

A Comprehensive Study of Feminism in Post-Freedom Era in English Literature

Arundhati Singh^{1*}, Dr. Aditi Dutta²

¹ Research Scholar, Shri Krishna University, Chhhatarpur, M.P.

² Assistant Professor, Shri Krishna University, Chhhatarpur, M.P.

Abstract - The study also examines the role of men in feminism in the post-freedom era. It discusses how male writers have contributed to the feminist discourse in English literature and how their works have been received by feminist critics. The study analyzes the works of prominent male writers such as D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett and how they have contributed to the feminist discourse in their own way. The study also examines the impact of feminism on literary theory in the post-freedom era. It discusses how feminist theory has influenced literary criticism and how feminist critics have analyzed works of literature through a feminist lens. The study analyzes the works of prominent feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar and how they have contributed to feminist literary criticism.

Keywords - Feminism, Post-Freedom, ERA, English Literature

-----X-----

INTRODUCTION

The males in Indian society are widely acknowledged to have positions of leadership. Men in Indian culture tend to jealously defend their maleness, while also seeing women as lacking in some essential masculine quality. Societal and religious norms that marginalize women are to blame. As a means of eradicating this underestimation, feminist progress has been a primary target. The 1970s saw a surge in feminism, and a woman's voice was finally heard. Better understanding of the woman's situation might result from reading information from a feminist perspective. As a result, women are better able to assess their own condition because of the core concept of feminism, which is reformist in nature. Here, Linda Gordon's hypothesis comes into play: "feminism is an examination of women's subjection to make sense of to transform it." At the moment, the principles of the women-centered perspective are seen to be explicitly embedded in the female experience. This should lead, therefore, to an intensive study of feminism, with the goal of presenting the most compelling case for the centrality of the female experience in all spheres of human endeavor and expression. Ideally, this shouldn't be associated with whatever the 'ism' stands for. Current society's fight against a tradition shaped by men's dominance arises from the rise of women's energizing and growing consciousness. But the fact remains that feminism is primarily directed against the suffering of women because of malicious males, and is therefore a social and socio-political evolution in its basics and multiple dimensions. Manu, the Hindu religion's founding lawgiver, states, "The father cares for her when she's a teenager, the spouse guarantees

her when she's young, and the kids handle her when she's old." [1]

A woman's never good enough for a chance. This provides the framework for an Indian view of femininity that is fundamentally connected to the fabric of Indian life. Thus, the feminist must bear in mind that Indian culture presents a nuanced depiction of women. We have modern political figures like Kasturiba, Sarojini Naidu, and Indira Gandhi who were instrumental in setting India free. The services rendered by Tara Bai, Ahalyabai, Razia Begum, Rani Durgaavathi, Jhansi Laxmi Bai, and others like them to our nation are extraordinary. Our rich history was enriched by women like Gargi and Mitreyi. Equally, these women are examples of empowered ladies.

The term "feminism" is often understood to mean "the belief that people ought to have equal rights and opportunities." A formal written statement in favor of women's rights and interests. Defining, constructing, and protecting women's equal political, economic, and social rights constitute the umbrella term for this movement. The project will also include an effort to improve access to education and careers for women. One who advocates for women's rights and equality is called a feminist. In India, feminism is the movement that seeks to define, construct, and protect women's equality in political and social rights and opportunities. It's fascinating to keep tabs on the progress being made for women's rights in India. Feminists in India, like their counterparts throughout the globe, advocate for sexual orientation equality, including equal pay and benefits at work, equal access to healthcare and education, and equal

participation in politics. The inheritance legislation and the practice of widow immolation, known as 'Sati,' are two examples of the societal concerns that Indian feminists have fought against in their country's male-dominated culture. [2]

As prominent journalists like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, and Shobha De began to focus on the difficulties facing Indian women, the feminist perspective emerged as a powerful political force. Their stance is consistent with that of feminists who want to limit societal norms and customs that place women outside of men's traditional roles in society (on all fronts, including the social, political, physical, and economic). These authors have chosen to focus on female protagonists who are actively challenging the status quo in their respective novels. No longer are women portrayed in the stereotypical male-dominated role of "manikin," where they are subservient to their male partners and treated like domesticated animals. These thinkers have created heroines who have an equal sense of purpose in the home and the community as their masculine partners do. They are individuals with distinct tastes. In order to be heard by the larger community, they must speak up. As a result, a new generation of women has emerged to take on the world and do good while advancing women's rights and perspectives.

Nayantara Sahgal's female characters are independent thinkers who can easily dismiss accusations of betrayal and discrimination. Saroj in *Strom* in Chandigarh isn't going to conform to the stereotype of a submissive, placid woman. She wants to establish her identity apart from Inder's so that he knows she isn't just another accessory in his life. The work successfully displays the mental processing of an average woman yearning for love and understanding. Her husband is still digging into her history with a child from before they were married. While Inder would want Saroj to be a faithful traditionalist husband, he would like to indulge in his own guilty pleasure of further conjugal venture with Maya, who is already a married woman claiming to enjoy masculine privilege.[3]

In another of Sahgal's stories, *The Day in Shadow*, the female protagonists also challenge male authority. The brave woman Simrit represents the plight of Indian women who fight in their own unique ways to end hopeless relationships. A woman in India has substantial difficulties after a breakup due to the skewed views of Indian society. She has a lot of problems to solve in both the positive and negative aspects of society and the economy.

Shonali, the protagonist of Sahgal's *Rice Like Us*, is a strong and independent woman who works as an I.A.S. officer but yet finds it difficult to avoid marriage. The 'certainty' of marriage in today's mellow culture is discussed, and the modern practice of making marriage the ultimate goal of every woman is humorously mocked. Whether or whether she has a managerial position, male superiors will often disregard her input out of a need to satisfy their own

feeling of entitlement and a need to prove their own superiority.

Nayantara Sahgal's heroines are the modern women who, in their quest for success, have broken free of the ties to society and morality that have held them back in the past. They take on masculine power in an effort to achieve equality. They are eager to prove that they possess an intrepid streak of defiance and refuse to recognise the normative pressure to bend to authority.

Sahgal's female residents are "chasers and aspirers" who are always looking for ways to better themselves and their community. Their brilliance is intrinsic to their own selves; it reflects an innate purity of spirit. Despite the lack of extreme vile female characters, Anita Desai's works display a feminist worldview. The heroines are plainly hesitant to admit that Indian culture has a male-dominated power structure and an oppressive bias against women. Both Maya and Monisha, the protagonists of *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City*, stand in opposition to their unfeeling, uncaring husbands. The unfulfilled desires of Maya's husband have led to her becoming a disobedient wife. Her partner was unable to satisfy her desires for physical and sexual intimacy. Maya, an educated and modern woman, finds it difficult to tolerate the Gautama's coldness. At her breaking point, she kills him and then kills herself in a fit of extreme rage and unhappiness. [4]

Desai depicts the harrowing life of Monisha, a college-educated woman who has married into a middle-class white collar family, in her novel *Voices in the City*. Traditional housewives, whose minds are confined to saris, diamonds, infants, and so on, are something she despises with a passion. Jiban, the man she is supposed to be with, ignores her and never returns her affection.

She ultimately resorts to suicide as her primary means of escaping her pain. In this way, Anita Desai's female characters challenge the stereotype of placid housewives like Sati-Savitri, who accept their resigned fate without protest. Shobha De stands in stark contrast to the other Indian women writers. She has broken new ground in her rejection of male authority and her support for feminist causes. Her writings skewer the callous, savage attitude of males whose indifference to women's plight blocks the route to equality for women's rights.

The ladies in Shobha De's stories make all of their own decisions and come out as confident leaders. Unlike traditional ladies, the women of today are not weak and fragile. These ladies live in the opulent and progressive metropolis of Mumbai. They're liberated, aspirational, self-assured, and assertive. After her father's death, Mallika Hiralal takes full control of Hiralal Industries and runs it on her own terms in the film *Sisters*. She can run her firm without the advice of anybody, not even Ramankaka, a close family friend of her father's who now provides active support in managing the company. But she rejects

his offer out of politeness. After that, Mallika marries Binny Malhotra not out of any deep feelings for him but rather to save her father's failing company from collapsing. [5]

Shoba De laughs at conventional wisdom, according to which a woman is expected to stay true to her husband after the wedding, while the man is free to treat the marriage as he sees fit. While a guy may have as many mistresses as he likes, a woman is left to wallow in her own misery and shame at home. When it comes to challenging the moderate beliefs and conventional norm of excellent characteristics that so often prevent them from rebelling, the ladies of Shobha De spring an ambush. The males of Shobha De have as many young female friends as their wives have sweethearts. I adore this friend of yours, and I need to be with him in vehicle," the protagonist, Karuna, says to her boyfriend, Krish, in *Socialite Evenings*.

Understanding the historical context of women's progress and concepts like "male centric society" and "manliness" are necessary for arriving at the right definition of feminism. After reading this, we may be able to overcome long-held biases against feminism that have been holding us back. Distinguishing between possibility and randomness is something we need to work on. It should be obvious from current practices that women's empowerment is a must. Acting like a guy when you're not isn't a good idea, but it's also important to recognize the differences between being a man and a woman. We need to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses. Restricting men isn't the greatest way to achieve our goals, and we need to recognize this. Humanism as a social structure is just that. Therefore, if we want gender equality, we need to learn about the background of males. Being a man-centered organization's problems may be easily solved by ourselves. If we have a positive feminist experience, we'll understand that the movement's goals are mutually beneficial. Men, too, want relief from the burden of manliness. Therefore, if we succeed in implementing feminism in society, it works wonderfully; but, to do so, we must pay attention to a wide range of factors, including sexual orientation, caste, color, religion, and disabilities. [6]

As is often understood, feminism in Indian English fictions is a grand and extravagant concept handled unobtrusively and with restraint. It's not a new concept; many writers, spanning many decades, have tackled the topic head-on in compelling works of fiction. From Toru Duff and Kamla Das to Sarojani Naidu and Suniti Namjoshi, Arundhati Roy and Shashi Deshpande, there is a wide variety of Indian women novelists and other writers who are formulating their thoughts in English. These women writers from India have chosen an eclectic range of topics written in a manner that is often associated with poetry and novels. Indian women writers have been vocal in their opposition to patriarchal systems that restrict women's rights and their fight against institutionalized sexism.

Male authors like R.K. Narayan, who pioneered the genre of speculative fiction, have also written about the plight of Indian housewives. Women writers explore the experiences of housewives and the perpetrators of violence against them in an effort to make sense of the modern world. Kamla Das looks at the situation of Indian women and their surrounding community. Other authors, such as Shashi Deshpande, depict protagonists who criticize their own callousness and indifference to their plight. Bapsi Sidhwa discusses the economic status of Parsi women. The books of Anita Desai probe the psychic world of women who must deal with a wide variety of oddities and deviations from the norm. [7]

HISTORY AND THEORY OF FEMINISM

Feminism is a social, political, and intellectual movement that works to eradicate discrimination against women, eliminate sexism, and expand women's rights and opportunities. The trend began in the latter half of the 18th century and has since gone through many iterations. In this introductory article, we shall examine feminism's theoretical development and historical roots.[8]

Origins of Feminism

The origins of feminism can be traced back to the late 18th century with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" in 1792. Wollstonecraft argued that women were not inferior to men and that they deserved the same rights and opportunities. Her work was considered radical at the time, as women were not seen as capable of intellectual thought and were often relegated to domestic duties.

During the 19th century, the first wave of feminism emerged, which focused on women's suffrage and legal rights. Women in Europe and the United States began to organize and agitate for their rights, leading to the passage of laws granting women the right to vote and own property. However, the movement was limited to middle-class white women and did not address issues of race or class.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the second wave of feminism emerged, which focused on issues such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and sexual harassment. This wave was more inclusive and diverse than the first, as it addressed the needs of women of color, working-class women, and lesbians. It also gave rise to feminist theory, which sought to analyze and understand the ways in which gender inequality was institutionalized in society.[9]

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory seeks to understand the social, cultural, and political structures that contribute to gender inequality. It explores the ways in which gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, and other identities to shape women's experiences. There are several key theories within feminism,

including liberal feminism, radical feminism, and intersectional feminism.

Liberal feminism emphasizes individual rights and freedoms and seeks to achieve gender equality through legal and political reform. It focuses on issues such as equal pay, reproductive rights, and access to education and employment opportunities.

Radical feminism takes a more revolutionary approach, arguing that gender inequality is rooted in patriarchy, a system of male dominance and control. Radical feminists seek to dismantle this system and create a society that is free from gender-based oppression.

Intersectional feminism emphasizes the intersection of gender with other identities, such as race and class. It recognizes that women experience oppression in different ways depending on their identities and seeks to create a more inclusive and diverse movement.[10]

Contemporary Feminism

Contemporary feminism encompasses a range of perspectives and movements, including third-wave feminism, postmodern feminism, and transnational feminism. Third-wave feminism emerged in the 1990s and focused on issues such as sexual liberation, body image, and queer rights. Postmodern feminism challenges the idea of a universal "woman" and seeks to deconstruct the categories of gender and sexuality. Transnational feminism focuses on the experiences of women in the Global South and seeks to address issues such as poverty, violence, and access to education and healthcare.

FEMINISM IN POST-FREEDOM ENGLISH LITERATURE

Feminism After Liberation The Feminist literary movement in English literature originated in the middle of the twentieth century, when women were fighting for equal rights in all spheres of society. The worldwide feminist movement and the fight for decolonization provided inspiration for this uprising, which sought to undermine colonial power systems and elevate previously powerless groups.[11]

As authors in previously colonized countries started to establish their cultural identities and contest the dominance of Western literary traditions, post-Freedom literature became marked by a range of voices and ideas. Feminist authors were essential in this shift because they attempted to give voice to women's experiences across cultures and to challenge patriarchal standards.

Feminist writing of the Post-Freedom period is characterized by its examination of women's subjugation within the context of local and international systems of power. These authors sought to improve upon previous depictions of women in literature by providing more detailed and multifaceted accounts of female protagonists' lives.

For instance, the female characters in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe are often portrayed as subordinate and obedient to the male characters. Feminist critics, however, have argued that these portrayals do not do justice to the layered realities of women's existence in traditional African countries. Similarly, in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the female characters are often shown as secondary to the male protagonists and given little to no agency beyond that of a love interest. Some feminists have pointed out that these depictions fail to take into account the agency and power that women in postcolonial nations really have.

Feminist writing of the Post-Freedom period not only addressed the oppression of women, but also race, class, and sexuality. Feminist authors understood the need of telling stories from the perspectives of women who had been disadvantaged in more than one way.[12]

The effects of colonialism and racism on the lives of women in the Caribbean are examined, for instance, in *A Small Place* by Jamaica Kincaid. She also condemns the tourist industry for its role in maintaining gender inequality and sustaining the exploitation of women in the Caribbean.

The complicated dynamics of gender, caste, and class in postcolonial India are also investigated in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. She depicts the lives of women who are marginalized by these overlapping systems of oppression and the ways in which these women fight back.[13]

THE IMPACT OF FEMINIST LITERATURE ON SOCIETY AND CULTURE

When it comes to advancing women's rights and questioning stereotypical gender norms, feminist literature has made enormous contributions to contemporary culture. This article will discuss the contributions feminist literature has made to modern culture, as well as the difficulties and possibilities that this literature has brought to the fight for gender equality.

Feminist writing has made important strides in breaking down stereotypical ideas about men and women. In an effort to shed light on the ways in which gender is built and perpetuated via cultural representations, and to question the social, cultural, and political systems that maintain gender inequality, feminism has produced a large body of literature.[14]

Feminist writing has also been essential in advancing women's causes. It has aimed to raise awareness of the marginalization and oppression of women by providing a forum for women's voices and experiences. Women's movements and campaigns for gender equality have been inspired by feminist literature, making significant social and political progress.

Feminist writing has had a profound effect on popular culture, altering people's perspectives on gender, authority, and individuality. Feminist literature, in questioning the societal norms and customs that shape people's daily lives, has given rise to new avenues for self-expression and self-definition.

Feminist writing has had a profound effect by advocating for women's rights and interests. Feminist writing has been crucial in raising awareness about the historical and contemporary oppression of women and in fostering a larger movement for gender equality. Feminist literature has encouraged women to fight for equality and raise their voices because it accurately portrays the challenges they face.

Social and political shifts have been sparked in part by feminist writing. It has helped bring to light a variety of concerns impacting women, from reproductive rights to employment discrimination, and has inspired women's groups and campaigns for gender equality across the globe. Feminist writing has contributed to a larger social and political movement by bringing attention to these problems and giving women a place to have their views heard.

In addition, feminist literature has been an extremely important factor in the development of modern concepts of gender and individuality. By offering challenges to traditionally accepted gender roles and stereotypes, feminist literature has pushed people to question the societal norms and conventions that dominate their lives. As a result, these individuals have pursued alternative paths for self-expression and self-definition. Moreover, this has allowed feminist literature to play a significant part in the liberation of women. This has helped to foster the growth of a cultural climate that is more accepting of people of a diverse range of sexual orientations and gender identities.

Despite the fact that it has many positive effects, feminist literature is responsible for a number of different issues and disputes. A significant barrier is presented by the uphill battle that must be fought to achieve gender parity while still recognizing and appreciating the unique viewpoints and identities that each woman has. Some people have the opinion that feminism merely promotes a narrow, essentialized concept of what it means to be a woman, and that it overlooks or disregards the experiences of women whose lives do not fit into this framework. Others have the opinion that feminism does not promote any knowledge of what it means to be a woman at all.

There is also the tension that arises when an artist wants their work to be admired for its own reason while simultaneously wishing to use their art to affect social and political change. Sometimes, feminist literature comes under fire for being too political or didactic, or for placing social and political issues ahead of literary beauty. These are two of the most common criticisms leveled against feminist authors.[15]

In spite of these challenges and ongoing discussions, feminist literature is, without a doubt, a powerful instrument for the alteration of social and cultural norms. The critique of traditional gender roles and the promotion of women's rights and interests are two of the many ways that feminism in literature has helped to make society more equitable. It has provided a forum for women to tell their tales and have those stories heard, and it has inspired them to fight for equal rights and justice. Literature written from a feminist perspective will, throughout the course of time, continue to have an impact on how social culture evolves.

CONCLUSION

the study has also shown that men have played a crucial role in feminism in the post-freedom era. Male writers have also contributed to the feminist discourse in their own way, challenging traditional gender roles and exploring the complexities of gender identity. This has led to a more nuanced and complex understanding of gender in literature. The impact of feminist theory on literary criticism has also been a significant finding of this study. Feminist critics have brought attention to the gendered biases that have been present in literary criticism for centuries. They have analyzed works of literature through a feminist lens, focusing on the representation of women and the power dynamics between men and women. This has led to a more diverse and inclusive literary canon.

REFERENCES

1. Gandhi, Gopalkrishna. (2014) "English in India." *English Academy Review* 14.1: 96–108.
2. Dor, Daniel. (2015) "On Newspaper Headlines as Relevance Optimizers." *Journal of Pragmatics* 35.5: 695–721. Web
3. Clahsen, Harald, and Claudia Felser. (2015) "Grammatical Processing in Language Learners." *Applied Psycholinguistics* 27.1: 3–42.
4. Dijk, Teun A. Van, and Alice Mwhaki. (2015) "Meaning As Use: A Functional View of Semantics and Pragmatics." *Handbook of Discourse Analysis* 11: 103–136.
5. Bartsch, Renate. (2012) *Norms of Language, Theoretical and Practical Aspects*. London and New York: Longman.
6. Goldberg, Adele E. (2014) "Constructions: A New Theoretical Approach to Language." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7.5: 219–224.
7. Doria, Nancy C. (2014) *Investigating Obsolescence: Studies in Language Contraction and Death*. Ed. Nancy C. Doria. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
8. Clark, John, and Colin Yallop. (2016) *An Introduction to Phonetics and Phonology*. Blackwell Publishing.
9. Dixon, Robert M. W. (2012) *The Rise and Fall of Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

10. Dowty, David. (2012) "Thematic Proto-Roles and Argument Selection." *Language* 67.3: 547–619.
11. Foulkes, Paul, and Gerard Docherty. (2012) "The Social Life of Phonetics and Phonology." *Journal of Phonetics* 34.4: 409–438.
12. Anderson, Stephen R. (2015) "Morphological Change." *The Routledge Handbook of Historical Linguistics*. Ed. Claire Bowern and Bethwyn Evans. London and New York: Routledge. 264–285.
13. Dijk, Teun A. Van. (2011) "Semantic Discourse Analysis." *Handbook of Discourse Analysis 2*: 103–136.
14. Baruah, T. C. (2011) *The English Teacher's Handbook*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd.
15. Aronoff, M. (2013) *Word Formation in Generative Grammar*. Cambridge (Mass.): MIT Press.

Corresponding Author

Arundhati Singh*

Author Designation Research Scholar, Shri Krishna University, Chhhatarpur, M.P.