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FEMINISM IN INDIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is a social movement that purposes the equal rights and opportunities for women in society. Feminism is to look towards women as human beings and to think about their problems, dreams and needs. Feminism is the belief that all people should be treated equally in legal economic and social areas – regardless of gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other similar pre-dominant identifying traits. Feminism is a socio-political movement which advocates involved active participation by women to demand for their rights. It is a movement which is fought against female oppression under patriarchy. The feminist ideologies also influenced the English literature in India. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Women’s writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The majority of the novels depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated housewives and oppressed lives of women of the lower classes. Feminism has been used by the women novelists. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that she is not helpless and is not dependent. They feel that woman is equal to man. Indian women writers explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the theme that range from childhood to woman hood. Through their novels, they told what actually feminism is. These women writers told that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of women in silence.

**Key Words:** Aggression, Feminism, Patriarchy, Syndrome.

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The term ‘feminism’ is derived from the Latin word ‘femina’ meaning woman. Feminism is a support for women’s rights, status and power at par with men on the grounds of ‘equality of sexes’. Woman should have the same social, economic and political rights as men. The word feminism refers to our intense awareness of identity as a woman and interacts in feminine problems.

Chaman Nahal, a noted critic observes the basic concept of feminism as, “I define feminism as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome, there is dependence syndrome whether it is husband, father, the community or a religions group when women will free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes.” (3) Feminism is not only the movement which is run by women for women but it is a bid of human liberation movements which encourages society to think that women also are human beings. It is a struggle for equality of woman, an effort to make woman become like men. Feminism is seen as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist aggression.

Eisenstien 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 relationship for better. Although, centrally about woman, their experience and condition. Feminism is also fundamentally about men and about social change (2).

Feminism is a political perception based on i) gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, injustice and ii) that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of the biological necessity but is produced by the cultural contradictions of gender differences. Feminism is a social movement sought to redress the imbalance in society by providing women with same rights and opportunities as men in order to be able to take their rightful place in the world. Janet Richards says "The essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that women suffer from systematic social injustice, because of their sex, the proposition is to be regardless as constituting feminism." (4)

Feminism in Indian literature, as can be most commonly conceived as a much sublime and over the top concept, which is most subtly handled under restricted circumstances with advancement of time, however feminism had been accepted in India, setting aside the patriarchal predominance to certain extent. The history of feminism in India can be divided into three phases, the first phase, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, initiated when male European colonists began to speak out against the social evils of Sati. The second phase, from 1915 to Indian independence when Gandhi incorporated women's movements into the Quit India movement and Independent women's organization began to emerge, and finally third phase, post independence, which has focused on fair treatment of woman at home after marriage, in the work place and right to political party.

Indian feminists present altogether different picture sequence. The long and painful sufferings of women, the bitter struggle for the conception of the idea of equal pay for equal work, the continuing battles on behalf of woman's rights to any gender inequality. Feminist situation in India possesses 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.

Unlike the western feminist movement India's movement was initiated by men and later joined by women. Much of the early reforms for Indian women were conducted by men. However by the late 19.C they were joined in the efforts by their wives, sisters, daughters, protégées and other individuals directly affected by campaigns such as those carried out for women's education. Describing the reaction of the feminist movement in India, Suma Chitnis writes, "The most distinctive feature of this movement is that it was initiated by man. It was only towards the end of the century the woman joined the fray. The list of two champions of the cause of women is long - Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Phule Ranade, Agarkar, Ranade Karve to mention few. The record of the reform they undertook to achieve in 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 upper caste Hindu widows and lots of other evil practices that affected woman." (1) By the late 20<sup>th</sup> C women gained greater autonomy through the formation of independent women's own organizations, the Indian constitution then granted equality, freedom from discrimination based on gender or religion and guaranteed religious freedoms. Also seven five year plans were developed to provide health, education, employment and welfare to women.

Feminism in Indian English novels is not at all a new-fangled concept and over the years many new writers who have broken into the literary circuit and have successfully created a reach base, Indian women writers composing their thoughts in English range from an array of people like Toru Dutt to Kamala Das and from Saojini Naidu to Sunithi Namjoshi, Arundati Roy to Shashi Deshpande. These female Indian writers tell the astonishing variety of theme, in style, that poetry and novels are capable of offering each writers in their own

way have been successful in forming a part of the chorus, a collective tone emphasizing the sovereignty of woman.

Indian literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> C is a memorable record of the triumph and tragedy of Indian people involved in the most significant engagement in their history, the struggle for independence and the challenges that followed the achievement of the goal. Women novelists have played a crucial and momentous role in enhancing the quality and quantity of the Indian English fiction. They have added the women's perspective and feministic dimensions to the novels. The words by women writers constitute a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. Women writers in India are moving forward with their strong and sure strides, matching the pace of the world. They are recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavour of the soil that they bring to their work. Indian women writers explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the theme that ranges from childhood to complete womanhood. These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to the silent sufferings of women.

Feminism is a struggle for equality of women, a struggle against all forms of patriarchal aggression. Literary feminism was concerned with the politics of women's authorship and the representation of women's condition with literature. The feminist and feminist writers have been successful in achieving the legal rights for women, yet much has to be done at the social level. Feminist writers today proudly hold their cause of 'womanhood' through their writings. The Indian literature field is bold to represent feminism in the hands of well known writers. Who have transformed from theoretical theme to historic and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, women's outlook and actions.

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