recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the soil that they brought to their work. Gender is only incidental but, one must admit, it does spice up their work. Indian women writers have grappled with complex issues such as sensuality, servility, subjugation and society. They have handled them with a sense of balance, never disregarding our Indian traditions. Detailed intimate descriptions have been an issue of controversy with both Kamala Das and Shobha De. It takes a lot of grit or perhaps even a touch of arrogant defiance, for a woman writer, albeit an Indian woman writer, to express it in writing and place it on exhibition to the entire world! Women writers in India no longer claimed as the exclusive property of India.

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