



Feminism in Indian English Literature

KEYWORDS

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Literature is a mirror of society. It reflects certain issues of that time in which they are produced. I discuss here about feminism in Indian English literature. Feminism in India is a set of movements with the purpose of defining establishing and defending political and socio-economical rights and equal opportunities for Indian women. Like the feminists of other countries in India too the women struggle for gender equality, the right to work for equal wages the right to equal access to health, education and politics too and I should say for food too as in villages the women farm workers are given less wages and food too as compared to their male counter parts. Indian feminist have to fight against Indian patriarchal society as they aren't given inheritance in properties. They had to suffer widow immolation known as sati too.

We can mainly divide the history of Indian feminism into three parts.

1. Beginning in the mid 19th century when Europeans came out openly against the social evil of sati.
2. From 1915 onwards upto 1947 when Mahatma Gandhi associated feminist movement with Quit India movement.
3. Post independence upto now. It has focused fairly for equality and giving rights for politics too.

Despite this progress women in India have been facing many issues of discrimination. There has emerged a disturbing trend of female foeticide or sex selective abortion a modern form of "Dudh Piti" or "Sati Pratha". Indian feminism only focuses on already privileged women or well settled women. They neglect representation of poorer of lower caste women. As a result of it we find caste specific feminist organizations and movements.

The most important thing about Indian feminist movement is that they have been initiated or started by men later on joined by women. Their main purpose was to abolish the custom of sati, child marriage, disfiguring of widow, remarriage of upper caste. Hindu widows, promoting women's education, legal rights for women to own property. The 19th century is a period when most of the issues of women were taken up.

In the first phase of feminism we must remember Maharani Jind Kaur, the youngest wife of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. She was full of beauty, energy and strength of purpose. The british described as "Messalina of the Punjab" too rebellious to be controlled other names to be mentioned are Jhansi Rani Laxmibai, Kittur or Rani Chennama, Qudsiya Begum of Bhopal and Jind Kaur of Punjab as mentioned earlier.

In the second phase the struggle against the british rule

boosted Nationalism was at its highest peak. Gandhi played a vital role by legitimizing and expanding Indian women's public activities. The women played an important role in the movements known as satyagrah of Bardoli and Satyagrah of Bardoli. All Indian women's conference (AIWC) and the National federation of Indian Women (NFIW) emerged as strong feminist organization by the efforts of Gandhian followers. They became supporting organizations of political movements initiated by congress against the colonialism.

The third and the last phase of feminism is after independence. The democratic and Republic Setup of India gave constitutional equality to all irrespective of race, religion, caste and gender too. The Indian state of Kerala is often viewed as the ideal progressive leader in the women's rights movement. In 1966 Indira Gandhi became the first female prime minister of India. She served as prime minister of India for three consecutive terms from (1966 to 1977).

In 2014 a Mumbai Family court ruled that husband cannot force his wife to put on sari if she wishes to wear a kurta and jeans.

Indian women novelists have given new dimension to the Indian English literature. When we refer the term Indian English writer who writes in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of 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 world wide. India was still under British rule and too rooted in the age old tradition. The concept of feminist writing was started by men in India as we have discussed earlier. So the first Indian feminist writers were actually men Rabindranath Tagore is one of them.

Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problem and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the main theme of their books. For example some of the novels of Anita Desai like "Voices in the City" and "Where shall we go this summer". She has portrayed the complexities between a man and woman relationship. She has tried to explore the psychological aspects of the lead protagonists. The women novelists try to create awareness that this is the time to proclaim with definite precision.

Indian English writings started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. She charmed the readers with her writings as the

great poetess.

Nayantara Sehgal and Rama Mehta used feminist themes in their writings. Nayantara was born on 10th May, 1927. Nehru was her uncle but she never came under his political influence. She openly opposed Nehru government policies and recently she was a part of "Award Wapsi Movement" against atrocities and intolerance of Hindu right wing party rule in India.

Her first book "Prison and Chocolate Cake" was published in 1954. She penned political writings like Indira Gandhi: "Her Road to Power" (1982) and "A situation in New Delhi" (1989). Her two novels "Mistaken Identity" and "Rich like us" were published in America in 1985.

Kamala Das also known as Kamala Suraiya (reverted to Islam) was born on 31st March, 1934. She contributed in Malayalam her native language too. She is believed as one of the exceptional Indian poets writing in English. She is also known as Madhvi Kutty in among her Malayali readers. Her contribution is mainly for short stories and poems.

Bharti Mukherjee was successful in highlighting the cultural clashes and other social and political dilemmas in North America. She is an Indian born American writer, born in Kolkata on 27th July, 1940. She graduated from Calcutta University in 1959 and post graduated from M.S. University Baroda in 1961. She wrote in collaboration with her husband two books "Days and Nights in Calcutta" (1977) and "Sorrow and the Terror". She received Nation Book critics circle Award in 1988 for her famous fiction. "The middleman and other stories". She also won "National Magazine award" for her essay "An invisible woman".

Dina Mehta is Parsi community Indian writer. Her works reflect history of Indian and communities. The parsi writers including Dina Mehta have the clear notion of the fact that the community of the parsis is disappearing rapidly. Through their works they try to preserve their ethnicity.

Jhumpa is indeed the storyteller who weaves the lace of love, identity, crisis, lies and faults in mature way. She is Bengali American author born in 1967 in London. Right from childhood she loved her homeland India. A sense of homelessness and inability to feel accepted took hold of her as she grew up. In 2003 "Namesake" was her first novel. In 2000 she wrote "Indian Holy song". In 1998 she wrote "sexy". Her famous works are "Interpreter of Maladies" (1999) "Unaccustomed Earth" (2008), "The Lowland" (2013).

Some more names to be mentioned are Anita Nair, Susha VIswanathan, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Indira Goswami, Malti Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Shobhade and Arundhati Roy.

Majority of Indian readers comprising both male and female read the novels of the Indian women authors with certain expectations. They look for some "Indian-ness" in their writings. Only the women novelists of India are capable for conveying the message of feminism in an Indian way.

1. Amarty Sen
"The Many faces of Gender inequality"
2. Parth Chaterjee
"The National resolution of Women's question"
3. Suchitra Sinha

"Women's empowerment and Gender bias in the birth and survival of Girls in Urban India"

4. Varsha Bhosle

"On Kamala Das' conversion to Islam"