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REVIEW ARTICLE

A STUDY ON FEMINISM IN INDIA

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A Study on Feminism in India

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Women's role in Pre-colonial social structures reveals that feminism was theorized differently in India than in the West. In India, women's issues first began to be addressed when the state commissioned a report on the status of women to a group of feminist researchers and activists. The report recognized the fact that in India, women were oppressed under a system of structural hierarchies and injustices. During this period, Indian feminists were influenced by the Western debates being conducted about violence against women. However, due to the difference in the historical and social culture of India, the debate in favor of Indian women had to be conducted creatively and certain Western ideas had to be rejected.^[9] Women's issues began to gain an international prominence when the decade of 1975–1985 was declared the United Nations Decade for Women.

Historical circumstances and values in India have caused feminists to develop a feminism that differs from Western feminism. For example, the idea of women as "powerful" is accommodated into patriarchal culture through religion, which has retained visibility in all sections of society. This has provided women with traditional "cultural spaces." Furthermore, in the West the notion of "self" rests in competitive individualism where people are described as "born free yet everywhere in chains." In India the individual is usually considered to be just one part of the larger social collective. Survival of the individual is dependent upon cooperation, and self-denial for the greater good is valued.

Indian women negotiate survival through an array of oppressive patriarchal family structures: age, ordinal status, relationship to men through family of origin, marriage and procreation as well as patriarchal attributes. Examples of patriarchal attributes include: dowry, siring sons etc., kinship, caste, community, village, market and the state. It should however be noted that several communities in India, such as the Nairs of Kerala, Shettys of Mangalore, certain Maratha clans, and Bengali families exhibit matriarchal tendencies. In these communities, the head of the family is the oldest woman rather than the oldest man. Sikh culture is also regarded as relatively gender-neutral.

The heterogeneity of the Indian experience reveals that there are multiple patriarchies, contributing to the existence of multiple feminisms. Hence, feminism in India is not a singular theoretical orientation; it has changed over time in relation to historical and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women, and women as a group. The widely used definition is "An awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at work and within the family, and conscious action by women and men to change this situation." Acknowledging sexism in daily life and attempting to challenge and eliminate it through deconstructing mutually exclusive notions of femininity and masculinity as biologically determined categories opens the way towards an equitable society for both men and women.

The male and female dichotomy of polar opposites with the former oppressing the latter at all times is refuted in the Indian context because it was men who initiated social reform movements against various social evils. Patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies. Relational hierarchies between women within the same family are more adverse. Here women are pitted against one another. Not all women are powerless at all times.

There have been intense debates within the Indian women's movements about the relationship between Western and Indian feminisms. Many Indian feminists simultaneously claim a specific "Indian" sensitivity as well as an international feminist solidarity with groups and individuals worldwide. The rise of liberal feminism in the West in the 1970s focused deeply on demands for equal opportunities in education and employment, as well as ending violence against women. To a large extent, the emerging feminist movement in India was influenced by Western ideals. These called for education and equal rights, but also adapted their appeals to local issues and concerns, such as dowry-related violence against women, Sati, sex selective abortion and custodial rape. Some Indian feminists have suggested that these issues are not specifically "Indian" in nature but rather a reflexion of a wider trend of patriarchal oppression of women.

Women were not recognized as individuals or autonomous beings. Women had to face many obstacles in the academic circuit, which symbolizes the effects of an educational culture that radically restricts the scope of women's intellectual exposure. Woolf identifies the certain information of being denied access to buildings or ideas as another type of infringement on the freedom of the female mind. This exclusion is a more radical kind of information, one that disturbs not just as a single thought or review but the life-long development of an individual or the historical development of an intellectual tradition. In order to prepare for the lecture, women and Fiction the narrator of 'A room of One's Own', goes to British Library for consulting book to her chagrin, she is surprised to see that men have written a lot of books about women but no books has been found on men either by male or female authors. The male authors highlight the strength and weakness of women. They did actually celebrate the virtues and vices of women.

Ashraf Behan first entered into the world of art and earned through writing. She was forced to earn her livelihood when she lost her husband. Women abstained from the world of imagination so to look after their household duties. Women work a lot from early morning to late night; still their work is not being paid. Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.

Art did not give way to activism in the writings of men: as they were more or less didactic. In contrast, women were more concerned with activism as a tool of social change. Activism is an, 'effective agent of social change than electoral politics.' Women writers believed that art is a major weapon for social change. Many of the women writers have moved towards the noble profession of activism through art.

The study shows feminism is a struggle for equality of women, an effort to make women become like men. Feminism is seen as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist aggression, such as oppositional definition presents. Feminism as the necessary resistance to the patriarchal power, logically then it is a theory of imagination.

Eisenstein interprets the term feminist or feminism as, *"In my understanding of the term 'feminist' then I see an element of visionary futurist thoughts. This encompasses a concept of social transformation that as part of the eventual liberation of women with change all human relationships for the better. Although, centrally about women, their experience and condition. Feminism is also fundamentally about men and about social change."*

FEMINISM IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

To understand and sympathizes the sensibility of feminism it is important to observe that Indian feminist present altogether different picture sequence. The long

and painful suffering of women, the bitter struggle for the exception of the idea of equal pay for equal work, the continuing battles on behalf of woman's right to abortion and to practice of birth control are some of the visible marks of the gender inequality that has persisted and that woman had to fight for inspire of the commitments they were made under circumstances. Feminist situation in India possess a dissimilar dispensation. Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. the several hierarchy within the family concreting age, sex and ordinal position ,congenial and fine relationship or within the community referring to the caste lineage, learning, occupation and relationship with ruling power have been maintained very strictly.

Describing the reaction to the feminist movement in India, Suma Chitnis writes, "The most distinctive features of this movement that it was initiated by man. It was only towards the end of the century the women joined the fray. The list of who, champion the cause of women is long –Raja Ram Manohar Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Matahari, Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, Karve to mention a few. The record of the reform they undertook to achieve is impressive. It reveals that their efforts spanned action to abolish the practice of Sati, the custom of child marriage, custom of distinguishing widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu widows and many other civil practices that affected women.

The feminist thought and feminist movement in the west have some influence on the woman's movement in the developing country like India. Yet, feminism as it exists today in India has gone beyond its western counter parts. Uma Narayan rightly puts it third world feminism is not mindless mimicking of western agenda in one clear and simple sense. Due to historical and cultural specifications of the region in India has to think in terms of its agenda and strategies. In the Indian context several feminist have realized that the subject of women's invasion in India should not be reduced to contradiction between men and women. The woman in order to literate herself and advance needs to empower herself to confess different institutional structures and cultural practices that subject herself to patriarchal domination and comfort.

Indian writing in English is gaming ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction it has heralded a new era, has earned many laurels and abroad. Indian woman writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal

Due to historical and cultural specifications of the region, the feminist movement in India had to think in terms of its Agenda and strategies. In the Indian context several feminist have realized that the subject of women's invasion in India should not be reduced to the contradictions between men & women. The woman in order to literate herself and advance needs to empower herself to confess different institutional

structures and cultural practices that subject herself to patriarchal domination and comfort.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the study shows feminism is a struggle for equality of women, an effort to make women become like men. The agonistic definition of feminism sees it as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist aggression. This study reveals the growth of Indian Feminism and its development. Indian women writers have placed the problems of Indian women in general and they have proved their place in the international literature.

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