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Feministic Theories and Gender Inequality in Literature

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Abstract

A mother, an ideal wife and a home-maker are widely assumed multiple roles of a woman in male dominated society. In social environment gender is formed by conditioning of male and female with different orientation. Society expects the conditioning of male as a dominant figure whereas a female's is of sacrificing, tolerance and submissive creature. On the contrary we see women form an inseparable part of society which provides a base for the survival of human race. Gradually the society is getting transformed. The sting of gender discrimination in social environment is being highlighted. There are gender sensitive themes in literature that also make some influence on the structure of the society. This paper explores such points from the feministic perspectives.

Introduction

In present times gender sensitivity is a crucial issue for debates and discussion. Gender issues have been the subject of the political policies and social reformation over the decades. Certainly this is an issue that should be reconstructed or deconstructed in order to break the rigid frame of the traditional society. Roots of this rigid framework have been watering since the beginning of human society. We can understand this construction on the basis of needs of primitive human. When human being started to live in societal groups a woman would bear and rear a child and man had to take her care for food,

shelter and protection. Therefore man started to use his brain in order to deal with the field work and started to frame rules for family and society and woman had to follow living in certain boundaries and constraints. In the sequence of evolution of family and society the structure of the family kept turning more and more rigid and gender had been constructed. Enhance society had turned gender sensitive and so was discourse and communication. Many civilizations rose and fell in the course of evolution of human society. Man started to share ideas from community to community, started to read and write. After the beginning of literacy, transmission of ideas and thoughts had become more convenient. Man started to produce stories; songs in order to express himself that were mainly transmitted orally and in written form also. As the society and human communication were gender sensitive, this sensitivity was also articulated in their songs and stories. In this sense literature has been gender sensitive since the beginning. Man was portrayed as strong, free, adventurous with sense of pride while woman as beautiful, delicate and tolerant. Research has shown that these ideas prevailed in the same way all over the world. Another aspect of this discussion includes that woman is treated secondary to man. Women in most settled societies of the world and virtually all class societies have experienced secondary status in the society, exploitation, oppression and loss of self-determination. Whichever class in hierarchy of the society she belongs to, woman is treated secondary. According to so-called social norms virtues of a woman lie in her dedication to patriarchy. Till last some decades across the world female member of the society did not have any power in fields of politics, culture and religion. Woman did not have any right to inherit the property of her parents but contrarily she herself was treated as property of a man. In Ancient Rome woman was not to participate in social event and were only allowed to leave their homes with their husband or a male relative. As the literature is the mirror of the society, literature also reflects the gender sensitivity in the society.

Objectives

Objectives of this research paper are:

- To explore the influence of gender sensitivity in literature on the society and vice versa.
- To explore how the gender sensitivity is a universalized concept in literature in different parts of the world.

Method

Implication of various feministic theories to explore the psychology of different characters in the works of literature.

Literature Review

Two precursors of feminism John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstnecraft sowed its seeds in the later half of the 19th century and it got sprouting in the first half of the 20th century. Primarily the need and demand of equal rights for woman gives rise to feminism. The notable feminist writers are Simone De Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*), Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*), Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*) Kate Millett (*Sexual Politics*) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic*) etc. We can go back to the fifteenth century in order to search the roots of the feministic theories when Christine de Pizan produced her work *Epitre au Dieud'Amour* (*Epistle to the God of Love*). With reference to aforementioned work it can be stated that struggles for emancipation of woman from old established identity had found place long ago.

American feminist Elaine Showalter divided the development of feminism in three phases that include feminine, feminist and female. According to Walter the first phase moves silently where women writer tried to write under the male pen names. Patriarchy was so powerful that works written by female writer did not become popular. Therefore women writers wrote under the male pseudonym. During the second wave of feminism woman started to reveal her identity and protested for right to vote. In the third stage of feminism woman tried to establish herself as an independent identity. Showalter gave a term 'gynocriticism' to interpret the writings of female writers. In her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" Showalter says that there is male dominancy even in language also. Even when we need to represent both man and woman in terms of human race issues the word man represents both man and woman. In this way we can say that everything is created by man for man to become dominant in the society. Even history is also a man's version. Taking an instance of Cleopatra, she writes that "Cleopatra in history is represented in two different forms. Like Shakespeare in his play *Julius Caesar* has depicted her as Caesar's adopted daughter whereas G.B. Shaw portrayed her as Caesar's concubine." Here she tries to state that even in records man presented woman as he liked.

Here we may point out one thing that in the earlier stages feminism was confined to woman of western countries. Woman from third world did not still started to realize her potential. Now she has founded her place in the stream of feminism. Gradually the feminism took the shape of world phenomena. African or Black feminism also took place. In an article *Feminist Icons: Alice Walker* in an online magazine "Books that Matter" I found that Alice Walker, a black writer for the first time used a word "womanism" for all the females of the world. In the course of such movements another Afro-American writer Barbara Smith coined the term "Sisterhood" to indicate the idea that she is not confined to black women rather she is addressing the women from all over the world. The wave of feminism reached in India also. Influence from abroad in the thought process of woman writers in India brought about the sparks of feminism. In few parts of India it took place in the beginning. Woman in India was facing stern traditions of patriarchy and male dominancy in society. Colonial rule in India also multiplied the troubles for woman. Many writers came forward to write about their struggle and condition. Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak writes, "Subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow". The outside invaders and rulers from always find woman as an easy target. Though such steps were taken to revolt against the exploitation and oppression, the emancipation of woman is still beyond the reach. Health and education are major concerns for woman welfare but still they are not in the reach of common woman. Female infanticide is a crime in India but even now it could not be prevented. So far as the female writers are concerned they were measured by various parameters. If a woman writes bold and blunt then she is condemned. The best example of this category is Kamala Das. Kamala Das tried to write whatever has happened in her life. For her writings she was condemned as prostitute. In the stream of feminism we have many great Indian woman writers such as Mahashweta Devi, Anita Desai and many others.

Conclusion and Findings

Study of the literature on this discourse brings out many points. Exploitation of woman in patriarchy society is one of the major concerns in current literary movements. Male domination in a women's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society and the consequent suppression of the woman to a secondary position seem to have prompted women writers to take up the cause of women. In the same vein if we see the scene in the other parts of the world for example in Egypt, it is a widely accepted belief that a man has

the right to beat his wife if denies sex. Will for power and authority of man gave rise to the oppression and suppression of woman. It is the man who makes decision for every aspect of woman's life including education, marriage and other things. It is universal across culture that families are the centre of exploitation of a woman. This domestic violence against woman is institutionalized by society. The acts of violence against woman and children were accepted as a rule of authority to keep the family in discipline.

Control of man over woman is predominant across the world. It exists in the diverse forms like abuse, psychological, sociological, economical, and physical but it is overlooked by the victim and other family members. From other aspects, the woman also tries to avoid negative labels given for being disrespectful to their men because of living in the conservative societies where women is expected to be silent. In addition to that numerous findings have brought out a number of themes pertaining to the highlighted concerns on the requirements and support of subjugation of women within family that women drew on in their accounts. It is environmental learning by a woman to be subjugate. From her very childhood she is taught that she is inferior to man and her primary duty is to look after the family. Doris Lessing, a British writer in her novel *The Golden Notebook* has stated the theme of breakdown as a major theme in this novel. This social and political breakdown finally leads to the psychological breakdown. Doris Lessing made Anna Wulf as her spokesperson to reveal her inner feelings. This clearly shows the inequality in relationship, sex, beliefs, work and politics. The novel can be divided into six different parts. First section of the book contains the concerns of free woman and followed by the four different colour notebooks of the narrator Anna wulf and the last section of the book consists of golden notebook. These sections contain the records of experience of conflicts and breakdown in the life Anna. She records her bad experiences in in these different notebooks to avoid such mess in her life.

“I keep four notebooks, Anna explains to herself, a black note-book, which is to do with Anna Wulf the Writer; a red notebook, concerned with politics; a yellow notebook, in which I make stories out of my experience; and a blue notebook which tries to be a diary.” (5)

We can declare Kamala Das an Indian woman writer as a feministic because in the course of her poetic tenure she struggled for the liberation of women from social obligations. Tawhida Akhtar in a research paper *Kamala Das: The Voice of Indian Woman's quest for*

Liberation presents the role of Kamala Das in contemporary times. Kamala confronted the oppression of woman and tried to bring a change in the pattern of the society and used the writings of literature as the tools for change. Therefore her writings can be viewed as protest against the male-centered domain

The women are expected to play certain conventional roles, and her own wishes and aspiration are not taken into account. The intensity of the protest, conveyed in conversational idiom and rhythm, make it symbolic of the protest of all womanhood against the male ego. (6)

“According to available statistics from around the globe, one out of every three women has experienced violence in an intimate relationship at some point in her life. This is an average based on available national surveys across industrialized and developing countries.” (7)

Fiction is a means of utterly recounting conditions, thoughts, state of affairs and social relationships. Fiction is much more than this. Tactfully produced fiction does not only narrate, write, enumerate, inform, and transmit the content. Ultimately such fiction catches the reader and let him live the content he is going through. This fiction creates the scene before the reader and consequently an emotional bond is formed between the reader and imaginary characters. This emotional bond between the reader and fictional character leads the reader to think differently. In the starting phase of fiction by woman, woman wrote completely in different way. The apparent grounds behind this were as Virginia Woolf puts it, “A woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction.” (9) money symbolizes power and freedom and a room of her own is to have contemplative thinking.

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