

The Creative Launcher

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Feministic Perspective in English Fiction

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Abstract

Feminism is about women having political economic and social rights equal to those of men, if we deny them to women; we have denied the rights of half the people in all over the world. In the archaic society women often enjoyed vantage to their society of so-called civilized society they existed as more independent entities in their own established customs and attitudes because the economic structure of their society was simpler. But with the advancement of the civilization simplicity got destroyed and a complicated form took birth and the frame work of society underwent a rapid transformation and the position of women kept changing along with it. Woman got thus reduced to the status of a reproductive machine and while man's sphere kept amplifying, her space kept abbreviating. In short she became the private property of man and he applied all the methods such as social, religious, ethical commands to establish his dominance over woman. This paper, thus, attempts to look at various issues and aspects concerning woman subjugation and woman emancipation widely dealt in English fiction.

Key Words- *Feminism, Independent Entities, Equality, Emancipation.*

Woman is the earth, air, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the knowing in the knowledge; in fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain steam; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama She is Sita, to Krishna She is Radha. Woman is the meaning of

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the world, the breath, touch, act; woman, that which reminds man of which he is, reminds herself through him of that which she be, Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, the Gods, inherence; woman is the death, for it is thorough woman that one is born; woman rules, for it is she, the universe. (Raja Rao 357)

The subject of feminism and its movement through the 1960's, can probably will, fill a book in the years to come. Feminism is about women having political economic and social rights equal to those of men, if we deny them to women; we have denied the rights of half the people in all over the world. In the archaic society women often enjoyed vantage to their society of so-called civilized society they existed as more independent entities in their own established customs and attitudes because the economic structure of their society was simpler. But with the advancement of the civilization simplicity got destroyed and a complicated form took birth and the frame work of society underwent a rapid transformation and the position of women kept changing along with it. Woman got thus reduced to the status of a reproductive machine and while man's sphere kept amplifying, her space kept abbreviating. In short she became the private property of man and he applied all the methods such as social, religious, ethical commands to establish his dominance over woman.

The industrialization dealt a fatal blow to feudalism and in the upheaval which followed many new social factors and democratic revolutions such as French Revolution, which broached a new ideology and new philosophy of life. Equality was the new slogan of that time. The long suppressed women found this new champion to encourage and there arose the Feminist Movement, "The feminist argument showed that more than half of humanity was included in this new dimension, demonstrating that earlier version of civil, private and legal rights were based on the premise that women were not considered subjects of rights." (Lara 26)

The term feminism was coined in France in the 1880s by Hubertine Auclert, who introduced it in her journal, *La Citoyenne*, to criticize male predominance (and domination) and to make claims for women's rights and emancipation promised by the French Revolution.

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Historian of Feminisms Karen Often has demonstrated that since its first appearance the term has been given many meanings and definitions; it has been put to diverse uses and inspired many movements. By the first decade of the 20th century the term made its appearance in English, first in Britain and then in the 1910s in the United States; by the early 1920s it was in use in Egypt where it circulated in French and in Arabic as nisa'iyya. The term originated in the West, specifically France. Feminisms are produced in particular places and are articulated in local terms. Creators and practitioners of women's history taking shape as a new field in the 1960s, and growing especially during 1970s and 1980s, attested to a plethora of feminisms that had appeared in different global locations.

The historic period preceding the middle ages in Europe, there have been women fighting to free their folk from the male's act of subjugating by cruelty. The partiality that is not fair or equitable against which the feminist protest- legal, economic, and social restrictions on the basic rights of women, have existed throughout history and all civilizations. The early edition of The Oxford English Dictionary defined the term feminism as; a) the principle that women should have political rights equal to those of men; b) the movement to win such right for women. What this movement stands for and from what women are demanding "liberation"? "Woman's liberation refers to liberation from the traditional female role, which effectively serves to limit the things women can do and the ways she can behave."(Neil & Rubin 414)

Feminism has three components. First it is a movement, something produced or accomplished through the effort or activity or agency of a person or thing; second those efforts are of social and political change, and the last in component but the beginning of feminism is to enable women to carry this responsibility. "One of the primal and seminal concerns of feminism is to declare that a woman is a being. She is an appendage of man. A woman is not other. She is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of, through trial and error, finding her way to salvation." (Ramamoorthy 37)

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Various limits have been enforced on woman by man who exercise authority over woman as the act of mastering or subordination them. She accepts it either because of social or personal reasons. Modern woman selects and alternative; choose instead to break away from psychological pain. Women are now portrayed as more inclined to bold and confident assertion; aggressively self-assured, more liberated, more enunciated as compared to their past folk. Instead of making them belittle with the elements of suffering and suppression, women start negotiating with the whole milieu, which has been henpecked by the male power. We could find the different sensitivities and temperaments of feminism in Indian writers who are writing in English such as Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das, Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Markandya, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapoor, or Namita Gokhale.

Many modern-day women authors are now expressing themselves freely and boldly and on a variety of themes. Though there may still be case of the occasional male envy, these new writers are not holding back in expressing the point of view from a feminine eye without adopting feminist posture. When Shobha De put it succinctly by saying: “The label of a feminist writer’ is one that marginalizes. I for one identify myself as a woman writer because of being read, judged and perceived differently by male readers on account of my gender.” (Sree 20)

In a way Shobha De personifies the dilemma that has dogged Indian woman writers. Traditionally if they stepped out of the boundaries drawn by men they were ignored, or silenced. They were merely the minority sub-culture in a male domain. But authors like Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Narnita Gokhale and more, are fast destroying this traditional image. For them the age of women writers has finally arrived. Though Shobha De says she simply writes about women’s lives through a woman’s eyes, she feels that writing about sexuality is still hurtful to men as, “It could mean women talking about their husbands’ Shortcomings or writing about being bored with them sexually, mentally or spiritually.” (Sree 22) Kamala Das is one of the strongest vices of women writing in India.

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Kamala Das's recurring theme practiced a new belief that physical love either inside or outside marriage would be perfect to perforate the male ego.

Kamala Das believes that the silencing women, the thematic of victimization functions not only through patriarchal attitude, but also through woman's conscious or unconscious complexity in the matter. In order to combat it, she recognizes the source of oppression, and desires to express her anger by writing as a fully liberated individual- as a woman- in the society. (Alexander 60)

Kamala Das places her unrestrained expression of emotion against all roles of women which are lacking spontaneity or individuality i.e. lover, wife and married woman. "Poetry becomes in her hand a powerful medium of self- expression: thereby conforming to a new female literary tradition to liberate the suppressed voice that has been trying through ages to find its own identity." (Alexander 62) Manju Kapur has taken writing as a protest, a way of corresponding from the point of view of woman's experiences. She describes the traumas of her protagonists from which they suffer, and perish in for their exultation of victory. The main ideas her novels consist are family life, sexual relationship, gender discrimination, socio- political upheaval and the desire for peaceful co-existence. She herself remarks: "It is an attempt to inject an element of artistic and emotional coherence. Actually a relationship with a woman does not threaten a marriage as much as a relationship with a man." (Kapur 3)

She desires to prove through her women protagonists: "A woman should be aware; self-controlled, strong willed, self-reliant and rational, having faith in the inner strength of womanhood. A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense." (Chaman 17) Kapur's female protagonists are mostly educated, aspiring individuals confined in a cage within the restriction of a bourgeois society. Their educational background leads them to autonomous thinking for which their family and society become narrow-minded about cherished opinions of them. There ensues an open clash between two opposing groups; tradition and modernity. And they struggle to acquire a voiced woman rather a silenced one. She seems to suggest that a woman's job is not to act

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wifely, child rearing and housekeeping but to do something more. Like adulterous relationship in Kapur's novel deals with lesbianism.

The age-old themes of marriage and politics are coupled with lesbian relationship, in the narrative making Kapur the first Indian English novelist to highlight women's desire for homosexuality. If Arundhati Roy, in her novel emphasizes the women's desire to choose their mates, Kapur goes a step beyond marriage and presents her protagonist in *A Married Woman* indulging in a pseudo-sexual relationship with a member of her own seed for the sexual orientation and gratification of the passion. (Nayak 137)

Anita Desai is one of those few Indian novelists in English who have tried to closely understand the situation from which extrication is difficult especially unpleasant for their female protagonists. Anita Desai distinguishes herself in determining the essential quality of human relationship. The following theme recurs again and again in her novels: "...The hazard and complexities of man woman relationships, the founding and nurturing of individuality, the establishing of individualism of her characters." (Narishmhan 23)

Anita Desai has raised striking appropriateness and pertinent question on the position of woman in society and she always offers freedom to woman which she lacking in the patriarchal society. This is question of extreme importance; vital to the resolution of the resolution of a crisis of how a woman gets freedom of thought, wishes, concern without being an appendage to men and they are sole masters who have control on the destiny of woman. That is why there is always a deficiency of freedom for women in social context.

In the light of feminine novelists Anita Desai's novels can be examined as the documents of female dilemma. She represents the welcome, "Creative release of the feminine sensibility." (Krishna Rao 50) A feminist reading of her novels reveals that almost all her women are not only liberated but go beyond to regions of psychological and philosophical depth. Her concern is not only with the radical feminism and woman liberation: "She lives and

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paints a scene where women can be presumed to be liberated. The narration starts after the independent identity is established.” (Tiwari 22)

The five novels, written chronologically, show a progression in the development of feminist thought in Desai’s fiction. The women characters in each successive novel grow up intellectually and psychologically. The movement is from insanity to sanity and from imprisonment to liberation. Yet, portraying her emancipated woman as single, Desai does not necessarily negate the institute-of marriage or support alienation from society because some of her women characters, like ‘Tara in *Clear Light of Day*, do achieve fulfillment in their marriages. Instead, through Bimala, Desai points to a kind of feminist emancipation that lies in not limiting life, apart from being invigorating, also frees them from dependence on men. Bimala, through her individual freedom, exemplifies Simone de Beauvoir’s description of an independent woman in her book, *The Second sex*, where she asserts that “once [a woman] ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator” Singh412). Yet, at the same time, Bimala does not negate her desire to nurture others and is able to find a room of her own in the home that she shares with her retarded brother Baba. In an interview, Desai says:“ I don’t think anybody’s exile from society can solve any problem. I think basically problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one’s individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and a lack of belonging. (Jain11) Thus, Desai’s women characters find freedom not by living in their own narrow selves or by clinging to others but by connecting with others and by, simultaneously, asserting their intellectual as well as economic independence. They strive, in other words, for a balance created by the harmonious individualistic existence within the community of men and women.

Shashi Deshpande’s primary focus and attention is the world of women where they are struggling hard in the context of modern Indian society. They are unable to confront resistance of traditional and patriarchal norms of society, these female protagonists in her novels assay to establish their own existence, identity and individuality not only as women

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but as human beings also. Her writings are concerned with a woman's search for an alternative that meets cognitive criteria for self; a careful systematic search into female psyche, that which is responsible for one's thoughts and feelings; the seat of the faculty of reason and apprehension of the mysteries of life, that baffle understanding and cannot be explained and she placed her protagonists there in that very situation.

Man- woman relationship is fairly large theme of modern Indian fiction and this has an exercising influence on the novels of Shashi Deshpande also. Her female protagonists are balancing their career and family together. Shashi Deshpande makes her heroine to pick out the state of being free and feel secure through the reestablishing of cordial relations. Her novels are not a hostile meeting of opposing or a triumph but they show compatibility in opinion and action and discernment between two sides (man- woman) of same the coin (human being). The radically distinctive quality of her female protagonists is that they are not rebellious but they learn from the connected series of events of unpleasantly stern then generate strength in themselves to contend with patriarchy.

The importance of woman has been acknowledged in literature's diverse surface. Literature depicts how it brings them in to the confrontation with the family and with the male world in the society. And then these female figures come to the realization that freedom lies in having courage to bring freedom by her within the family adherence.

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