



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English Literature

FEMINISM AND INDIAN POST MODERN FICTIONS

KEY WORDS: Feminism, Post modernism, Sudha Murty, Anupama, Shashi Deshpande, Jaya, Anita Nair, Ladies Coupe-Akhila

Ms. Kajal Paghdal

Research Scholar Bhagwan Mahavir University, SURAT

Dr. Snehal Vaghela*

Research Guide Bhagwan Mahavir University, SURAT*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Feminism aims to have equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. It throws light on equality and equity based on gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality as understood through social theories and political activism. From Vedic period to present women in India undergoes agony and plight in man dominated society. On the one hand, society worships women in the form of Goddesses and on the other hand, people are wary on their very being born. Most postmodern Indian women novelists are interested in exploring the feminine consciousness of the women characters, their evolution towards an awakened conscience and how eventually this leads to enrichment of their inner self in a male dominated society. Sudha Murthy's novel Mahashweta is one of the best examples for domestic violence, whereas Shashi Deshpande's novel That Long Silence portrays the silent sufferings of Jaya who is the protagonist of the novel. Likewise, Anita Nair's popular work Ladies Coupe is a tale of the indomitable spirit of contemporary Indian women. Women started regaining their lost identity and position in the last few decades of twentieth century, it was majorly due to the efforts laid by social reformers and the writers who penned down the importance of equality. The paper will highlight the difficulties faced by the protagonists as the replica of most of the women in male dominated society and how they stand on their own without male support.

Feminist approach is the prominent in modern and postmodern literature. Women's liberation movement is a serious reform movement aiming at upliftment of women in society. Feminism aims to have equal rights and opportunities for both men and women. It is about respecting women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realise their full rights. It throws light on equality and equity based on gender, gender expression, gender identity, sex, and sexuality as understood through social theories and political activism. Moreover, the concept of feminism precludes time to time. Feminism in literature essentially concerned with the representation of women in society and their corresponding fluids positions. It gives women a voice to introduce an alternative to traditional society.

The term 'feminism' originates from the Latin word 'femina' (woman), originally meant "having the qualities of females". It was used with reference to the theory of sexual equality and the movement for women's rights replacing womanism in the 1890s. However it is difficult to define Feminism in one particular way as different scholars have defined 'feminism' differently. Webster's Dictionary (1996) defines feminism as "the doctrine advocating social, political, and all other rights of women movement for the attainment of such rights for women" (708). Similarly, the Oxford Dictionary (1985) defines feminism as "Movement for recognition of the claims of women for rights (legal, political, etc.) equal to those possessed by men". Toril Moi says:

"The words 'feminist' and 'feminism' are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new woman's movement which emerged in the late 1960s." (1986:20)

The definition of 'feminism' may vary from person to person, but it must be understood in its broadest sense as referring to an intense awareness of woman identity and interest in feminine problems. Its area should not be limited only up to advocacy of women's right. The feminists enormously differ in their approaches and perspectives. Some critics prefer to use the word "feminisms" instead of mere "feminism". However there is one common strand, i.e., feminism is a movement against patriarchal ideology. It is a movement of reforms in the interest of women.

1.1 History of Feminism:

It is believed that feminism began in 1792 with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's revolutionary book A Vindication for the Rights of Women, who demanded equal opportunities for women in the fields of education, economics, and politics. This was followed by other well known writer on women and society such as Margaret Fuller, who showed serious concern about women's oppression in Women in the Nineteenth in 1845. John Stuart Mill, the strong male supporter of women liberation, in his The Subjection of Women in 1869, realized the need for improved education for women and criticized women oppression as domestic slavery. Consequently, the nation of a patriarchal society in which the woman was the victim of economic and cultural disadvantages was reviewed by Rebecca west and Virginia Woolf. In fact A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf was considered as a classic document regarding the feminist critical movement. She discussed strongly issues such as why there were only few women writers and why it was difficult for women to write.

1.2 Waves of Feminism:

Over the years, depending on the country, culture and the period, different feminists have had different goals and causes. Initially, Feminism as a term was coined by Charles Fourier in 1837. A lot of times the term has been reserved for modern movements and any preceding movements have been termed as 'protofeminist'. It is observed that the entire feminist movement has been characterized in three waves. The first wave feminism began in Western countries in the 19th and early 20th centuries as a liberal feminism. The aim of this liberal feminism is to have aimed at emancipation and equality for woman in man dominated society. They struggled for:

- a) removal of barriers to women's participation in public life, and
- b) inserting women into male ways of knowing and doing [girls participate in science, technology, mathematics and boys in languages and humanities] behavior and the political process.

The second wave (Western) feminism from the mid-twentieth century concentrated on the cultural features of female oppression and the structural, social and

psychological transformations to achieve women's liberation. Therefore, feminism not only challenged contemporary sexual relations and politics but produced a new language and discursive framework of:

- a) liberation rather than emancipation, and
- b) Collectivism rather than individualism. Second wave feminism challenged to official (patriarchal) curricula, texts and behaviours and practices including sexuality, femininity and masculinity.

The third wave feminism suggested women's issues in three steps:

- a) the representation of female empowerment as individual transformation,
- b) economic problems, and
- c) the portrayal of political issues as worthy of mockery. Individual empowerment was a key focus of third wave feminism. Western feminists focused on human rights, economic exploitation and political domination.

Fourth wave of feminism: The Feminist Movement Today
Feminists in the United States today are riding the undefined fourth wave of the feminist movement.

"Being a feminist in 2022 means learning and requiring gender equity beyond catchwords, beyond catchphrases, beyond what is presented on social media, on news stories, in textbooks, on documentaries," (Dr. Dennis).

This current wave encompasses many events, including the #MeToo movement and the 2017 Women's March.

The #MeToo movement gained traction in 2017 when producer Harvey Weinstein was exposed for sexually harassing and assaulting women in Hollywood. Unbeknownst to many, activist and survivor Tarana Burke actually started a similar movement over a decade earlier. Her nonprofit organization *me too* strives to provide resources for survivors and help activists end sexual violence.

1.3 Feminism in India

Feminism in India is a set of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and opportunities for women in India. It is the pursuit of women's rights within the society of India. Like their feminist 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 issues within India's patriarchal society, such as inheritance laws.

From Vedic period to present women in India undergoes agony and plight in man dominated society. On the one hand, society worships women in the form of Goddesses and on the other hand, people are wary on their very being born. This explains pathetic sex ratio in India, where even the most advanced and urbanite expectants prefer sons over daughters. Women in India always treated as under protection of man without any freedom to lead life as per their wish.

The feminism in India has a long history and has had several offshoots. The space of fiction allows one to create agency, to challenge boundaries and to represent the lived experiences of women. Female writers in India have questioned societal norms and dismantled patriarchal binds through their writing. Their writing has not just been limited to the domestic space but has also included sharp political critiques. Writers like Githa Hariharan and Mahasweta Devi have also been fierce activists fighting for women's rights.

Most postmodern Indian women novelists are interested in

exploring the feminine consciousness of the women characters, their evolution towards an awakened conscience and how eventually this leads to enrichment of their inner self in a male dominated society. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Bharathi Mukherjee, Anita Nair and some others have denied any sort of feminist bias in their writings but an in-depth analysis proves a strong feminist intent, for women's issue pertains to be the chief concern of their plot.

Sudha Murthy's novel *Mahashweta* is one of the best examples for domestic violence. She ingeniously focuses on realistic problems faced by women in the society and family relationship and how they encounter with the problems. This research will reflect on the educated woman's role as a wife in love marriage, her submission life to her husband, mother-in-law and step-mother in the novel *Mahashweta*. Anupama, who is the protagonist in the novel *Mahashweta* becomes subject of domestic violence. From Vedic period to Digital period women undergoes a series of humiliations, betrayals. The very beginning of the novel states:

"Even though the female child is stronger than male child at birth as adults it is the man who become oppressor, and woman who suffers". (M-1)

Sudha Murthy clearly expressed by her work that the present age women have realized that they are not helpless and are not dependent. A woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today a woman has also become a direct money earner and she is not only confined to household works. The character Anand and Anupama are reflecting the mood and temperament of present day couple. The Novel *Mahashweta* projects post-Independence sentiments and attitudes crystal clearly making the readers to think that life after marriage is not to live individual life but to life together with right understanding to lead a clean and healthy life.

Sudha Murthy's novel *Mahashweta*, offers the readers a tale of a new age woman, named Anupama. She is very beautiful girl, who is from a small village. Her beauty and acting skills fascinate Dr. Anand, who belongs to a rich family. Eventually, Anand's mother Radhakka, reluctantly gets them married despite the family status. The author shines the spotlight on Anupama's resilience and determination throughout the novel. She frees herself away from the clutches of being a traditional daughter-in-law and unlike any other traditional Indian women, she does not subdue her self-respect and dignity for the sake of the prejudices their in-laws hold on to. After their marriage Anand goes abroad to pursue his masters, leaving Anupama with her in-laws. Her fairytale marriage meets with tragic end due to her white patch.

After much thinking, Anupama concludes to be brave woman and she decides to live a happy and respectable life at own cost. At one point she told Satya, "I neither worry about the past, nor brood over the future. I accept life as it comes and don't have any regrets." (M-117)

Shashi Deshpande plays an important role in writing Indo-Anglican novels. She has much contributed for the growth of Indian feminine fiction with her novels. She raises her voice to the struggles and frustrations of Indian middle class women. She attempts to explore the inner psyche of the modern women who are subjugated and suppressed by male dominated society. Most of her novels focus on the feminist fight for the liberation and freedom against the patriarchal society. She has been successful in creating a variety characters who try to assert their individuality by showing their talents and abilities in their successful career.

Her novel *That Long Silence* portrays the silent sufferings of Jaya who is the protagonist of the novel. It exposes Jaya's inner conflict, alienation, isolation and her self-quest to free herself

from the tradition bound society. A subaltern refers to someone with a low ranking in a social, familial or cultural context. In this novel, Jaya has been marginalized and oppressed by her husband and other family members. She is not able to express her thoughts and feelings freely as she is muted by the rules and restrictions of the male hegemony. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes individual existence, freedom and preference. Jaya, the heroine of the novel, is a well educated and creative writer who tries to establish her distinctiveness and individuality in her society. Jaya works towards finding herself after 17 years of marriage and attempts to end the long silence that started in her childhood and restrained her throughout her life. Deshpande beautifully portrays Jaya's inner conflict and her quest for self-identity in this novel that attempts to free the female psyche from male control.

Anita Nair is a living postmodern Indian woman writer in English. As a woman writer, she goes deep into the inner mind of the depressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and brings to light their issues, which are the outcome of Indian women's psyche and emotional inequalities in a male dominated society.

Nair's popular work *Ladies Coupe* is a tale of the indomitable spirit of contemporary Indian women told with great insight and solidarity. In this novel she reflects the perpetual tension between the predicament of the contemporary Indian woman and the traditional Hindu culture. The novel deals with multiple lives and multiple voices, where Nair answers a few questions that every woman would have faced in her life-questions related to her vulnerable position in society. The questions Nair poses in the novel, whether a single woman can really survive all by herself in this world or does she need a man to love her, protect her, and care for her.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* has turned out to be a great success. It is the story of a women's search for freedom and women's conditions in a male dominated society. The novel raises the questions whether the role of an Indian woman as a representative of other women, living under oppressive patriarchal systems in relation to cultural resistance, should be restricted only to their roles as wives and mothers. In such a world, woman's role is limited to reproduction regardless of her own desires and needs. Hence, researcher tries to point out how Anita Nair projects Indian feminism and attitude through women characters in her novels.

REFERENCES:

1. Deshpande, Shashi, *That Long Silence*. New Delhi , Penguin Books, 1998.
2. Murthy, Sudha, *Mahashweta*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2007.
3. Nair, Anita, *Ladies Coupe*, Penguin Books India, 2001.
4. Brunell, Laura; Burkett, Elinor, "Feminism", *Encyclopedia Britannica* Retrieved on 10 January 2020.
5. Chaudhari, Maitryee, *Feminism in India*, Women Unlimited, 2005.
6. G Brisilla, *Feminine Perspective in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe*, *Journal of the Gujarat Research Society*, 2019 - gujaratresearchsociety.in
7. Hiremath, Rudramma S. *Search for Identity and the Glorification of Womanhood in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe*, *Journal of the English Literator Society* 1.2(2016):143-47. Web
8. Iyenger, K.R. Shrinivasa, *Indian Writing in English*, Asia Publishing House, 1973.
9. Myles, Anita, *Feminism and the Post Modern Indian Women Novelists in English*, Sarup & Sons, New Delhi.
10. Parvarthi, S. Pushpalatha, S.K. , *The Evolution of a New Woman In the Sudha Murthy's novel Mahashweta*, - rjelal.com
11. PBM Marieswari, *Feminist Perspective in the selected Novels of anita Nair's Ladies Coupe and Mistress*, *Language in India*, 2014 - languageinindia.com
12. Rimah Saleh, *The Social and Ethical Values in Selected Novels of Sudha Murthy*, *giapjournals*, volume 7, No.5 Sept 2019
13. Swain, S.P. *Articulation of the feminine Voice: Jaya in Shashi Deshpande, Shashi, That Long Silence* .Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Spectrum, 2004 - books.google.com
14. <https://www.womenshistory.org/exhibits/feminism-first-wave-0>
15. <https://www.bestcolleges.com/blog/history-of-feminist-movement/>