The Rise of Feminism in India

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to discuss the meaning, origin and development of feminism and it also states names of the feminist writers of India. Feminism is a movement started by the women writers in the west to seek the same opportunity and honor in the patriarchal society. They raise voice against the patriarchal society in their writings and also inspire other women to fight for their rights.

INTRODUCTION

The feminist ideologies began to influence the Indo English literature. Women’s writing has been considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements in the 20th century. The majority of the women novels depict the mental and physical harassments of women in the patriarchal society. The novels also narrate the socio economical condition of the women in the present age. As a result of all these feminism has been used by the women novelists with a view to reform the condition of women in the society. Before discussing about the feminism in literature, we are going to discuss the meaning and concept of feminism and its emergence in Indian literature.

THE MEANING AND CONCEPT OF FEMINISM

The term 'feminism' has come from the Latin word ‘femina' which means 'woman'. Feminism is a movement started by women which shares a common aim of; to define, establish and defend equal political, economical, cultural and social rights for women. Its aim is to seek equal opportunities for women in education and employment. The feminist generally fights, advocates and supports the women to achieve the rights and equality of women in the society. The feminist campaigns for rights of women such as property, contract law, voting, bodily integrity, autonomy and reproductive rights. Some feminists have worked to protect women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault. They have also advocated for workplace rights, including maternity leave and against forms of discrimination against women. Feminism is mainly focused on women's issues but author bell hooks and others have argued that, since feminism seeks gender equality, it must necessarily include men's liberation because men are also harmed by sexism and gender roles.

DEFINING FEMINISM

In the beginning or early years women did not write as it now the reason Virginia Woolf asserts: 

A woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction (Woolf: 1929, 126).

Virginia Woolf was asked to deliver a lecture on ‘Women and fiction’ at a university where she was interrupted by the approach of Beadle, a university security guard as she writes in her book, A Room of One’s Own. He told her:

Only fellows and scholars are allowed here, the gravel is the place for me (Woolf: 1929, 139).

She thought over this statement and interpreted in her own words that women are not allowed to think freely, the path is not smooth for them to travel. They have to undergo many hardships to enter into the world of art. Then to collect the material for her lecture she visited the library of the university and noticed that there were many books written by male writers but not even a single book she found written by female writers either on men or women and then she was inspired by the visit of the library and delivered drastic lecture on men and women and composed her thoughts into a book named; A Room of One's Own. This book can be considered as the milestone for the feminism.

Ashraf Behan was the first who entered into the world of art and earned through writing. She was forced to run all the responsibilities of her home and earned for livelihood when she lost her husband. Women work a lot from early morning to late night; still their work is not existed in the world of literature and she started to write and became a famous writer through her writings.

Chaman Nahal expressed her thought of feminism as:

I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is dependence syndrome whether it is husband, father, the community or a religious group. When women will free themselves of the
dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes (Nahal: 1991, 17). Eisenstein defines the term feminist or feminism as:

In my understanding of the term ‘feminist’ then I see an element of visionary futurist thoughts. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that as part of the eventual liberation of women with change all human relationships for the better. Although, centrally about women, their experience and condition. Feminism is also fundamentally about men and about social change (Eisenstein: 1963, 58).

Thus, feminism is a struggle for equality of women in the patriarchal society. Feminism as the necessary resistance to the patriarchal power, logically then it is a theory of imagination.

FEMINIST WRITERS IN INDIA

The western feminist thought and feminist movement have influenced the Indian literature. Yet, feminism as it exists today in India has gone beyond its western counter parts. Indian writing in English is in full swing in the present age. In the realm of fiction, Indian women writers have touched the peak of the achievement and have enriched the Indo English literature. The women novels reflect that woman is not helpless and is not dependent but she can create her own identity in society and proves that she is equal to the male. Indian women writers explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the theme that ranges from childhood to womanhood. Through their novels, they told what actually feminism is. These women writers told that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence. The Indian women novelists like Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri used realism as main theme of their novels. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today’s male dominated world as the theme of their books.

In the post-independence era many women writers have entered the arena of literary writing and they have focused their attention on the inner conflicts of modern women. Notable among such writers are Sivasundari, C.S. Laxmi, Anuradha Ramanan, Indira Soundarajan, Vaasanthi, Thilagavathy, Shobha De, Manju Kapur, Mahasweta Devi etc. Through their writings they strengthen the feminist movement in India and inspire the new emerging women writers to write.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study shows feminism is a movement started in west and inspired Indian women writers. It is a struggle for equality of women, an effort to make women become like men. This study 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.

REFERENCES

