

Exploring the Feminity and Socio-Cultural Identity Crisis

Karan Singh*

Abstract – This paper seeks to reveal the notions and aspects that are pertinent in exploring the Feminity in the context of social culture. It studies the existence of women in terms of gender, class and oppression that meted out to them in society and culture. The objective is also to trace the feminist ideology in exploring the sensibility of feminists and society towards women in Indian English literature. It explores women with a deep sensibility in the core of society and culture especially after independence. This paper presents social phases, impact of waves of feminism in Indian circumstance, quest for an identity and also the struggle for the individuality. It attempts to trace the sphere of Indian English literature which presents women in a liberal way. On the other edge especially in Western culture, they have been explored through radical mannerism. Indian culture is deeply rooted and associated with women in terms of fulfilling the rituals and customs. Today, the advocacy has assumed a vital role in the context of the world in representing women. It has become a global movement and known as “global feminism.” Now, this questions even for the existence of men in to the lives of women. Feminist ideology has converted into radical approach.

Keywords- Feminity, Oppression, Culture, Subjugation

-----X-----

INTRODUCTION

Language is the core of any particular literature. It carries the values of social and cultural backgrounds in itself. Literature depicts the state of aspects of objects that are laid in the history of any particular subject. In the same sense, Indian English Literature explores the vision of various authors and society as well through the perspectives of men and women. As Ngugiwa Thiong “O, a Kenyan writer states, “Language carries culture and culture carries particularly through orature and literature the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and others.” (Jagger, 1983). As an individual, it depicts the perspective of men and society towards the weaker, exploited and oppressed section of women. This paper reveals the place of women in culture and society through Indian writings in English. As it is like crystal clear, feminism made its way in India in three phases. It covers the pre-independence period, the period of independence and post-independence period. Initially, it was exercised particularly in Western countries like America, England and France etc. These particular countries conveyed the advocacy for the civil, political and economic rights of women and later assumed the form of movements that fought for the same. Feminism travelled through the minds and ideologies of the people. At much extent, the social practices of that time influenced the people

especially women in questioning against the oppression of male patriarchy. Many books like *A Vindication for the Rights of the Women* (1794), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *Sexual Politics* (1970) and *The Second Sex* (1979) inspired the spirit against oppression respectively by Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Kate Millett and Simon De Beauvoir. The ideologies and aspects of these writers enlightened the minds of people. Finally, through various platforms, the efforts assume the name of feminism and today is known as “global feminism” by making cross- cultural connections in its core.

In the context of India, Indian writings in English influenced the minds and developed the thought and structural ideology of the people. Before taking the literary root, various movements led out with a greater prominence and shook the tendency of the bastions of male patriarchy world in India. The efforts put their focus in representing women socially, politically and individually. A very well-known figure Savitri Bai Phule took the charge to educate women although she was cursed on account of being “dalit” but she defies the oppressive notion of men and society through promoting education for girls than marriage at an early age. The task was not achieved completely because the roots of the norms of the perspectives of gender, class and castes were deeply planted in

the culture and society. The appearance of Raja Ram Mohan Rai as a social reformer challenged the notion of social hierarchy of India. Raja Ram attempted to abolish the most brutal practices of “sati system”, “child marriage” and “female foeticide” with the help of Englishmen by introducing some political and civil laws. With the overall efforts these social traits eradicated out from the social hierarchy of Indian social system. A ray of hope appeared and later it took the root of feminism more specifically through writings in India. But the harsh reality was there towards the other side of these efforts which couldn't cope with the most basic requirement of these social traits. Although, due to these efforts, the social evils and traits eradicated from the society by reluctantly to do this but lacked in making people aware towards the harsh picture of the society. Yet, the Indian society is still struggling with the same issues like “dowry system” and “child marriage” even in the 21st century. The notion of the identity again aroused around the independence of India which resulted to call for social and civil rights for women. Writers build up the notion for writing in English and various languages as well. The literary figures introduced the new platform of literature to the Indian people in order to aware people within the social system of India. The crisis of identity brought round the women in common. The proponents of women's identity cared about the aspect and shook the sphere of male patriarchy in India.

The social cultural identity crisis brought out between the function of Indian culture and the social practicing system of India. The struggle of women lied in this very gap by questioning for an identity within the social sphere of India. In the socio- cultural aspect of India, women are deeply associated and interlinked with rituals and following customs and are supposed to follow the foot marks as suggested to them by male tyranny. Male patriarchy allocates the boundary of women in presenting them as an “image” of the family in terms of following the stereotyped root of fulfilling the responsibilities of family. The real struggle of women starts when they are ignored as an “individual.” figure outside the notion of the family. This particular aspect questions for the reason of crisis and agony that meted out women within the radius of culture and society. Naturally, this leads to women in a deep concern for feminine psyche. The particular concern creates the faint picture of developing India as a whole and puts us in the state of dilemma in order to take a stand against the social evils. The desired notion for an identity represents the true and uncivilized picture of false and civilized society.

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND CRISIS IN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH FOR WOMEN

Indian fiction in English traces its origin in pre-independence era. In India, feminism and feminine psyche came out through various writings of feminist writers. Women's position has been living at

struggling place since pre- independence period. R.K Narayan's novel *The Dark Room*, published in 1938, explores the layers of stereotype of a happy house in the characterization of *Savitri*. The novel presents the notion of male patriarchy of south Indian people before independence. The female protagonist finds herself confined within the social familial bars. The rejection of house proved a good one decision for her but the notion of being hindu and a wife of her husband created confusion for her even after the rejection and this resulted in acquainting her moral duty and her return to her husband's house so called “a dark room.” The presentation is made with a sympathized notion in order to be liberal within the family.

Kamala Markandya's *A Silence of Desire*, published in 1960, takes up the same thing in its theme. It portrays the agonized life of its female character Sarojini. This female character has been adjusting herself with the hegemony of male patriarchy society. This novel explores the brutal behavior and mentality of male through the characterization of Dandekar. Kamala Markandya explores the ill treatment of men towards women. This novel portrays the sphere of male's ill treatment which considers women for fulfilling social and familial responsibility.

The notion of identity runs in the soul of the novel *Difficult Daughters*. This piece of fiction is woven around five women characters such as Kastoori, Virmati, Shakuntla, Swarnalatha and Ida. These women characters are presented with an ideology through the mind of the writer. While going through the characterization of the novel, we come to know about the course in these characters. Moreover, these characters depicts the three generations in their approaches. Kastoori's presentation depicts the colonial Indian and notion of identity at that time. Virmati's liberty signifies an insight but with a constrained approach within the boundaries of the family and on the other hand, Ida's depiction is shown as a modern girl.

Shashi Deshpande's fictional novel *That Long Silence* is a remarkable piece of writing which was written in 1989. This novel also portrays the male supremacy in the patriarchal social culture. It depicts the male tyranny even after getting the independence. This renders as a compromise rather than a perfect marriage relationship. Jaya's complicated life experiences explore the agonizing treatment of brutal male dominated society and her compact desires could not flourish in the social aura of the family. Jaya's acceptance of socio-psyche nature explores the submission and surrender of women at that time. The internal quest for an identity within the family leads to a liberal approach of the feminist world.

NOTION OF IDENTITY AND EXISTENCE OF WOMEN

In the womb of the feminist literary fictions, a quest for an identity appears at a very first look. Since the pre- independence period, we see a clear thirst and feminine concern in the history of English literature of India and not only through this platform but also with many contemporary ideologies over a long period. The struggle is looks clear between the social and cultural values where a woman has to prove herself as a devoted wife and mother by fulfilling all the requirements that set out by male patriarchy world. Women's quest for an identity in her own family, society and culture can be traced and felt by understanding the pages and layers of literature and society. The depiction renders the most agonized picture of so called "civilized society" in Indian Scenario. The Eastern perspective for women demands for a liberal approach within the family instead of radical in Western countries especially in America. It signals a concern of moralistic values rather than ethical which is poured on women to prove their chastity.

Many feminist writers communicated through writing in English literature in order to aware women for their civil and basic rights. Among that the identity comes at first as far as the human background is concerned. The preference is given to have liberty for men and women equally but the writings show the brutal and ill behavior of society which proved a survival point for oppressed women. In this context, at this time it can be said that it has become an international movement which is running globally in the minds of people especially through women who question for their basic notion and that is "identity."

CONCLUSION

This discourse in writing comes with a conclusion that Indian literature in English dealt with the episteme of the work of literature. Literature is a mirror of contemporary society so in the same sense, literature purely reflects the notion, struggle and crisis in society and culture in Indian scenario. Indian writers' attempt in representing and exploring the notion of female and Femininity looks marvelous but it renders still in doubtful and in critical state. The clouds of uncertainty create a foggy aura of social sphere for women as far as their rights and identity are concerned. Since the pre- independence period, various movements stroke out the tendency and traits but failed in making connection with the men in general. The present state in 21st century still enmeshed in the sphere of social and cultural bars. Even in the digital age, the critical state of women still reminds the brutal aspect of male patriarchy. Even after proving in the technology and digital age, women still need to survive in order to create a world for them. Indian English literature and feminist writers penetrate the social boundaries and defy the notion

of social cultural identity crisis. Literature still conceptualizes the notion of culture and society and makes aware with changing times.

REFERENCES

- Jagger, Alison M. (1983). *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Rowman & Allanheld, 1983. Print.
- Kapor, Manju (1998). *Difficult Daughters*. Penguin India. 1998. Print.
- Ngugiwa Thiong O. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Literature* (Zimbabwe, Heinmann, 1986) 16.
- Walker, Alice (1982). *The Color Purple*. Harcourt Brace Jovanvich, 1982. Print.

Corresponding Author

Karan Singh*

ks87english@gmail.com