



## FEMINIST LITERATURE- A REVIEW

Rahul George<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Kusha Pandit Chawla<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English and Communication Skills (School of Humanities), Alakh Prakash Goyal Shimla University, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

Email id: [rahulgeorge0@gmail.com](mailto:rahulgeorge0@gmail.com) / [rahulgeorge0@yahoo.com](mailto:rahulgeorge0@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor (HOD), Department of English and Communication Skills (School of Humanities), Alakh Prakash Goyal Shimla University, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

Email Id: [kpleolion@gmail.com](mailto:kpleolion@gmail.com)



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### ABSTRACT

Feminist literature is any work, fiction or nonfiction, backing up the goal of shielding equal rights for women, including political, economic, social, and civil rights. Various works of literature dating back to the 15th century have been known as feminists, works that usually define the unequal role of women in society and the negative costs that such inequality has on society. Christine de Pizan's 1405 masterwork *The Book of the City of Ladies* is often taken to be the earliest work of feminist literature. Largely written in reaction to the popular *Romance of the Rose*, Pizan argues both in favor for the education of women as well as the idea that women are valued participants in society. Pizan also wrote *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* and *The Tale of Joan of Arc*. Critics have considered three stages in women's writing over the centuries. Mary Wollstonecraft, George Sand, Kate Chopin, Susan Glaspell, and Virginia Woolf are the famous authors feminist of literature. Feminist writers believe that gender inequalities in society should be removed, and that all people perceive society in terms that do not differentiate based on gender.

Keywords - Woman, Feminist, Literature, Society, Phase

### 1. Introduction

Women have long had an existence in British literature, but this was mostly forgotten by the mid-20th century and so had to be recovered. Since the 18th century, for instance, some educated women with children wrote to avoid poverty and the workhouse. Aphra Benn (1640–89) was one of the first women writers to earn her living by her pen, paving way to other professional women writers in the 18th century. Most notably, Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters and George Eliot shaped 18th- and 19th-century literature, and the opinions of the readers who read their work. Female authors such as Virginia Woolf directed the way to modernism and the reinvention of the novel in the early 20th century. Woolf eminently claimed that a woman required a room of her own.

Although there have been professional women writers for centuries, women's writing inclined towards specific categories like travel, health, fiction and histories. Much research by feminist presses and on the part of

feminist historians and writers went into digging up many lost and forgotten women writers from the past. By the mid to late 20th century, with amplified education and higher standards of living, a wider range of women's voices began to be heard.

## 2. Review of Literature

Feminist theory concentrates on approving women and helping them discover how to breakdown the stereotypes and patterns of some traditional roles and roots that women play that may be hindering their development and growth. This type of treatment grew out of influences of the women's movement of the late 1960's. Feminist theory inclines to be more focused on firming women in areas such as boldness, communication, relationships, and self-worth. One of the main goals of feminist therapists is to grow equal mutual relationships of caring and sustenance. The therapist believes that her client is the only skilled in her own issues and will help her progress the tools and personal property needed to reach her prospective as a matchless and treasured individual.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

The core objective of this study is to enlighten the exact structures of feminism, leading feminist writers, and important historical phases of feminist writings. The paper has the set up with a small conversation of keywords and features of feminism and feminist literary criticism. The study is being done in a consistent order as it conveys some facts, the role of some feminist opponents in literary criticism, analysis of some feminist writers and the new words which are created by them

## 4. Research Methods

Research methods are the tools used to explore, examine and analyze the social world like interviews, observation and questionnaires. There is no clear description of feminist methodology because this is argued in the literature. There is a debate over what feminist methodology is, and whether it really exists. According to Chafetz (2004) stated in his works that there is no such thing as a feminist methodology and that we should use all and any research tool necessary to further our research on gender and women. In dissimilarity, Baber (2004) argues that there is such a thing as feminist methodology and that some research tools are not useful for feminist research. Baber (2004) argues that feminist methodology is distinct in its assumptions and its goal to make women's lives better. Indisputably, feminist methods honor women's experience. Honoring women's experiences is a reply to these experiences being quieted and misunderstood. Just aiming on women, however, doesn't guarantee that women being studied will have power in the investigation process. Nevertheless, specific methods have been established for conducting feminist research

## 5. Historical Phases of Feminist Writing

Feminism comprises political and sociological theories and philosophies troubled with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that fight for gender equality for women and fights for women's rights and interests. Although the terms "feminism" and "feminist" did not gain extensive use until the 1970s, they were already being used in the public jargon much earlier; for example, Katherine Hepburn talks about feminist movemen in the 1942 film '*Woman of the Year*'. Feminists and scholars have separated the movement's history into three waves namely:

- a. The first wave refers mostly to women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century (mainly concerned with women's right to vote).
- b. The second wave refers to the thoughts and actions associated with the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s (which fought for legal and social rights for women).
- c. The third wave talk about the continuance of, and a reaction to the observed failures of, second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s.

## 6. Women as Readers and Writers

Elaine Showalter "In her Essay" towards a Feminist Poetics, she talks about woman readers and writers, but this essay has not well answered the questions like do women read and write contrarily? Elaine Showalter

a forerunner amid feminist literary critics has tried to answer these simple questions. Women earlier always read what was written by male writers. Feminists have claimed that the literature and literary criticism bears a print of male supremacy. Women were believed to be just centerpieces; they were the representation of weakness. Men have portrayed women in their literary works and they have also assessed women writers.

Rendering to Elaine Showalter, one of the problems to the feminist criticism is that it is male-oriented. When the need of female writers was felt, the woman started writing. According to Elaine Showalter study she stated that It was through the women's liberation movement that we began to draw connections between our own work and our lives, to note the disparities between the identifications and ambitions that these attracted us, along with thousands of other women to study and teaching of literature and the limited and secondary roles women granted to female scholars.....Feminism spoke to our lives and our literary experience with the fierce urgency of a revelation or a Great Awakening. (Showalter 1985 .5)

### 7. The Purpose of Writing for Women Writers

There were some rational issues which were raised in modern times according to which why women read novels, what did they read, what did they get from them, with whom they shared their experiences? Women's connection to the novel as writers, readers and critics and some of the aids are discussed here. Charlotte Smith wrote to provide for her children. Charlotte Lennox wrote as she was under the financial problem and had left her husband. Women wrote as they found the opportunity to write, but glancing beside these basic reasons for seeking employment women also wrote because they needed to find a form of self-expression to grasp their potential and to define their own lives. They needed their own voice.

Now the point is what did they write about? Essentially, they wrote about average women's lives, they were concerned with fiction and politics. They used fiction to discover their own world and to remedy some of the deficits of their rejection and isolation. Many seventeenth and eighteenth-century women writers wrote in psychological conditions, many women writers wrote without 'a room of their own'. Regardless of these limitations, they played a vital part in shaping, extending and securing the viability of a literary community and their input deserves to be much better valued and extensively known. Women's efforts were hardly welcomed by the literary formation.

Mary Wollstonecraft maintained that one of the last male strongholds to fall would be that which appropriated for men intellectuality and creating huge material and legal gains have been made in two hundred years since she presented her case in *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Elaine Showalter while commenting on the way of a feminist critique might precede, she talks of a well-known example of the opening part of Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, which has been praised by Irving Howe who has appreciated the brilliance and power of this opening scene: To shake loose from one's life to discard that dropping rag of woman, with her mute complaints and maddening passivity to escape not by slinking abandonment but through the public sale of her body to a stranger, as horses are sold at a fair and thus to wrest, through sheer a moral willfulness, a second chance out of life it is with stroke, so insidiously attractive to male fantasy, that *The Mayor of Casterbridge* begins. (Indian Women Novelist 66)

How like other male critics of Hardy has opportunely ignored in the novel that Henchard not only sells his wife but also his child who can only be female. Henchard is symbolically selling his whole share in the world of women, although he was served with the bond with the female community. Hardy has shown man at his best and thus female characters in '*The Mayor of Casterbridge*' are somewhat idealized and melancholy projections of a repressed male self. (Indian Women Novelist 66)

### 8. Indian Feminist Writers

Indian women writers institute a major section of the modern Indian writing in English. Even Indian women like western feminist writers underwent oppression and injustice at the hands of the male. Indian English Literature has come of age. The women novelists also in India institute a most important group of Indian writers. R.K. Dhawan in his book, *Indian Women Novelists*, focuses on women's issues, they have a women's perspective on the world, (Dhawan 10). He further writes that one of the reasons that women in India have in large number

taken up their pen because it has allowed them to create their own world. It has allowed them to set the conditions of existence, free from the direct interference of men, (11). Indian women writers including Nayantara Sahagal, Shashi Desh Pande, and Shobha De, have dealt with problems related to women. In India too, the study of feminism, the study of the images of women in literature is one of the primary fields of feminist literary criticism to be discovered.

Literary criticism in India deals with the portrayal, treatment, and images of women as seen in the works of particular Indian authors, both male and female. The treatment of women by Nayantara Sahagal, the image of women as mirrored in Indian writings are some of the headings of dissertations submitted to the Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal. Sushila Singh in her, recent trends in feminist thought: *A Tour de Horizon*, in a book edited by R.K. Dhawan writes that Gayatri Spivak has made an admirable effort to develop a materialist anti-imperialist feminism which draws on the insights of recent poststructuralist and postmodern theory ..... Does not leave high theory of men. She takes over for her own feminist and anti-imperialist purposes, (62).

Women writers are enjoying a cumulative fame and prestige. They have remarkable records of achievement. Chaman Nahal in his *Feminism in Indian English Fiction*, his article in a book edited by R.K. Dhawan says, if I take into account Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* or some of the other French writers, they are very much anxious about the physical subdual of women. Consequently, according to the French models of feminism, it would denote greater sexual expression. If we take into account the British models, all feminists slowly become well-thought-of or retrieved into the male world order. If we consider American models they are more outspoken, (28).

Feminist criticism has also come under fire from some of its own subdivisions. According to Sudha Pandya in her article on '*feminist critical theory* in the book '*Indian Women Novelists*' writes that 'it can be asserted as hitherto –sexist, homophobic, racist or guilty of, cultural imperialism.....black feminist critics, on the other hand, believes they have suffered from the 'racism' of white feminist theory'(82). Bearing in mind the fact that there are all these various components within feminist criticism, it is comprehensible and perhaps welcome that it has not arrived at any one theory, acceptable to all.

## 9. Conclusion

In the 1980's, feminism surfaces as a thought system, a point of view to reordering the world realities, a positive whole approach to life, a step forward saneness in human relationship, and possibly the only mode for the safeguarding of very human existence in this planet. Elaine Showalter in her essay, *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, in the end says that, the task of feminist critics is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision, (142). Further, she says feminist criticism is not visiting. It is here to stay and we must make it a permanent home, (142). Elaine Showalter has spoken about the phases of feminist writings in her essay *Towards a Feminist Poetics* and has very well placed her stand in the phases of feminist writings.

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