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HELEN CIXOUS: AN ICON IN FEMINISM

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KEYWORDS :

For two thousand years in history this whole idea of female has been dealt with to suppress, oppress and subjugate the female kind. If we are asked who is a female, we say that a female is the one who does not dress like a male and the one who smiles nicely. Similarly, if we have a young man in the class coming with a female dress or behaving like a female, he will be looked at with suspect and disgust. This is a reflection of our gender biases that we want the female to behave in a particular way because we expect that a female would grow up into an obedient sister, a very loving caring mother, and a beautiful wife, and a man can be anything. This gender bias has resulted into two thousand years of social and political separation of the female. And feminism is a fight against inequality. Feminists do not want to become men; they want to remain women but they want to fight against inequality, injustice, oppression, tyranny, discrimination and marginalization.

Right up to the end of the 19th century in the western world, women were not allowed in public services, to ride horses, become scientists, drive vehicles, take part in politics and government, or even write literature. Women writers in the West like Emily Bronte or Charlotte Bronte did not write as females; they wrote as males. They wrote under male names because they were weak. But, weakness is a male bias which is resulted from politics and power.

Helen Cixous is an important part of the long tradition of feminist thinking and the feminist struggle for equality and justice. She is a very senior writer and has personally experienced and seen the ups and downs for feminist movement; a writer and a very extraordinary caliber and creative artist of intensity. Cixous is a name to reckon with as a professor in French. She has lectured and taught at various universities in U. K., Canada, America and Europe. Cixous has been strongly influenced by people like Sigmund Freud, Jacque Derrida and a host of other eminent European thinkers. But she has been very closely associated with Derrida since both grew up as French Jews in Algeria. This is a very important fact as the Jews in the early decades of the 20th century particularly during and after the end of the WWII suffered from the sense of isolation, exclusion and eraser of identity. Influence of Sigmund Freud is equally important as the poet's analysis of the gender rules heavily depended on the bipolarity of the male and the female, and obviously the famous 'Oedipus Complex'.

Helen Cixous inquires very seriously into the given binary opposition between the written and the spoken, namely the sound and the word challenging thereby the whole tradition of male writing on women. The written work signifies legal authority, social sanction, religious approval and political mandate, and feminists argue that the political mandate has been in the control of men for centuries; therefore, everything written on women is to a great extent suffers from gender bias.

This indicates that gender bias also includes writing which is admittedly regarded as a very important tool of propagating and legitimizing; it attains a certain kind of legal sanction. That is why we say 'the word of law', but we do not say 'the sound of law'. The word of law has, therefore, a judicial decree. Therefore, Cixous' essays argue that the written language is not reliable; it is the language written by men, and men have controlled over language and political mandate for centuries together. And by writing on men, they have created an image of women suited to men completely ignoring the female existence, completely ignoring the sensitivity. The presence of women is consequently seen in all kinds of cultural products and social institutions wherein women play a very vital part in holding the family institution together. Unfortunately, this history is pushed aside. And, what is taken as dominance over the history and existence of the female is the gender bias by regarding women as weak and impulsive justifying their claim by saying that women do not think before they talk; they do not make judgment and decisions on the basis of reason because of their typical feminine emotionality. Biologically speaking, this whole discussion goes astray because there is no such a thing as a masculine love and a feminine love. This is completely a gender bias for there is no scientific distinction between the male and the female emotionality. Helen Cixous questions all these premises, biases and assumptions which are cultivated, perpetuated, propagated, and judicialized by men.

As unprejudiced readers of Cixous, we can locate her Sorties in the large feminist discourse due to the fact that she is talking about the marginalized sections of women. And, the issues of marginalization of women are very important issues. In the view of this debate, Sorties is part of the whole gender discourse. Cixous' Sorties, then, is basically a discourse on the traditionally assumed polarities between the male and the female but she extends these polarities to the larger facts of nature such as, Sun and moon, Day and night, Father and mother, Logos (reason) and pathos, Form and progress against matter and reception, and in the similar manner, Speech and writing.

She considers this as a hierarchical placement of the oppositions that operate in the male structured dichotomy. Philosophically speaking, women have always been associated with passivity and deception in the prevailing theories of culture, history, art, and even social sciences. It is this male- oriented discourse that structures and reproduces the human thought. Even in literary history, the female is an index to man's desire, his victory and his perception of the world. Cixous argues that the word 'logocentric' is synonymous to 'phallocentric', wherein the male believes in his supremacy in history, society and in the production of knowledge.

Unlike most feminists, especially the Anglo- American feminists, Cixous is aware of the coexistence of feminity in men, a world in which the male thinkers argue that in each male there is an element of a female in the sense that you cannot assume a generalization that the male is absolutely devoid of feminist emotions of love, tenderness and care. Similarly, there are millions and millions of examples of women who had acted like fathers to their children in terms of social responsibility, in terms of training and development of the children, mothers have also shouldered the responsibility that the father is supposed to take on. Cixous does not rule out the responsibility completely but says that there is an element of masculine in each female and there is also an element of female in each male. So, she does not make that kind of sweeping generalization; otherwise this would be making a very mechanical kind of man. So, when she speaks of the gender differences, specifically the differences between the male and the female she is

aware of the complexity that every human being is a complex man in terms of the emotionality, social consciousness, awareness, his location in culture as well as his human participation in human civilization.

To Cixous, the gender difference is a complex issue; she believes that gender difference is distributed according to mere political economy or socially structure. But it is equally an important fact to recognize that most theoreticians on gender attempted to establish the gender difference as a gender opposition on the basis of an essential phallocentric argument.

Commenting on Freud's male- biased ideas, Cixous argues that he looks at the female as a biological misfit, a natural defectiveness and that the male's passion for the female on the various stages of his growth is necessarily a result of his natural fascination for the opposite sex. Without recognizing the natural bisexuality, the focus has always been on the primacy of the male. And, the natural result is that male is supposed to be the producer of culture simply because female is comparatively less capable of sublimating (controlling) her libido or her sexual desires.

Obviously, this is her serious departure from the Freudian psychoanalysis. Freud argues that the male-female issue is an identity that is discovered by male and female both in a given stage of teenage. When the children reach teenage they discover their biology and their libido, a stage in which the female suffers from some kind of defectiveness. This statement that is uttered by Freud is very unscientific. That is why the feminist argument becomes very strong. Freud also argues that the structures of human civilization: the system of education, training, science and development is an act of sublimation. He says that you cannot have civilization without sublimation. Man becomes a gentleman because he is able to sublimate his desires. Freud believes that all civilizations are a product of sublimation, and who is capable of sublimation? The male, not the female, is capable of sublimation. For this reason, men, in Freud's opinion, produce civilization whereas females are incapable for they are impulsive and emotionally charged. And the result is that they cannot sublimate. But this is unscientific either. It is a gender bias to say that women are impulsive and Freud gave this bias a scientific basis when he says that women are not capable of sublimating their desires. That is why all these cultural civilizations are the product of male sublimation, that is to say, the sublimation of desires and the sublimation of dreams.

Cixous' plea, as a modern feminist, is to create and reconstitute a 'gynaecocratic'1 criticism, a society where living structures of the male and the female consciousness are simultaneously recognized and accordingly rewarded. Literature is constituted by the act of representation, i.e., mimesis, and this process of presentation is structured by images, reflections, myths, folklore, legend, symbol and the various devices of linguistic play (meaning). These linguistic devices need to be reconstituted, restructured and reformulated so that women are recognized as equal to men in producing human culture and civilization. In plays, short stories, poetry, journals, essays or whatever you write, every act of writing is necessarily an act of representation which is meant to represent and re- present. So, the way we represent a female would be according to our perceived notions, that is to say, what we expect a female and feminine to be. Accordingly, the plea of all feminists would be "do not represent us as you want us to be, represent us as we are". And this is exactly what women are doing.

A text can also be regarded as a kind of sexual bias wherein you impose your gender because you are the actor and operator; you are the man. This way of female representation can be traced to 2000 years back of gender bias. The feminist reaction against this is that they have been trying to eliminate these unscientific male-prejudiced ideas by negotiating and debating with the hope that they would transcend and sublimate the male consciousness about male superiority. And off course, ***Paradise Lost***, John Milton's epic poem, as a whole is not about Eve; it is about Adam coming down from Eden. It is about Man who is the center of the universe. That is why Nietzsche once said that God have not created us; we have created God. Well, you may have your faith, but the human mind must act rationally; it must surrender to reason and logic. The human progress is rooted in man's capacity to rationalize; without logic and reason you cannot progress. And women, off course want men to be reasonable. It is just a very simple kind of plea. In this sense writers like Cixous speak about the liberation of the female consciousness and at the same time it is the liberation of the male consciousness, as well. In that sense, the feminist discourse is a libratory discourse.[1]

References

1. Gynecocraticy'(n.),'gynaecocratic'(adj.) /dʒaɪˌniːkəˈkrætɪk/: supremacy of women)