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THE ROLE OF FEMININE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST LITERARY THEORIES AND CRITICISM

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the condition of women in the field of literature, literary theory and criticism. Women see that their condition is not inferior in the field social, political, economical but in literature also than they raise a voice. This voice was a revolt and a movement against the men that they should have the same rights as men in the field of literature and criticism. Its history has been broad and varied, from classic works of 19th century women such as George Eliot and Margaret Fuller. Elaine Showalter term 'Gynocriticism' that defines to feminist criticism. Simone de Beauvoir in her book 'The Second Sex' she condemned the male practices in which women have not given proper place in literary history. Kate Millet (*Sexual Politics*) views that on the basis of social and culture women works always neglected. This focuses on the system of Patriarchy and Matriarchy that spread among the society, man aggressive or scornful pilot. The recent of Virginia Woolf by her essay (*A Room Of One's Own*), Toril Moi and Julia Kristeva contribution in the field of criticism and deconstruction.

Key Words: Criticism, Feminism, Gynocriticism, movement,

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Feminism-Define

Feminism is the name given to a political movement. This movement basically related with the liberation of woman from certain gender-based discriminations that deprived woman with the opportunities of self-promotion and equality with man, simply because they are women. It is unawareness that women always unjustly treated and provided inferior status in comparison to men. Feminism gives emphasis on women's freedom and liberation from the bondage of man-made society and its norms. Rebecca West's work on women's suffrage from approximately 1910 traced as the beginning of the feminist criticism movement. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*-

"Feminism is the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; it is also a struggle to achieve this aim."

Thus feminism is an ideology which seeks not only to understand the world but to change it to the advantage and welfare of women.

A woman's writing is always feminine: it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine.-
Virginia Woolf

In the field of feminism a lot of the writers have played an important role, In addition to West's work, Virginia Woolf's, *A Room of One's Own* from 1929 is an integral text to the movement. Prominent

feminist literary critics include *Isobel Armstrong, Nancy Armstrong, Barbara Bowen, Jennifer DeVere Brody, Laura Brown, Margaret Anne Doody, Eva Figes, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Annette Kolodny, Anne McClintock, Anne K.Mellor, Nancy K. Miller, Toril Moi, Felicity Nussbaum, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Hortense Spillers, Gayatri Spivak, Irene Tayler, Marina Warner.*

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practices will never be theorized, enclosed, encoded- which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.- by Helen Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa'

Feminist literary criticism

Feminist literary criticism is a literary movement of the second half of the 20th century. Its primary concern is to study the position of women in literature. In it responds to the way how women presented in literature. It has two basic premises as made by Elaine Showalter in her essay.(1)- the first premises studies-how women presented in literature by the male writer from their own point of view (2)- the second premises studies how women are presented in the writing of the female writers from their own point of view. Thus the first premises give rise to a kind of feminist criticism known as *phallogocentrism* and the second premises leads us to another kind of feminist criticism known as Gynocriticism.

Theoretical foundation of feminist criticism laid by Simone De Beauvoir's book titled *The Second Sex*. "In its earliest years, feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classical and popular male literature and the exclusion of women from literary history" says Elaine Showalter and rightly so. Three important books that deserved special mention in this regards are (i) Katharine M. Rogers's *The troublesome helpmate* (1966), (ii) Mary Ellmann's *Thinking about women* (1968) and (iii) Kate Millet's *Sexual politics*(1969).

A New Term for Feminist- Gynocriticism

Gynocritics seek to formulate a female framework for the analysis of women literature 'to develop new models based on the study of female experience rather than adopts male models and theories. Gynocriticism takes into account the feminist research in the field of anthropology, history, psychology and sociology to formulate their critical principle. Working as 'Gynocritics' women had tried reading male-created texts producing a literary category as 'the women-centered criticism'.

Various Views and theories of feminist thinkers

The feminist believe that in order to understand the position of women in the world, one has to understand the system of patriarchy. Whatever position women have in literature, but her position always presented inferior by the male writer. Male literature is biased because everything written by them comes under the system of patriarchy. It is not only men whose points of views are biased but he has also taught and even forced women to look at them from male point of view. The social roles of a wife, mother, housewife etc assigned to woman and men's purpose in life is considered to serve man. Men considered to be bold, strong, independent, aspiring, rational and logical. On the contrary woman are considered to be timid, yielding, gentle, dependent, self-sacrificing and emotional. Although all cultures claim to praise and value the womanly virtues yet there are several examples which degenerate women to the second position.

Simeon De Beauvoir phase 'the second sex' is undoubtedly notable. She has the opinion that women's ideas about her is inferior to men and depends on him, springs from her realization that world is masculine on the whole. She says "no one is more arrogant towards women, more aggressive or scornful, than the men who is anxious about his virility." Although the biological distinction between male and female is an accepted fact, yet the notion that women are inferior to men is no doubt, male dominated society which has several prejudices against woman. She says in the second sex-"one is not born, but rather become a women." The feminist movement aims at making woman the subject of her own story and not the object of male

desire and male satisfaction. The old prejudices against woman as being weaker than man in all respects reflected in the language system – particularly in English, one notices the pronoun is largely male-oriented. Now there is not a single position in the society, including administration and government which is not being occupied by woman. Today we have women presidents, prime minister, Scientist, Commanders, Administrator and what not. Thus, the feminist movement aims at overthrowing social practices that lead to the oppression and victimization of women lock, stock and barrel.

Simeon De Beauvoir –*“one is no born genius, one become a genius and the feminine situation has up to the present rendered this becoming practically impossible”*.

The concept of a woman as we are stereotype is a social construct right from the beginning of human history; women were considered much a part of men. Let us start our thinking from Bible itself-

“so god created man in his own image and the lord god caused sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept and he took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh instead their off and the rib which the lord god had taken from man, he made a woman and brought her up to the man and Adam said, this is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. They were both naked man and his wife were not ashamed”

The subjection of women thus started from the beginning of the universe. Man is considered as an image of God, but woman as made of the remaining bone and flesh of man. It certifies that God and Adam both being masculine had played vital role in the subjection of woman. This subjection is not natural, but social and behavioral. One of the basic thinkers of feminism- Simeon De Beauvoir with the association of Gean Paul Satre, in her famous book- ‘The Second Sex’ (1949) propounded that man; woman relationship had always been partial. Family, society, country and the entire world is divided into two poles. One is known Patriarchal and the other is generally called Matriarchal pole. To indicate the real position of women in society, other is more appropriate than matriarchal as far as the

relationship between men and women is concern. It is define and explain from the different parameter. A family is known and identified not by the name of the mother but by the name of father. It has been a global phenomenon to considered woman inferior by mind and body. Actually no family system can sustain itself without the active participation of woman. But all credit and leadership ability are attributed to man. On the other hand the nobility, beauty, softness and various other negative aspects are attached to women. This paradoxical situation felt by several female writers.

Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf in the modern time have advocated in very strong words for distinct identity of women in literature, criticism, society, politics and almost every walk of life Virginia Woolf in her essay ‘A Room Of One’s Own’ (1929) strongly advocates that the contribution of women for the betterment of society is tremendous but they have not been fully recognized so far. She strongly believes that the life of a woman, her sufferings, pain, hopes, despair, vision and everything broadly differ. Therefore her literature, science, sport and other achievement should be studied from the feminist parameter. Any parameter that cannot do justice with female activities therefore, an independent room should be provided to women in society. Theoretically women were colonized in hand of men at every level of life with the process of decolonization of countries, the decolonization of woman started. European Anarchy was imposed upon many countries of the world. Simeon De Beauvoir and many other thinkers have expressed their views that both processes are identical in spirit. When women come to their own, they had to face division among themselves. To effigiate the study of feminism, it can be divided into three following categories- Radical, liberal, and rational feminism.

Feminist writer refuse to accept the ‘images of women’ as portrayed by male writers. They are of the views that women characters portrayed by male writers. They are of the views that women characters portrayed by men in literature are lacking in authenticity. In other words, men have portrayed women as they find them not as ‘women’ would have perceived them. This kind of

attitude prompted Carlo Christ to say that- "women have not experienced their own experience"

Kate Millet in her book, 'Sexual Politics' maintains that sexual politics is a process whereby the ruling sex seeks to maintain and extend its power over the subordinate sex. She suggested that social and cultural contexts of a work of art should be taken into account in order to understand it in proper perspective. Thus she like other feminist literary critics, is opposed to the historicism of the New critics. To her a literary text is not a 'verbal icon' independent of social and historical reality. Analyzing the works of Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, she exposes their patriarchal bias and sexual harassment of women. Feminist literary critics argue that if one studies stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited role women play in literary history one would not learn what women have felt and experienced but what men have thought women ought to be.

Marginal Roles of Women in Various Field:

Undoubtedly women always mistreated, marginalized in the field of literary criticism and in various field. Therefore their thinking pattern and literary experiences are broadly different. Virginia Woolf, a great women writer of America was one deprived from entry to Cambridge University library which turn Virginia a revolutionary and anti-patriarchy, not only this but many times women mistreated.

It means not that they have no contribution in the literary field several important female writers as Sylvia Plath, Jane Iyer, Jane Austen, Kamla Das, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, and many more have created tremendous literature on their personal experiences. These experiences are mostly of alienation, frustration, humiliation, sexual exploitation at the work places, lack of centrality, lack of emotional outlook and overall insert. These characteristics are very much common in the life of every woman whether she is career-oriented or ordinary housewife. Since there had been conflicting relationship with man here feminists parameter cannot do justice with their writing. In a very angry mood Virginia Woolf declare "Re-write the history".

The history of literature, society, politics, social work and humanism had been male biased. They

have marginalized women in every sphere of life. Therefore, any critical formula which man has created, according to showalter and some other feminist cannot be honest and impartial in the matter of feminist writing.

Anita Desai in most of her novels used the female protagonist. Her main female characters suffered by the hand of male in one way or other way. She was fully aware about the problems of feminist and given a great contribution to raise the position of the women in the male dominated society.

Conclusion

In the comparison of feminist form 17th century to the modern world, we will see the major changes. In 17th women condition was worse but in the recent time feminism is studied from deconstruction point of view propounded by Jacques Derrida. It can again be studied from Lacanian psycho-analysis, New Historicism, post colonialism, post modernism and from cross culture point of view. There is a influence of feminism on the contemporary theoretical writing. Today feminism has exercised crucial influence on world-politics, media, culture, fashion and many other popular fields.

Feminist literary criticism has given us an opportunity to look at 'women' in literature from women's point of views. This reminds me of John Stuart Mill's observation: "we may assert that men can acquire of women, even as they have been and are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial and will always be so until women themselves have told all they have to tell"

To sum up, I should say that feminist criticism is concerned with 'women as the producer of textual meaning with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women'.

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