

GENDER TROUBLE IN LITERATURE

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Abstract

“I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat or a prostitute.” (West, 1913)

Research means careful investigation or inquiry especially through search of new facts in any branch of knowledge. Gender trouble feminism and the subversion of identity is a book of society which argues that gender is a kind of improvised performance. The work is influential in feminism, women’s studies, lesbian and gay studies.

Keywords:- *Gender trouble, feminism, Literature*

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Introduction

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Objective

The objective of this paper is to highlight the difference between the male and female of the present and past times in and outside India. Another objective is to highlight the problems of the feminine gender which they are still facing in today's world. The paper also highlights that women are not only facing problems inside the confined walls but they are also facing problems outside the confined walls instead of the ample rights given to them.

What is Literature?

Literature in its broadest sense is any single body of written works. It's Latin root literature /litteratura (derived itself from littera; letter or handwriting) was used to refer to all written accounts, though contemporary definitions extend the term to include texts that are spoken or sung (oral literature). Literature can be classified according to whether it is fiction or non-fiction and whether it is poetry or prose; it can be further distinguished according to major forms such as the novel, short story or drama; and works are often categorized according to historical periods or their adherence to certain aesthetic features or expectations (genre). Simon and Ryan begin their attempt to answer the question “What is Literature?” with the observation:

“The quest to discover a definition for “Literature” is a road that is much travelled, though the point of arrival, if ever reached, is seldom satisfactory. Most attempted definitions are broad and vague, and they inevitably change over time. In fact, the only thing that is certain about defining Literature is that the definition will change. Concepts of what is Literature change over time as well”.

Definitions of Literature have varied over time; it is a “culturally relative definition”. (Wikipedia)

What is Gender Literature?

A gender study is a field for interdisciplinary study devoted to gender identity and gendered representation as central categories of analysis. This field includes women’s studies (concerning women, feminism, gender and politics), men’s studies and queer studies. Regarding gender Simone de Beauvoir said: “one is not a born woman, one becomes one”. This view proposes that in gender studies, the term “gender” should be used to refer to the social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities and not to the state of being male or female in its entirety. Gender is pertinent to many disciplines such as literary theory, drama studies, film theory, performance theory, contemporary art history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics and psychology. Each field came to regard “gender” as a practice, sometimes referred to as something that is performative. (wikipedia)

Feminist Activists:

Malala Yousafzai- She is a Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest ever Nobel Prize laureate. She is mainly known for human rights advocacy for education and for women in her native Swat Valley in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Northwest Pakistan, where the local Taliban at times banned girls from attending school. Yousafzai’s advocacy was grown into an international movement. She fights for the rights for women as well as for the children.

The famous autobiography “I Am Malala”- Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb was to take a stand and raise Malala’s voice on behalf of the millions of girls around the world who are being denied their right to go to school and realise potential. My mission, our mission, demands that we act decisively to educate girls and empower them to change their lives and communities. It was when a group of teenage girls and teachers who were chafing from a bus ride from their school. The midterm final had just started and in their joy the girl started singing a national song. As the school bus drove

along the country road and approached the town of Mingora, two men halted the bus and then suddenly entered the vehicle one of them pulled out a girl and asked which one of you is Malala? None of the girls spoke some out of loyalty and others out of fear and unintentionally their eyes turned to Malala, that's how the gunmen knew she was the target and at point length range fired four shots at Malala. Here Malala continues her story and tells about her recovery and her rise as a global symbol of peaceful resistance. Later on we read how her land is taken over by Taliban and how life changed during their rule. For example- any girl who was over the age of ten was banned from going to school. So, Malala and her classmates had to pretend of being under the restriction age, when going to school they had to hide their pen and books underneath their clothes. According to Taliban doctrine local men were forced to grow beards and women were not allowed to laugh out loudly or even white coloured shoes because for some reasons white shoes were male privileges. The televisions were also banned only the Taliban radio station Mullah was allowed. People were told what to eat, wear, how to behave and think. The Taliban enforced a totalitarian fact of state. Every day is a struggle for the local people. The lack of education for girls is especially alarming, the thing is to "educate a man is to educate an individual but educating a girl is educating a generation". In this book in the words of Malala is a war for education, a war for reform and it's a matter of life and death. Malala explains how proper education can reform her country. By the quotes of Malala we see the story of each and every girl:

"I tell my story, not because it is unique, but because it is not. It is the story of many girls".

"Extremists have shown what frightens them most: a girl with a book." (Yousafzai, 2013)

Angela Yvonne Davis- She is an American political activist, academic scholar and author. Her research interests are feminism, African-American studies, critical theory, Marxism, popular music, social consciousness, and the philosophy and history of punishment and prisons. She grew up surrounded by communist organizers and thinkers who significantly influenced her intellectual development.

The famous book of Angela Yvonne Davis "Colors of Violence against Women"-she states violence is one of those words that is a powerful ideological conductor one who's meaning constantly mutates. Many of us now take for granted that misogynist violence is a legitimate political issues, but let us remember that little more than two decades ago, most people considered domestic violence to be a private concern and thus not a proper subject of public discourse or political intervention. Only one

generation separates us from that era of silence. The first speak out against rape occurred in the early 1970's and the first national organisation against domestic violence was founded toward the end of that decade. We have since come to recognise the epidemic proportions of violence within intimate relationships and the pervasiveness of date and acquaintance rape as well as violence within and against same sex intimacy. One of the major question arises is how to develop analysis that furthers neither the conservative of sequestering millions of men of color in accordance with the contemporary dictates of globalized capital and its prison industrial complex nor the equally conservative project of abandoning poor women of color to a continuum of violence that extends from the sweatshops through the prisons, to shelters and into bedrooms at home. The argument that sexual and domestic violence sometimes leads to a hierarchical notion that genital mutilation Africa and Sati, or wife burning in India are the most dreadful and extreme forms of the same violence against women which can be discovered in less appalling manifestations in Western cultures. As Kimberle Crenshaw germinal study on violence against women suggest the situation of Native American women shows that we must also include within our analytical framework the persisting colonial domination of indigenous nations and national within and outside presumed territorial boundaries of the U.S. (Wikipedia)

Suchitra Bhattacharya- In the mid eighties that she took to novel from short stories. With the publication of the *Kacher Dewal* she became one of the prominent writers of Bengal. Her writings basically revolve around social issues. She writes mainly on the crisis of all human relationships and the changing values of the present era which involves degeneration of honesty and morality. Being a woman writer she portrays the sufferings of woman from all classes of life and society, although she is not a feminist.

The famous book of Suchitra Bhattacharya "Dahan"- This is a story of a middle class young woman named Romita Chowdhury. In the first letter to her elder sister who stays in Canada she says that she is in love with her new home, her in laws. The arranged marriage has ensured that the couple didn't know each other well. The incident which shakes up the easy and quiet rhythm of her post marital romance, takes place when she and her husband Palash go on a shopping trip and are caught without transport in an evening shower outside the metro station near their house. While Palash is across the road buying cigarettes a group of men started harassing Romita and finally assaults her. When Palash comes to save his wife, the men beats him up severely and tries to carry Romita with them. No one came to her rescue but only one woman Srobona Sarkar a school teacher comes to her

rescue. The men were thrown off their balance due to the persistent trial of both Romita and Srobona and they both finally escaped. Srobona was to be facilitated for her act of bravery whereas on the other hand, Romita was seen as a housewife being molested by several men. Even when Romita recovered from the trauma Palash was questioned many ill things about Romita. Romita was constantly supported by her sister-in-law. Srobona was also not allowed to support Romita because it was a matter of prestige for her in-laws and her husband. Romita writes in long letters to her sister briefly contemplating divorce after Palash beats up and rapes her, all the while taunting her about her metro station lovers. Everything got confined for Romita after the incident. Both women at the end seem to find a modicum of freedom by being on the road being between spaces-travelling from one impossible shelter to another which also perhaps does not exist. Romita does not break up her marriage legally but decides instead to travel to her sister in Canada. Her future is indefinite-perhaps she will find a job, perhaps take up a course, perhaps she will stay, perhaps come back. She is no longer so concerned, she writes about whether her marriage formally remains or is ended, but asserts nonetheless her desired to be freed from confinement. In a sense she denies a possible legal solution to her problem, perhaps having realised the limitations of legality to give freedom and dignity to a women in a world where she continues to remain half a human being – infantilised, powerless, and silenced by the very relationship that she holds dearest. Srobona too struggles with herself but finally agrees to marry Tunir in spite of her utter disillusionment. Her loss of respect and trust. The book seems to argue that love survives the death of these emotions and because there is nowhere else to go, perhaps to stay is as good as solution. Romita's voice reads from her letter, as Srobona walks out from the old age home; 'We are all inevitably alone. Then why disturb these relationships as they are? Let them be. Perhaps it is enough not to depend on them any longer'. (Wikipedia)

How Literature represents Gender Trouble?

In Literature gender trouble is depicted in many ways. In the past in earlier Asia and Africa there women also faced gender problem. During Renaissance women were given freedom to wear according to their wish, they were allowed to party, sing and dance but in confined walls. In that age men were only given rights to express their views through writing. But when women thought of doing so they were denied, so writers among the women folk had to use different male pseudonyms- Mary Ann Evans as George Eliot and many other like her. The fight for women's right remained crucial and was articulated in powerful slogans such as equal pay for equal work. This type of liberal "equality

feminism” is best associated with the pioneering American feminist Betty Freidan whose works expressed the frustration and psychological distress of 1950’s housewives in America and labelled their secret sufferings the “problem with no name”. The Second Sex argued that there was no such thing as ‘feminine nature’. There was no physical or psychological reason why women should be inferior to men, and yet, throughout history and across cultures, women had always been second class citizens. Even when worshipped and adored, they have had no autonomy and received no recognition as rational individuals, any more than when they have been abused and denigrated. Biological differences do not provide a casual explanation for women’s oppression; however their reproductive function has placed women at a disadvantage trying them to the domestic sphere and associating them with the body and thus with animals and nature. Just as man considers himself superior to nature, so he considers himself to be superior to woman. Asking why women have allowed men to subordinate them (existentialist philosophy emphasizes self-determination) brought de Beauvoir back to the body and motherhood. Excluded from the public sphere women fail to form the alliances made by men in war and government and business, and form instead male-female bonds that destroy the potential female group identity that could position man as the other to women’s self. For de Beauvoir marriage is an oppressive and exploitative arrangement, which reinforces sexual inequality and binds women to domesticity. It perpetuates the belief that if the female is protected and provided for by her male partner, she is happy; she is thought to be content that her needs are provided for de Beauvoir however related this belief. Introducing the concepts of ‘transcendence’ and ‘immanence’, she argued that the fulfilment of human potential must be judged not in terms of happiness but in terms of liberty. Liberty is something attaining more than one’s existence peacefully and comfortably; to be free, a person must transcend his or her life –the temporary and unthinking happiness that comes from being warm and well fed- and pursue the uniquely human desire to know more, do more, have more. The male we are led to believe, is transcendent: his work and invention will shape the world for future generations, thereby affording him a form of immortality. The female, however, is immanent: through motherhood she produces the next generation in a purely animal way, and does not affect the future. She is excluded from the pursuit of knowledge; her liberty is limited and defined and granted her by someone else and as such, is no liberty at all. For de Beauvoir, the key to female emancipation lay in women’s release from her bodily identification. De Beauvoir believed that women’s reproductive cycle and typically lesser physical strength have worked to entrap her within the imminent, whilst men has been free to transcend the purely biological through the philosophy, art and science all of which

differentiate him from the other animals. Feminist literary criticism was born of the debates of second wave feminism. Feminists brought to literature a suspicion of literary ideas which made their approach truly revolutionary. They were interested in literature as a means of creating and perpetuating belief systems. Before 1970's the established canon of 'great works' was male authored, with a few exceptions such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charlotte Bronte. Up to this point, the field of literature like the whole of culture had been considered gender-neutral. Whilst second wave feminists were working through their disagreements a growing voice of dissents could be heard coming from number of different directions. Increasingly black, lesbian and working class women were protesting that the seemingly universal voice of feminism did not represent their views or their lives. Some feminists had been guilty in ignoring their issues. Black women protested at the common division between race and gender in feminist discourse and argued instead that two categories were inseparable. For black women all oppression was not reducible to sexual difference and there was more than one identity battle to fight. As well as being accused of racism, feminism came under attack for 'homophobia' or at least for 'heterosexism' – the presumption of a heterosexual norm. Taking its cue from use of the terms Black and Third World War, lesbian criticism began by questioning the politics of defining oneself as a lesbian. As the politics of sexuality were further explored the definitions of lesbian and lesbian writing began to expand. Following for example- Daly's inclusive idea of the 'lesbian in all women', a novel such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland an all female (non sexual) utopia could be seen to overlap to lesbian identity. In today's times we all say that Sati system(Pratha) has been eradicated from our Indian society but is it really so, I say no because in some developed society and states still new born brides are being burnt live by their in-laws in the name of 'dowry'; can't this act be called as Sati? In the book My Name is Malala, there Malala raises her voice for the education of girls but the sadistic part is that parents sent their girls to school mainly not for education but for having meal in the Mid-day meal programme if this continues no one can educate a girl. (Tolan, 2006)

Conclusion

In present day's society though many feminist writers have tried much to raise the issues of the women folk but then also in many places we can see that women folk are being victimised in one way or the other. In some of the religious places also she is denied to enter till today, but for why, is it only because they are women or has God said that 'No' women should come to my temple to worship me;

so why and who are we to make rules differently for the women folk. Can we proudly say that we are giving all the rights to the women folk, are we truly worried for the welfare and empowerment of the women folk? I don't think we all can give a appropriate answer to this because we all at the back of our mind know that till date women folk are being subjugated and being confined in between four walls. Government is providing with employment but how many of the women folk are being employed. Though child marriage has been eradicated from our society but is it so because girls after attaining the age of eighteen immediately gets married, though she is eighteen (18) years old and is legally eligible for marriage but biologically she is not ready; isn't it is indirectly child marriage? Feminists are trying their best to uplift the women folk and upto some extent it's been successful in the upper classes and in urban area but in the rural and lower classes till the old patriarchal society reflects why so, it's just because for we the people; now again a question arises 'how?' the answer is though we say untouchability is eradicated but I will say it's not been eradicated in true sense because when the question of going to any villages arises then we the literate people from urban area start giving ample of reasons for not going there; if we will not go there then how will the feminist get helping hands to help the subjugated rural women folk to overcome their nightmares?

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