Feminist Mode in Major Indian English Fiction: - The Analytical Review

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Abstract: -- Indian society reflected in literature of this age is passing through a phase of transition. Nothing seems to hold for long time. Feminism means the advocacy of women's right on the ground of equality and gender both in family as well as in society. It challenges patriarchal thoughts in society. Feminism is often described as a struggle against all form of patriarchal sexist oppression. It has also come to mean as movement in support of the principle: the women should have the same rights and opportunities- legal, political, social and economical as men.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism means the advocacy of women's right on the ground of equality and gender both in family as well as in society. It challenges patriarchal thoughts in society. Feminism is a range of political, social movements and ideology that have a same goal; to define, establish and achieve equal political, social and economical and personal right for women.

In literary terms, “Feminism” means challenging the patriarchal cannon, deconstructing phallocentric creative and critical discourse; decoding gender as an organizing principle of experience and relating forms of feminine articulation of changing external circumstances and association. Feminist theory studies the structural inequality of women caused by systematic social injustice.

Indian society reflected in literature of this age is passing through a phase of transition. Nothing seems to hold for long time. Things are falling apart; tradition fails to hold individuality in check. For long, woman has felt that she deserves a better deal at the hands of man. There are three phases in women's writing- male superiority, protest and displacement.

Post-independence Indian English fiction retains the momentum which it had during the Gandhian era. The notable development occurred with emergence of an entire School of women novelist. The leading figures among them are Kamala Markandaya, Nayanthara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. These women novelist have awareness which comes because of their acquaintance with the life of East as well as West. Their high education and intellectual strands has sharpened their observation of life and have imparted a psychological depth of the writings.

Consequently these women novelist have been able to create interesting personage who successfully expose the oppression inflicted on women in society. They revealed the fact that society requires a massive change to avert the suffering of women. Most postmodern Indian women novelist indulge in exploring the feminine consciousness of the women characters, their evolution towards and awakened conscience and how eventually this leads to enrichment of their inner self in a male dominated society.

The women in their novels are portrayed as cultural backbone of family due to their capability of providing physical, emotional and cultural vitality to their respective family.

Feminism is often described as a struggle against all form of patriarchal sexist oppression. It has also come to mean as movement in support of the principle: the women should have the same rights and opportunities- legal, political, social and economical as men. Feminist try to identify the deep rooted cause of suppression of women and endeavor to remove them.
They tried to bring about a change in society in which women are accepted as equal in all respect to men in sharing of equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities. Most of the women have shown greater interest in analyzing and portraying women characters than male novelist do, an important advantage of the feminine sensibility is the projection of Indian women from all sections of Indian society, a portrayal which is free from male distortion and prejudice. The artistic sensibility of Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayanathara Sehgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande is thoroughly annealed with their feminine sensibility. It controls and shapes their creative aspirations and get filter through their themes, characters, attitude and general tenor.

However feminist in Indian context has definitely reached its Zenith with the effort of above mentioned Indian women novelist, whose protagonists free themselves from the traditional roles of daughters, sisters, wife and mother and emerge as individual in their own right.

II. THEME OF FEMINISM

Feminist challenges the traditional view of women as the weaker sex and the belief that her place is in the kitchen. It assumes that the equality of sexes and seeks to achieve women's role in society with such a quality warrants. This has led to a rethinking on gender relation reflected in literature and in life. Feminist movements are partly rooted in transformations in social experience that challenge widely shared categories of social meaning and explanation.

Feminism can be identified as the liberation of women from social taboos and male dominance. Jane Flex in fact considers gender as the basis of feminism: “Gender relations enter into and are constituent element in every aspect of human experience”. Gender relation is a category meant to capture a complex set of social process.

Feminism is often identified as movement which began in late nineties, but the history of the struggles for women's equality, though sporadic, is older than that. Feminism is in India can be traced to the days of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and the Atmiya Sabha he started in 1914. The emancipation of Indian women was a byproduct of Gandhiji’s non-cooperation movement. The Brahma Samaj led the movement of emancipation.

The ancient rules of parda were broken with Gandhiji’s non-cooperation movement, women were encouraged to come forward and participate in the life of the nation. With the spread of education there was a gradual erosion of faith in traditional customs and values but it took some time for the modern idea and western culture to fill the vacuum so created. The gulf between the Indian and western culture created a transitional society which was neither fully modern nor fully traditional, and the woman walked in.

The conflict of tradition and modernity is favorite theme for Khushwant Singh, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. Women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Nayanatara Sehgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande are preoccupied with the problem of adjustment. They have been trying to explore the feelings of girls who fall a victim of the conflict between the traditional and the newly acquired values.

The feminist theory is dependent upon and reflects certain set of social experiences. The Indian English writers have recovered and explore the aspect of social relations that has been suppressed, unarticulated or denied within the dominant male view points

III. VIEW OF INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS

The views of women novelist are explained below:-

A. NAYANTHARA SEHGAL

Nayanathara Sehgal is a writer with feminist concerns seeking independent existence of women. She sees women as victims of conventional Indian society engaged in the quest of identity. She revolts against the suffering caused to the women in their mismatched marriages which only bring domestic turmoil, anger and suffering.

Her protagonists are pained to break away from traditions because escape does not necessarily bring security. Her works have a strong realistic bass and reflects the changing values of society. There is immense struggle for liberty whether it is personal or political. She places her women characters as rebellion against parochial society and depicts the struggle.

It is felt that the patriarchal practices reduce women to inferior social beings who have been made so since the time unknown. Man looks women as the weaker sex and treats her as an object for pleasure. Her novels revealed as the ever increasing injustice to women. Along with other
writers she raises her voice against inequality, oppression and male domination.

She places educated female characters in conflict with parochial society and depicts their struggle. She examines in her novels the tension between traditional Hindu culture and predicament of contemporary Indian women. Her works are the study of social forces. She places them in their respective domestic life and portrays their desire to freedom from social shackles. She rebels against idea of women treated as a mere possession.

The achievement of Nayanthara Sehgal as a writer is quite an impressive one. She has made her mark with her seven novels; “A Time To Be Happy”, “This Time Of Morning”, “Storm In Chandigarh”, “The Day In Shadow” , “Rich Like Us”, “A Situation In New Delhi”, “Plans For Departure”.

She has written autobiographies “Prison and Chocolate Cake” and “Fear Set Free”. She has also presented a book of history, “History of Freedom Movement”. Active enough both as novelist and as champion of emancipated women, she is essentially writer who extend and enriches Indian creative tradition that includes, among numerous others.

**B. ANITA DESAI**

It was different from those of Nayanthara Sehgal. She writes about the psychic life of her character whose revolt is the result of jeopardized values and beliefs. However they struggle to attain a matured outlook. Through Maya she reveals social fatalism. She does not concern herself with social norms till they clash with the individuals. She depicts women’s plight in modern society and has psychic turmoil which indicates “Awakening”, Maya, in “Cry The Peacock” dies in her quest to find fuller life.

Her novels, like those of other Indian English writers, are also rooted in reality and portray a complex society. The novel stresses on inability of an individual refusing to accept the imposing norms. Post-independence status of women underwent great changes forcing them to self-awareness. Instead of the presenting her protagonist in conflict with society, the novelist chooses to focus on conflict of mind.

There is a conflict between traditional values and westernized ideas. She reflects social reality and delves deep into the problem of patriarchal family. The difference between her and other writers of protest fiction is that she observes social reality from a psychological plane and not as a social reformer.

She has written many novels. Some of her important novels are “Cry the Peacock”, “Bye Bye Blackbird”, “In Custody”, “Fire on the Mountain”, “Voices in the City” and “A Village by the Sea”.

In “Cry The Peacock”, she depicted the psychosomatic growth of a female character who cannot cope up with the practical world of the husband and feels dejected, forlorn and demoralized which ultimately gains catastrophe, when the wife kills her husband out of frustration.

A common characteristic in her novel is the protagonist’s desires of freedom from all social norms. Each one of them has distaste for social responsibility. They display certain conflicts but like to remain independent individuals. Her protagonists are powerful characters who break down under stress, but nevertheless remain staunch individuals. They are people born out of loveless marriages, those who rebel by escaping from reality into their own words of fantasy.

**C. KAMALA MARKANDAYA**

Kamala Markandaya is a post-independence female novelist. The intimate relation of her to the South Indian peasants- women is visible in her novels. She is modern writers of traditional fiction. Internationally, known as the writer of “Nectar in a Sieve”. She commands a wide reputation as a creator of extremely readable novels. Her novels are mainly concerned with human relationships and women’s predicament.

She is an expertise writer and is chiefly regarded as the most gifted Indian English women novelist. She is concerned with plight, status and attitude of women in India under the stress of changing social, economic, modern, spiritual and political forces. She tries to awaken the consciousness of women against tradition oriented society and communicates the real existence of women. She is the most outstanding modern novelist who deals with “Feminism”.

She has written many novels. Her first novel “Nectar in a Sieve”, an Indian peasant’s narrative of her difficult life, remains her most popular work. Her next book “Some Inner Fury” portrays the troubled relationship between an educated Indian woman whose brother is an anti-
British terrorist, and a British civil servant who loves her.

Marriage provides the setting for conflict of values in “A Silence of Desire”, in which religious middle class women seek medical treatment without her husband’s knowledge from Hindu faith healer rather than from a doctor. Later works by her includes “A Handful of Rice”, “The Coffee Dam”, “The Nowhere Man”, ”Two Virgins”, “The Golden Honeycomb” and “Pleasure City”.

Her work was inspired by crusading spirit for the welfare of humanity and human sufferings. In her later novels, she reveals the evils of society. The process of modernization is the point of revolt and traditional way of life is a recurring theme in her novels.

D. SHASHI DESHPANDE

As an author of 70s and 80s, she mirrors a realistic picture of contemporary middle class, educated urban women. Her novels portray the miserable plight of contemporary middle class urban women and also analyze how their lot has not changed much even in the 20th century. She has given bold attempt at giving voice to the disappointment and frustration of women despite her vehement denial of being feminist.

She defines freedom for Indian women within the Indian social cultural value system and institutions. She has throughout restricted the temptation of creating strong female heroes and has presented the Indian women as facing the wary real dilemma of having to choose between modernity and convention. She has laid the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation operating within the family and male centered Indian society at large.

Her feminism does not uproot the women from her background but tries to expose the different ideological elements that shape her. These include religious and cultural elements - myths, legends, rituals and ceremonies as well as social and psychological factors e.g. women's subordinate position in the family and her restricted sexuality. The protagonists of her novels are always modern, educated and independent woman.

In her novels we observe a change corresponding to the change in contemporary society. We notice that the plot in her novel begins with an unconventional marriage and later on deals with the problems of adjustment and conflict in the mind of the female protagonist and ultimately portrays the endeavor to submit to the traditional roles. In her novels, she tried with sincerity and honesty to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional distress syndrome of women.

She has written a number of books and novels. Some of them are: “The Dark Holds No Terrors”, “Roots and the Shadows”, “That Long Silence”, “The Binding Vine”, “A Matter of Time” and “Come Up and Be Dead”.

She portrays modern, educated and career oriented middle class women who are sensitive to changing times and situation. A glimpse of her novel reveals how pignantly she expresses the frustration and disappointment women experience in social and cultural oppression in the male dominated society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Indian writers portray instances of social exploitation that breed emotions of anger, rage, resentment, revolt and violence to awaken readers to present realities and there revolt reveals the contemporary social values. Their characters use language to reveal their protest, conflict and despair as desired by the novelist.

The Indian English novelists unmask the objectionable aspects of contemporary life. They use the novel as a medium to debunk the myths in society which perpetuate exploitation and moral duplicity and challenge social propriety. They want their protagonist to refuse to submit to the discrimination, corruption and exploitation at any level and draw the reader’s attention to the plight of the socially harassed communities of the people.

A major development in modern Indian fiction has been the growth of a feminist or women centered approach, an approach that seeks to project and interpret experience from the viewpoint of a feminine consciousness and sensitivity. Feminism assumes that women experience the world differently from men and write out of their different perspective.

Women in India have started questioning the age old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hand of men. They have shown their worth in field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing them today without any hurdles. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women’s writing
has seen delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationship.

In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas, and marital bliss and the women's role at home is a central focus. It is interesting to see that emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement.

Women are more assertive, more liberated in the views and more articulated in their expression than the women of past were. She has started asserting her substantial identity in action not in words but through her creative writings. The works of these writers are “Devi”, “The Thousand Faces of Night” and “Sita” by Gita Harisharan. Shashi Deshpande’s “The Dark Holds No Terror” and “Lucy” of J M Coetzee.

Women writers have established a coherent class structure, one of assertion of identity and defiance of male supremacy and protest at being subordinate by man. Today the works of Kamla Markandeya, Shashi Deshpande, Nayanthara Sehgal, Anita Desai, Shobha De and many more have left an incredible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English Literature.

V. REFERENCES


