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INDIAN FEMINISM

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ABSTRACT

Feminism means the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes. Feminism in India, is a set of movements aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic and social rights and equal opportunities for Indian women. Feminists throw a challenge on the age-long tradition of gender differentiation. Feminism is perhaps the most powerful movement that swept the literary world in the recent decades. Rabindranath Tagore, Kamini Roy, Ismat Chughtai, Kamala Das, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Lalithambika Antharjanam are some of the elemental feminist writers in India who wrote in regional languages. Many Indian novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity, which is imposed as a patriarchal society. However, with the development of time, feminism has been established in India, setting the patriarchal predominance to certain extent.

Key words: Feminism, fiction, predominance, protagonists.

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INTRODUCTION

Feminism means the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes. It is an organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish and achieve equal political, economic, personal and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. Feminists typically advocate or support the rights and equality of women. Feminist movements have campaigned and continue to campaign for women's rights, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to receive education, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to promote bodily

autonomy and integrity and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence.

Feminism in India: It is a set of movements aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic and social rights and equal opportunities for Indian women. It is the pursuit of women's rights within the society in India. Like their feminists counterparts all over the world, feminists in India seek gender equality: the right to work for equal wages, the right to equal access to health and education, and equal political rights. Indian feminists also have fought against culture – specific issue within India's patriarchal society, such as inheritance laws and the practice of widow immolation known as Sati.

The history of feminism in India can be divided into three phases, 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 movement into the Quit India movement and independent women's organizations began to emerge; and finally, the third phase, post-independence which has focussed on fair treatment of women at home after marriage, in the work force and right to political party.

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 are – Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra 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 women's movement in the developing country like India. In the Indian context several feminists have realized that the subject of women's invasion in India should not be reduced to contradiction between men and women.

Feminism in Indian literature as well as the broader perspective of feminism in India, is not a singular theoretical point of reference, it has metamorphosed with time maintaining proportion with historical and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, perceptions and actions of individual women and women in mass. Feminist writers in India today proudly uphold their causes of 'womenhood', through their write-ups. However not only the contemporary times and British India times, feminist literature in India has existed in India from the vedic period, with the gradually changing face of women coming to light in every ages, with its distinctiveness. World's two of the most prehistoric greatest epics, Ramayana and Mahabharatha written by two sages Valmiki and Vedavyas have been composed pivoting around two central

character Sita and Draupadi, both women. It was during this time that the nascent stages of feminism was born in ancient Indian literature, the illustration of which needs no further introduction – the tribulations of both Sita and Draupadi is perhaps realised by every Indian presently. Sita, absorbs all harshly imposed desolation and mortification of the male ego, whereas Draupadi challenges the male ego to the epitomic limits of human excellence. Sita accepts, accommodates and withdraws; Draupadi resents, rejects and involves herself in the process of life as a protagonist. These two feminine archetypes define the limits of feminine experience in reality, especially the Indian literary reality. Even in the present day Indian literature, the gender division moves between new 'iconisations' of these two bold and prehistoric figures. Feminism does not particularly talk of equality and rights of women but it is more about compassion, respect and understanding from the male counterparts.

Feminism throws a challenge on the age-long tradition of gender differentiation. It attempts to explore and find a new social order, to find pertinent resolves to the real life problems in the light of traditionally – gendered role – playing. Woman has always been projected as a secondary and inferior human being. Feminism is perhaps the most powerful movement that swept the literacy world in the recent decades. It has been articulated differently in different parts of the world by various writers depending upon their class, background and level of consciousness. As a critical tool, feminism aims at providing an altogether new awareness of women's role in the modern complex world.

The famous feminist writers in India: When we talk about feminist authors, we directly go to the likes of Virginia Woolf or Toni Morrison. Indian names rarely come up in the list of feminist writers. The truth is that Indian writers were a little slow in catching up with the Feminist movement that raged worldwide. India was still under British rule and too rooted in age old tradition. The concept of feminist writing was started by men in India. It was later caught on by women writers. So the first Indian feminist writers were actually men. Here is a list of notable feminist Indian writers Rabindranath Tagore, Kamini Roy, Ismat Chughtai, Kamala Das, Chitra Banerjee

Divakaruni, Lalithambika Antharjanam. These are some of the elemental feminist writers in India who wrote in regional languages.

Indian English writings started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. She charmed the readers with her writings as the Nayantara Sehgal and Rama Mehta used feminist themes in their writings. The varied writing styles of each writer give us different perspective of feminism. While Kamala Das explores women exploitation in India and the world, writers like Shashi Deshpande make characters who can blame their own egotism for their regretful condition. Arundathi Roy has her opinion on the society, begins her story without a beginning and does not real end it. Jumpa Lahiri on the other hand carefully crafts her story and moves at a perfect pace.

Women writers in India are moving forward with their strong and sure strides, matching the pace of the world. We see them bursting out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrance. Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by women in today's male dominated world as the main theme of their book.

Feminism in Indian English Novels: Feminism in Indian English novels, as commonly conceived, is a very sublime and over-the top concept, which is most subtly handled under restricted circumstances. However, with the development of time, feminism has been established in India, setting aside the patriarchal predomination to certain extent. The history of Indian English novel, a journey which began long back has witnessed a lot of alternation to gain today's chic contour. In the past few years many prominent writers have made a mark on the Indian Diaspora.

Indian writing in English is now gaining ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era has earned many laurels both at home and abroad. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. Today, the work of Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Geetha Hariharan, Shahsi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, Jumpa Lahiri, Shoba De and Manju Kapur and many more

have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity, which is imposed as a patriarchal society. Female quest for identity has been the pet theme for many women novelists. Male novelists, like R K Narayan, have also highlighted the sufferings of Indian house-wives in the course of his presentation of fictional imagination. Women writers explore into the life of house-wives and condemn their exploitation in order to make sense of the fast changing pace of the new world around them. Others like, Shashi Deshpande sketches characters who blame their own complacency for their remorseful condition and stoic suffering. Anita Desai's novels are an exploration into the psychic world of women who face various oddities and eccentricities in their day to day life.

The feminist perspective came into prominence ever since the prominent writers like Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Shobha De began to opt the women's issues as their themes and focused on the cause of Indian women. The stand taken by them is the same as taken by the feminists who oppose the customs, norms and traditions of the society which tends to place women in a position inferior to that of man-socially, politically, physically and economically. These novelists have taken up themes of rebellion against the existing social set up by its women characters. Women are no longer like a 'puppet' portrayed in a traditional way where husbands are the lords and women are identified as weak, meek and submissive creature. These writers have created protagonists who feel and realize that they also have their own role to play in family and society like their male counterpart. They too have their own likes and dislikes. They want to raise voice to be heard by the society. So, a class of new women has come up in order to play a positive role on the world to promote the women's cause and perspective.

Conclusion

Feminism is a struggle for equality of women, an effort to make women become like men. The Indian novelists are keenly aware of various problems which women face in their day-to-day life.

Almost all the major novelists of Indian writers in English have raised various issues relating to women and they are performing the tasks of feminists. Indian novelists are pleading for equality and justice for women in their own way while expressing their creative genius. However feminism in Indian literature is not a single point of theoretical reference, but has transformed with time maintaining proportion of historic and cultural realities, levels of consciousness, outlook and actions of women.

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