

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**FEMINISM IN INDIAN ENGLISH AND TAMIL LITERATURE****Dr. A. SELVAM¹, Mrs. P. PANDIA RAJAMMAL²**¹Controller of Examination, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli.²Assistant Professor of English, Ultra College of Engineering & Technology for Women, Madurai**P. PANDIA RAJAMMAL**

Article Info:

Article Received:10/03/2014

Revised on:21/4/2014

Accepted for Publication:23/04/2014

ABSTRACT

The feminist ideologies began to influence the English literature in India. In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The majority of the novels depicts the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife 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 ranges from childhood to womanhood. Through their novels, they told what actually feminism is. These women writers told that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence. The Indian women novelists like Bharati Mukherjee, NergisDalal, Krishna Sobti, ArundhatiRoy, JhumpaLahiri used realism as main theme of their novels. Most of the female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, ShashiDeshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the theme of their books.

In the post-independence era many women writers have entered the arena of literary writing and they have focused their attention on the inner conflicts of modern women. Notable among such writers are Sivasundari, C.S. Laxmi, AnuradhaRamanan, Indira Soundarajan, Vaasanthi, Thilagavathy. Thus in the post-independence era, a new class of women writers in Indian English literature as well as in the Tamil literature have arisen. These writings are the reflection of newer conflicts, morality, human relations, aspirations and frustrations of the Indian women in society. Some similarity of context is found in Indian English novels and Tamil novels especially in those of the women writers.

Key Words: Feminism, feminine subjectivity, newer conflicts aspirations and frustrations.

@ Copyright KY Publications

The term 'feminism' has its origin from the Latin word 'femina' meaning 'woman'. It refers to the advocacy of women's rights, status and power at par with men on the grounds of 'equality of sexes'. In other words, it relates to the belief that women should have the same social, economic and political rights as men. The term became popular from the early twentieth century struggles for securing women's suffrage or voting rights in the western countries, and the later well-organized socio-political movement for women's emancipation from patriarchal oppression.

The feminist ideologies began to influence the English literature in India. In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The majority of the novels depicts the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife 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. Nowadays, woman has become a money earner and she is not confined only to household works. Indian women writers explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the theme that ranges from childhood to womanhood. Through their novels, they told what actually feminism is. These women writers told that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence.

Indian women writers have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Indian English Literature has developed over a period of time and writing in English did not start in a day. It took many years to bring the present status. We can find Indian literature as novels and also in the forms of poetries and short stories. Several women writers composed songs and short stories before the rise of novels. It is believed that women are the upholders of the Indian tradition of fables. In the middle of the 19th century, more women started to write in English language. During this period, more women actively participated in India's reformist movement against the British rule. This led to the women's literature. At that time, their writings mainly concentrated on the country's freedom struggle.

Indian English writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. This great poetess charmed the readers with her writings. Feminism themes have been used by writers like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta. Regional fiction theme has also been used by Kamala Das, Anita Nair and Susan Viswanathan. Novelists like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai visualized the spirit of Indian cultures and its traditional values. Many Indian women writers made India as a popular literary nation in 1990. The Indian women novelists like Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, MalatiChendur, Gauri Deshpande, NamitaGokhale, Ruth Jhabvala, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri used realism as the main theme of their novels. Most of the female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the theme of their books. They chose English language as their medium. This made them popular in the global. The exploration of Indian feminine sensibility emanates from a thoroughly sensitive appreciation of the Indian woman.

In addition to the development of the Indian English literature, the other regional languages have also flourished at the same time. The earliest works of Tamil literature included love lyrics and the poetries like 'Eight Anthologies' and 'Ten songs' has described the rural and urban life of the ancient Tamil people and the valor of kings. The rules for ancient Tamil poetry were similar to folk love. This was found in the 'Tolkappiyam', the earliest Tamil grammatical treatise written in verse. The 'Tirukkural and Nalatiyar' were also a collection of aphoristic poetry. Ideas of enlightenment and interest in national culture and literature increased in the 19th century. 'Tamil Patrika', the first Tamil magazine, began its publication in 1831. The first newspaper, 'Svadesa-mittiran' came in 1880. Tamil prose literature was first written during the 17th and 18th centuries. It became an independent genre in the 19th century. One of the founders of Tamil prose was Vedanayakam Pillai, who wrote the first Tamil Novel, 'Piratapa Mutaliyar Charithram'. This was a landmark in Tamil literature. The book gave a birth

to a new literary genre and Tamil prose began to be considered as an important part of the language. "Kamalaambaal Charithram" is written by Rajam Aiyar in the later part of the 19th century. This is the first Tamil novel depicting the real life of people. Authors like Kalki Krishnamurthy, Akilan wrote historical novels during the Indian independence period to have patriotism in the minds of the people. The first Tamil short stories were translated works. It was adapted by western-European short story writers.

The anticolonial views were expressed in original short stories and it was written by S. Aiyar and Madhaviah. The early Tamil prose works were based on enlightened realism. Subramanya Bharathi was a prominent poet of the early 20th century. His works contained patriotic and anticolonial motifs. The literary and artistic journal played an important role in the development of the 20th century Tamil literature. The prose writer 'Kalki' wrote the first Tamil historical novel 'Beloved son of Kaveri'. In the middle of the 20th century socially oriented novels of daily life were written by R.A. Mahadeven. Prominent Tamil short story writers of the 20th century were Puthumaipitthan, K.V. Jagannathan, T. Janakiraman and G. Ajahinsami. The other outstanding Tamil prose works of the 20th century have been the psychological novel 'An Anxious Heart' by Akilan and the works of C. Rakunathan and D. Jeyakanthan. In the second decade of the 20th century, writers like Kalki Krishnamurthy, Sandilyan, Sujatha Rangarajan, Balakumar, Akilan, Sivasundari, C.S. Laxmi, Rajsehkumar, Anuradha Ramanan, Indira Soundarajan, Vaasanthi, and Thilagavathy have introduced the refined form of the Tamil novels. These writers wrote novels on different themes which are based on history, family, society, science and human psychology.

In the post-independence era, many women writers have entered the arena of literary writing and they have focused their attention on the inner conflicts of modern women. Notable among such writers are Sivasundari, C.S. Laxmi, Anuradha Ramanan, Indira Soundarajan, Vaasanthi, and Thilagavathy. Thus, in the post-independence era, a new class of women writers in Indian English literature as well as in the Tamil literature has arisen. These writings are the reflection of newer

conflicts, morality, human relations, aspirations and frustrations of the Indian women in society. Some similarity of context is found in Indian English novels and Tamil novels, especially in those of the women writers.

The literature reflects the ever changing reality of life. The portrayal of the position of woman in society is the important phenomenon. In recent times, the status of women has been undergoing a rapid change in the world. And so the portrayal of woman is important in the study of literature. The woman is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in literature is pervading. Among all literary forms, fiction reflects the contemporary social conditions. The portrayal of woman in fiction is governed by the prevailing attitude towards women in society.

Indian society shows women as ideally warm, gentle, dependent and submissive. The conventional image of woman in the pre-independence era exists in literature. Most of the Indian novels that dealt a woman's issue which glorifies the stereotypical virtues of Indian women like patience, devotion and acceptance of her status. Throughout history the same social stereotypes have been reinforced by archetypes. In every age woman has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress and sex object. The writers portrayed the woman in these traditional roles. Moreover, female characters are too distant from reality and too crude, moralized or sentimentalized.

The first Indian woman novelist in English, KrupabaiSaththianadhan (1862-1894) wrote novels "Kamala: A Story of Hindu life" (1894) and "Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life" (1895). She projected her Indian sensibility and attitude through women characters in her novels. These novels are also a self-revelation of her inner life of sorrows and anguish. The novelist described that any sensible reader might infer that (protagonist's) Kamala's sorrow is the sorrow of many Indian women. In earlier literature, two contradictory images of women were found. They are deified image and exploited image. Raja Rao, an Indian novelist in English and Toru Dutt, the first woman poet in English deal only with the archetype of Indian womanhood like Sita and Savitri whereas Derozio creates the image of a woman with degraded

position in his poem. Another woman novelist of the pre-independence India was Sarobji. She was a social reformer and feminist. She was an advocate by profession. She exposed the deep mental agony of the married and unmarried women in her "Love and Life behind the Purdah" (1901) and 'Between the lights' (1908).

The early Indian English fiction of the 20th century had begun to reflect women's participation in the freedom struggle, imbibing knowledge, experiencing a sense of emancipation. The spirit of patriotism gave a spur to the movement towards amelioration of women. She no longer remained the dumb creature in the early stage. Literature projects a new portrayal of the Indian woman at the time of the freedom movement. The works of Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand could not have been possible without it. An *Akkayya* or *A Javani* stirred the enlightened Indian as never before while Anand introduced innumerable *Lajwantis* in their plight in a male dominated society. R.K. Narayan created Saviti, (The Dark Room's heroine) a woman with self-respect who does not submit to her husband's tyranny and asserts her individuality by walking out on the marriage.

Society and the writers noted the role played by women in the freedom movement and there was a shift in the sensibility towards them. However, such writings were a few. Though the woman was struggling to come out of the state of stagnation, women writers have neglected this aspect. The portrayal of the archetypal woman still loomed large on the horizon in spite of the fast growth and the development of women's education. In actual literary practice, numerous women characters in fiction are found plying the role of classic prototype. They enact the suffering, sacrificing the role of Sita and Savitri. However, the writers of the contemporary world came out rapidly from historical romance and mythic stories and presented the realities of the life of women. As the image of woman, family and society kept on changing all through the years, the writer's views were all changing resulting in a variety of realistic images. In the last quarters of the 19th century, there was an emergence of host women novelists. It should be considered as a landmark in the history of Indian English novels. The women novelists gave

a new direction in the writing of fiction in English. Their novels focus on the inner mind on Indian women in the feminist perspective.

The orthodox Indian women of conservative family feel inhibited to raise their voice against aggressive dominated male persons in the society. This was because of their inferiority complex and rigid code of conduct which was imposed on them. Their ambitions, desires, sense and sensibility are faithfully expressed in the novels of the women novelists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Their novels show how an educated woman suffered psychologically due to an inferiority complex and deep sense of inhibitions. They depict the image of the new women waiting for emancipation and liberation in a fast changing world. The Indian women novelists belong to other pre-independence period during which both Hindu and Muslim communities in India were being governed rigidly by their traditions. Due to the miseries, the women novelists of feminist perspective committed themselves to women's cause with a view to ameliorating their position. With the increasing awareness of feminism as a new revolutionary idea, the trend of feminist writing persisted in Indian literature.

With the advent of the 20th century, the change in the statue and spirit of women has been noted by sociologists. In post-independence India, when women's education commenced, life had started changing. The spread of education inculcated a sense of individuality among women and aroused an interest in their rights. The early writers presented the traditional type (Sita) but the writers tried to show the emerging new woman. The new woman does not want to lead a passive married life of a sacrificial and shadowy creature because the education has matured her sense of individuality. R.K. Narayanan portrays a wide range of feminine characters from conventional to rebellious. Mulk Raj Anand wrote for the emancipation of women. Moreover feminist trends appeared on the horizon and they came into conflict with the conventional moral code. The image of woman in literature in recent decades is different from that of the past. Indian English fiction writers during the last two decades of the 20th century provide a glimpse into the female

psyche and deal with a full range of feminine experience. A study of the recent Indian English fiction reveals that the female protagonists are quite conscious of their identity and are no longer meek and submissive. There is a marked difference in their attitude as compared to the portrayal of woman in early literature.

In 'Images of woman in Indo-Anglican Novel', Meena Shirwadkar claims the changes in Indian society. Novels have started to progress from depicting women characters solely as epitomes of suffering and womanly virtue as portraying more complex as well as real characters. In the recent years, this was taken to understand that writing was the only preference made by women. Through this medium of expressing themselves in writing women have investigated and published those aspects of lives that have not been acknowledged by society previously. Despite late 21st century, women are not still attaining the required level of socio-cultural, educational and economic advantages usually enjoyed by men. Women in many societies are still under the pressure to conform to traditional concepts of womanly behaviour, to be self-effacing and to invest all their efforts in their man's success. In recent years, women made sustained struggle to retain their rights as writers. In this assertion of Woolf, it is clear that women writer's need women writers as example. The writing that might give expression to a very personal emotion but when readers get identify with it, it becomes universal and symbolizes human emotions itself. Through the writings, they give shape to human feelings and so it is a part of a social movement.

Shashi Deshpande a renowned writer admits the fact that she is able to empathize better with woman and so her protagonists are women. Independent Indian has witnessed the various phases of women writing till 1960s. The works of women writings dealt with male domination. Their themes deal on patience, suffering and subjugating. Women writers around 1970s brought in a big change. They started to transform their own experience as women as well as their femininity into literary expression. The suffering and submissive models were replaced by 'new woman'. As Seshadri writes:

"The new woman is assertive and self-willed, searching to discover her true self. In these years a class oriented fiction emerged: the woman, who still suffers, but not in silence as she used to be".

However the change occurred with the emergence of several highly talented women writers in the last quarter of the 19th century. They have written of Indian women, their conflicts and predicaments against the background of contemporary India. The changing contexts have placed these women writers in an amiable position. Toru Dutt, Krupabai Sathianathan, Cornelia Sorabji, Iqbal Lunnisa, Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Prawar Jhabavala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sehgal, Kamala Das, Geeta Mehta, Shobha De and Arundathi Roy are concerned mainly with the psychological crises in the lives of Indian women who are subjected to physical and psychological torture in a male dominated society. The novelists have exploited their skill in projecting the agonized mind of the suffering women. Their portrayal of women characters in the novels bears authenticity to their feminist perspective. The women novelists focus on the existential predicament and travails of the subdued women in a male dominated society which are governed by rigid traditions and restrictions. These writers go deep into the inner mind of the repressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and bring them into light.

Depiction of woman in Tamil literature has kept pace with the changing social image of the woman in Tamilnadu. Tamil fiction reflects the prevalent contradictions in contemporary society about a woman's position that is her glorification and exploitation. Tamil classical literature is an ancient literature. It has a long history and a great source of information to know about ancient Tamilian's life, customs, beliefs, roles and history. It was divided as *akam* (internal) and *puram* (external) poems. The *akam* poems dealt with love and feelings related to it, while the *puram* poems are about war, daily life, ballad and beliefs. The anthology 'Ettuthokai' portrayed women as a young girl, as a lady in love, as a wife, as a mother and their beliefs and experiences.

'Silappathikaram' (story of anklet) depicts the life of Kannagi, a chaste woman who lead a peaceful life with Kovalan in Puhar, the capital of Cholas. Her life later went astray by the association of Kovalan with an unchaste woman Madhavi. The duo started resurrecting their life in Madurai, the capital of Pandyas. Kovalan went to sell the anklet of Kannagi to start a business but was held guilty and beheaded of stealing it from the queen. Kannagi went onto prove the innocence of her husband and believed to have burnt the entire city of Madurai by her chastity. This was composed in the post Sangam period (300BCE to 200 CE). Depiction of violence against women in Tamil literature has been quite an articulate aspect. Right from the turn of century most nationalistic texts dealt with the plight of women especially child marriage and widowhood. In fact, most male writers like Ramasami –Kootha Theevu – (a feminist Utopia) of pre-independence era have evinced a sympathetic portrayal of women in society. After the fifties we have writers focusing on diverse themes like indentured labour (Thunba Keni of Pudumai Pithan), domestic abuse (Rajam Krishnan's Lamps in a Whirlpool), rape (Jayakanthan's Sila Nerangalil Sila Manithargal) and caste based violence (Poomani's Piragu). Attempts at exploring woman as subject with a sexuality that is forever contested have been the source of

Thi. Janakiraman's writing. Women writers have also existed with their understanding of the world. The eighties women's movement did not really take the literary aspects in Tamil seriously. Rajam Krishnan's works were the primary inspiration to address women's issues. Ambai ushered in female subjectivity into the Tamil literary world. Women writers in modern Tamil literature have written several short stories and novels that depict the internal conflicts of women, particularly related to the culture and traditions of Tamilnadu. The various works of women writers also portray the problems related to family, affection for children and other minor aspects of life. The subject matter or the theme of the novels written by women writers in Tamil literature primarily deal with delicate issues like the alteration in dull and routine life, the social discriminations and the consequential problems. Their writing and works usually do not represent or discuss major social issues or revolutionary themes.

Such themes and subject matters are portrayed with remarkable case and in a fascinating manner.

In 1972, the Tamil writer C.S. Lakshmi who also calls herself Ambai, published the short story 'Wings can break'. In 1984, she wrote a critical work called 'The Face Behind the Mask: Women in Tamil literature' on the images of Tamil women in the fiction of Tamil writers. It reflected the writer's preoccupation with the images of 'woman' in Tamil culture and the impact of Tamil fiction of women writers. Ambai shows how these dominant images to be constructed in the colonial period. She does so by tracing the origins and development of the reformist agenda relating to women's issues in Urban Tamilnadu starting from the late 19th century through the 20th century. Under the dynamic leadership of Annie Besant and Margaret Cousins several Brahmin women sought to rectify specific social injustices such as the pre-puberty marriage of girls and the tonsure of Brahmin widows and to introduce widow re-marriage. But the images of the ideal woman which the reformists propagated were essentially elitist and upper class coupled with "ardent cries of reviving the Vedic past"(8). This was projected as the Vedic past was a supposed ideal period of the golden age of Hinduism in which women served as the spiritual exemplars for all the society. Ambai says of the reformist agenda:

"The urban-based middle-class awareness was circumscribed by its origin. They were only aiming at concessions within a particular set-up which they totally approved of. They had no doubt that the basic role of a woman was that of a home-maker and if not, one of rendering service to others. Education and eradication of certain evils were essential to function better (14)".

Ambai shows that the women's movement in Tamilnadu gradually lost direction by the end of the 1940s and has, according to her, essentially remained stagnant since then. She concludes:

"..... by the end of the forties, the notion of helping women through clarity – through Homes, Orphanages and destitute homes – seemed to be the only alternative to even partially examining the social status of women"(25).

'The Face behind the mask' concludes with Ambai's appeal to Tamil women writers to "Step out of their traditional roles" and "write the truth"(244). A revival of Tamil Literature took place from the late 19th century when works of religious and philosophical nature were written in a simple style for the common people to enjoy. The modern literary movement has started with Subramania Bharathi, the Indian Nationalist poet and writer who has the power of influencing the masses. His works are stimulating in their progressive themes like freedom and feminism. With growth of literacy, Tamil prose began to blossom and mature. Short stories and novels began to appear.

During the 18th and 19th century, Tamilnadu witnessed some of the most profound changes in the political scene. The first novel, 'Prathapa Mudaliyar Charithram' (1879) is written by Mayuram Vedanayagam Pillai. 'Kamalambal Charithram' (1893) and 'Padmavathi Charithram' (1898) portray the life of Brahmins in 19th century rural Tamilnadu by capturing their customs, habits, beliefs and rituals. Madhaviah tells the story in a more realistic way with a searching criticism of the upper caste society, particularly the sexual exploitation of girls by older men. The women writer's work is analysed are overwhelmingly from the urban middle class and tend to be a Brahmin. Their fiction reflects the images of women in Tamil culture. The heroines are stereotypes. They portray the qualities of women are fear, ignorance, shyness, sobriety and chastity. Tamil culture is replete with images of women like Kannagi and Sita going through various ordeals to preserve their purity and chastity. Female sexuality in Tamil culture ridiculed as a weapon with which women tempt men. Tradition only continues to fetter women and making them to certain stereotypes. It impoverishes any fiction they write because the fiction reflects this conformity. The rejection of tradition is necessary for the emergence of the new fiction. Contemporary Tamil women's writing is enriched with its own merit having a foundation of more than two thousand years. It has its initiation with sangam poets such as Avvaiyar, Nachinarkiniyar and other such poets. Since then women writing has its own standing compared with men writing and the only difference is in the Middle Ages, when women could

not contribute much as they were not given a chance for education. In the 20th century, women had their equal position to that of men at their production level of creative writing; but towards the end of the century women writing have equal merit with that of men, both in the production and in-depth creativity. Writers like Rajam Krishnan, Sivasankari, Indhumathy, Bama, Sivakami and Anuradha Ramanan occupy eminent position in contemporary Tamil women writing and considerable research has been done on them. These writers have touched upon social issues and gender issues in their writings.

Though the country has attained tremendous progress, the role of Indian women remains the same. Gender discrimination is the universal phenomenon in the society. Due to the education and economic independence, the status of women has been raised. In order to overcome the discrimination in the society, they must know their rights. Thus the new generation of Indian women novelists advocates independence and assertiveness of women by depicting their characters as survivors who successfully bear torment both physical and emotional. They must raise their voice against the brutalities and violence which is caused by the society. They tend to rebuke the male dominating society which discourages self-reliance in women.

WORKS CITED

- Seshadri, Vijayalakshmi. *The New women in India- English Women Writers Since The 1970*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation. 1995.
- Lakshmi C.S. *The Face behind the mask: Women in Tamil literature*, Stosius Inc/Advent Books Division, 1984.
- Shirwadkar, Meena. *'Image of Woman in Indo-Anglican Novel'*, Sterling Publishers Pvt., Ltd., 1979.
- Dhawan, R.K. ed., *'Indian Literature Today'*. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1994.
- Iyengar, K. R. S. *'Indian Writing in English'*, New Delhi: Sterling Publication, 1985.