

# Thoughts on Feminism in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries: A Descriptive Study

<sup>1</sup>Sohan Singh and <sup>2</sup>Dr.Puran Singh

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar OPJS University

<sup>2</sup>Supervisor, Professor, OPJS University

---

## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 07 September 2018

### Keywords

observable, feminist, illustrate, literary, disparity, descriptive, methodology, significant

---

---

## ABSTRACT

One of the most arguable and observable societal trend is gender inequality, which is focused on feminist theories. The purpose of this study is to illustrate and examine how feminist ideas and gender differences take place in various literary works, including how literature can, along with its values, reflect human life. Based on the importance of feminist ideas and gender disparity in cross-cultural literature, a descriptive study of literature that focuses on feminist ideas is acceptable. Four types of literary works have been used for this study, especially drama, prose (short story), film, and poetry. The methodology of feminism as a sociological strategy was proposed in this research in conjunction with comparative critique and content interpretation approaches. This work has tackled how feminist theories received more recognition and inspiration as the century progressed. Several significant conclusions can be drawn by contrasting literary works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, namely (a) feminist thoughts become stronger with the growth of the century; (b) feminist thoughts frequently oppose gender inequality, as both are frequently recognized in literary work as binary oppositions; (c) both feminism and gender discrimination live by human values and recurrent intervention.

---

## 1. Introduction

Life of Human is filled with emotions, values, and experiences that often affect human life mentally and physically. People also need to portray their own experiences and one of the reflections of life is literature. Literature is a kind of perception of human life that reveals human nature. Human life, while it is difficult to describe, is easy to understand through literary works (Taum, 1997).

Taum's (1997) assertion is in accordance with Wellek and Warren (1977), who recognize that literature portrays combinations of aspects of several lives and presents them. As mirrors and embodiments of human life, their theory confirms literature. This theory argues, in a nutshell, that literature is originated from real social events. In literature, the author provides the reader with ideas through some sort of work. As defined by Taum (1997) and Wellek and Warren (1977), the concepts in literature present real human life.

It must be recalled that man's life carries values and faith. This is also in line with the truth that society instills in us values and beliefs and plays an important role in our lives. The above principles serve as guidelines in life in order to explain and execute acts (Knafo and Schwartz, 2003).

There must be an implication that literature would reflect man's life, along with its real values. Beliefs are created in a certain place and period of time by the thoughts of human cultures. In a certain period of time or a certain age, literary works can often be used as a means of examining social phenomena, social ideals, and even human thoughts. Gender inequality focused on beliefs about feminism is one of the most arguable and noticeable social-phenomena.

This study aims to elaborate and compare how ideas about feminism and gender inequality exist in various literary works, such as in fiction, poetry, drama, and film, provided how literature can reflect human life along with its values. Gender discrimination has been a part of society for hundreds

of years, as it also causes abuse against women. Gender inequality is a social construct that consists of the belief that men are superior and that women are inferior. This idea is part of the hegemonic system, often known as the 'gender paradigm.' Some societies even consciously create inequalities between men and women in the community. Via these intentional or unintentional forces, gender inequality is increasingly recognized as one of the basic social phenomena.

Hollander (2002) states that gender is a social construction, not something related to biological disparities or biological dissimilarities. The majority of researchers think that gender is socially constructed. Sex is a social institution and so it is something that members of the society create, manage and introduce. In other words, people have also decided that there is a law that governs how people interpret others. By saying "others" who never regulate what the rest of the population should and should do, Hollander refers to those belonging to the subdominant group. As Hollander (2002) states, when gender discrimination is recognized by the subdominant culture, then the ideas of feminism come to light.

Eagleton (1983) argues that feminism is also associated with other issues. It is not a certain 'social-movement' for some political projects, but rather it is seen as a dimension that informs and demands every aspect of personal, social and political life. The message of the women's movement, as perceived by those outside it, is not only that women should have parity of status and power with men; it is an examination of power and status. This means that although it is not expressly believed that the world will be a better place with more feminist feelings, despite the 'feminization' of human society, the world will live harshly.

Feminism, as an activity but historically special, is socially constructed uniformly, as per Mackinnon (1982). Feminism is a hybrid of topics and the mind. In response to the existence of

feminist ideas, Stanton argued in Bressler (2003) that "because men and women are complementary to each other, in order to build a secure and stable government, we need woman's thought in national affairs" (Bressler, 2003). There is a significant argument in post-modern feminism that supports gender as a social construction, as Hollander (2002) notes.

## 2. Objectives of the study

Some of the main objectives of this study are enumerated as follows:

- For elaborating and contrasting perspectives on feminism.
- To know how feminists' theories received more recognition and inspiration as the year progressed.

## 3. Materials and methods

Four styles of literary works, namely drama, prose (short story), film, and poetry, were taken from this study. All of the literary works that are collected from different authors. Four literary works exist:

- A) Maria Irene Fornes's (1985) *The Conduct of Life* (drama),
- (b) *The Translator of Maladies* by Jhumpa Lahiri (Short Storey) (1999),
- C) *How to be Single Guided* (movie) (2016) by Christian Ditter,

This work involves feminism as an ideology. Along with the approach of comparative criticism, feminist theories and gender inequality are used as strategies. In all cultures whose human life is the same, descriptive analysis is an approach that transcends national, geographical, lingual boundaries and considers literature to be an universal phenomenon (Justi, 2002).

Descriptive analysis is essential because, in any literary work on first contact with global literature, it shows cultural practices and the latest trends to help boost human consciousness or ethnic inclination. The central items in comparative literature are comprehension of the unity of human thought. This unity of thought can be realized in one part of the world. The ideas shared by a scientist, scholar or writer are the same thoughts that appear in a different way in another part of the world (Akbari, 2007).

In this research, the second approach, along with comparative critique, is the inferential approach known in qualitative analysis as content analysis. Content analysis is a much-used methodology in qualitative research, according to Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Conventional content analysis and coding categories are derived directly from the text data. Research starts with a theory (feminism) with a guided approach as guidance for finding meaning. The text chosen was taken from literary works' scripts. On the basis of two key parameters, namely feminism and gender inequality, the alternative was introduced. Data collection was carried out on the basis of a non-participant observation methodology.

In this step, researchers take a more distant role in non-participant approaches and do not interact with the objects of the analysis. In this study, the research objects are the chosen text that represents thoughts about feminism and gender inequality. On the basis of the methodology of feminism, the

chosen text was gathered, read carefully and then analyzed using the quantitative analysis technique.

## 4. Results and discussion

Gender inequality can cause oppression of women on the basis of the theory of feminism. Katz et al (2005) suggests that a multi-dimensional notion is inequality. Race, color, ethnic background and age are associated with it. Therefore, women's injustice still comes along with gender-inequality and feminism concepts. From various perspectives, these three social phenomena will interweave and need to be investigated. This study offers comparative criticism of the aforementioned phenomena in order to provide a detailed elaboration and analysis of feminism, views, gender inequality, and women's discrimination in literary works of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### A. In *The Conduct of Life*, *Fornes's Thoughts of Gratitude* (Fornes, 1985)

*The Conduct of Life* is described by Fornes (1985) as a portrait of a marital life colored by sexual abuse, women's oppression and gender bias. Married characters portray thoughts on feminism, gender discrimination, and women's oppression in *The Conduct of Life* (1985). The theme of the drama revolves around the husband, called Orlando, performing violent acts. In the play, Orlando is a lieutenant with a tendency to commit physical and sexual abuse.

The victims who encounter his violent actions are his wife, Leticia, and the young girl he abducts, named Nena. The play shows how Leticia needs more recognition as a wife from her husband. Leticia also wants to extend her education to earn more recognition, despite having experienced a lot of abuse from her husband Orlando. "She speaks about her husband's abusive treatments in Scene 2, along with her desires to be respected," He's deaf. He's a beast. He's a beast. He's touched by nothing but sensuality. I just can't change it. I'd like to learn. I want to be thorough. I'm tired of being overlooked.

I'm going to have to study a lot at university. I'd like to be a woman who speaks and listens to everyone in societies. There is nothing that I can do.' This describes how women feel inferior and helpless in marriage. Marriage is shaped according to both sexes' sexuality. Gender embodies sexuality as socially developed, not the contrary, as Morgan (1975) put it. Gender is separated into the economic circumstances of heterosexuality, which institutionalizes male sexual dominance and female sexual submission, rendered into the sexes as we know them, and therefore sexuality is the shaper of gender discrimination (Morgan, 1975) and control is the issue of feminist thinking.

### B. In *"Interpreter of Maladies," Feminism Thoughts of Social Interaction* (Lahiri, 1999)

Related authors have different convictions. Both feminism and gender disparity manifest in various ways in different literary works. The focus of the storey rotates as the main female character in the indirect domestic violence faced by the housewife in Lahiri's short-story *Translator of Maladies*. The central female character, Mrs. Das, has no trouble communicating her needs to her husband, her kids, and even to an outsider, like Mr. Kapasi, who works for her family as a tour guide. However, both her husband and her family have suffered indirect persecution from Mrs. Das. Her marriage

comments have some consequences for living in an insensitive community that is sufficiently oblivious of her needs for social contact. In her conversation with her tour guide, Mrs. Das, she tells him her life story. She told Mr. Kapasi about how she will get married. She said, "We got married at college."

They were best friends with our parents and they lived in the same city. I assume it was all the more or less a decoy (Lahiri, 1999, p. 26). Her complaint gives an assumption that getting married at a young age is not her choice. After her marriage, she becomes constrained as a wife by all of her duties, but her husband does not even know that she is oppressed by family decisions and her position as a housewife. The indirect inequality that the main female character faces in this story is caused by the choice of an insensitive husband and family. In this way, it can be defined as family or domestic oppression. As previously stated by Katz (2005), inequality has many dimensions. Anywhere, anywhere, injustice and its implications, namely discrimination, will occur.

Furthermore, in the storey, Mrs. Das speaks of her oppressive life. She states that she was overwhelmed from raising children so fast and breastfeeding after she married so young while her husband was at work. Even though she is still tired and left with the baby at home all day, her husband never looked cross or harried or plump as she was after the first baby (Lahiri, 1999 p.26). From the floor, it is obvious that Mrs. Das wants more social interaction despite her leading a very limited domestic life. As a result of spending all her time in college with Raj, "The narrator mentions her loneliness and social alienation," She did not make many close friends. There was no one to trust him or share a fleeting thought or concern at the end of a difficult day. She declined invites from her one or two college girlfriends to have lunch or shop. Finally, the friends stopped calling her, so she was left at home with the baby all day (Lahiri, 1999, p. 26).

A female lead, with various constraints, is portrayed by Lahiri (1999). Women have been put in such small circumstances, so it is claimed (Qasim et al, 2015) that when women encounter violence as their life, the most terrible thing is. The statement suggests that when a woman is finally used to unfairness that place her as inferior, the most awful thing is to the point that she can no longer assume about seeking any great possibilities based on her own desires and abilities. This short story shows that the family's perspective on racial disparities is very vital to determining women as an individual. A woman's family and her remotely comparable network might become an influential factor in the life of a woman. Family values can push women into a more traditional relationship, or they can expose women to the concepts and interpretations of feminist theory and equality.

### **C. In "How to Be Single," Feminism Thoughts on Personal Development (Ditter, 2016)**

Literature is one of the ways of portraying various facets of individuals and culture, as mentioned in the previous section. This argument is supported by Qasim Et. All (2005) who believed that literature would serve as a reflection of anything at a certain age or period that happens in society. Feminism and gender inequality can also be seen in how literature depicts female characters, as literature can be a reflection of society. In this sense, how culture treats women and how women present themselves as people are important when

addressing feminist theory and gender inequality. Many female characters are featured in the film *How to Be Single* (2016). All the female characters are single, including the principal female character named Alice. This film shows how the female protagonists, despite being lonely, confused, and sometimes, sad, live their lives of singularity.

At first, as the leading character, Alice had a boyfriend, but later she decided to be a single person to get more space for her personal development. She said to her boyfriend, "I said I'd do things all the time, and I'd never, ever do it." Like, I'm going to learn to cook, or take a lesson in self-defense, or I'm going to hike the Grand Canyon, and I'm never going to do it, ever. I need to be aware of who I am on my own. We need to know what it's like to be single at least once.' In the previous paragraph, it is clear from Alice's remark that, as a woman, Alice always needs to know who she really is. She needs to discover herself for a moment by releasing herself from any connotation. A modern woman has the legal right, without a partner or family dictation, to choose a life for herself. So Alice only wants to be free from any relationship for a while and to find herself in a single life. This means that she needs to be seen as an individual, with her own thoughts, interests, and lifestyle. For older women who have been bound by the will and marriage of their families, this sort of freedom may be impossible. It is evident in modern times that women see themselves as a free individual who is unable to be bound by any family or relationship roles as long as she is single.

At the end of the book, despite being lonely and confused during her solo period, Alice finds her experience of being single as an essential point in her life. "How does Alice interpret her unique experience as expressed in the closing scene of the film by the narrator," But how much do we really want to be alone? Isn't there a danger that you're going to get too good at being single, that you're going to miss the chance to be great with someone? Many people take baby steps to calm down. Some people refuse to settle down at all.

Alice's goal is to show us the example of an autonomous woman who makes her own decision and behavior without her specific position frustrating her. It is obvious that in this film, the right of women to choose marriage or singularity is the most powerful feminist thoughts that profoundly contradict the ideas of the patriarchal hegemonic construct. There is an inferential analysis focused on the movie..

### **5. Conclusion**

Feminism, woman-oppression, and gender-inequality are multidimensional social phenomena that spread through personal, family and social and cultural values. In this research, all the literary works demonstrate that ideas about feminism, gender-inequality, and women-oppression are interwoven. There are some implications based on previous discussions that (a) feminist thoughts have grown stronger alongside the progression of the century, (b) feminist thoughts are mostly opposed to gender inequality as both are binary oppositions in literary work, (c) feminism and gender inequality live by values, (d) feminist thinking is crucial to the growth of personal and family values. Socialization is a huge factor in defining gender identity or the spectrum that people feel is related to traditional gender roles while displaying features, as stated by Banarjee (2005) (Bem, 1993). Finally, it is evident through this analysis that literary works as a portrait of society can also reflect all of

the points listed above, including the beliefs and attitudes of human beings that are formed and affected by both feminist

ideas and gender inequality.

## References

1. Akbari, B. (2007). The comparative study of Faith in Miguel D'onamono and Hafez Shirazi, *Comparative Literature Journal*, 2nd year, 6, Summer.
2. Banerjee, R. 2005. "Gender identity and the development of gender roles". In S. Ding & K. Littleton (Eds.) *Children's personal and social development*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell. p. 141 - 179.
3. Bem, S. L. 1974. The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 42, 155 - 162
4. Bressler, C.E. (2003). *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, 2nd edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
5. Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
6. Fischer, Molly (3 October 2017). "Meet Rupri Kaur, author of ubiquitous *Milk and Honey*". Retrieved June 5th, 2018, from [www.thecut.com](http://www.thecut.com).
7. Fornes, M.I. (2001). "The Conduct of Life". *Types of Drama: Plays and Contexts*. 8th ed. New York: Longman, 2001. p. 1345-1358
8. Hollander, J.A. (2002). Resisting Vulnerability: The Social Reconstruction of Gender in Interaction. *Social Problems*. 49 (4), 474-496.
9. Hsieh, H.F. and Shannon, E.S. (2005). Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15 (9): 1277-88
10. Katz et al. (2005). Women and the Paradox of Inequality in the Twentieth Century. *Journal of Social History*, 39 (2), 65-88. George Mason University Press. Web. Retrieved 5 February 2016.
11. Knafo, A., & Schwartz, S.H. (2003). Parenting and adolescents' accuracy in perceiving parental values. *Child development*, 74(2), 595-611. Retrieved February 5, 2016, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.7402018>.