

Feminism in 19th Century Literature and Society

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Abstract:

Feminism is an approach celebrated centuries together. Still the 19th century generations gave it a different limelight. It also suggest the liberation movement. Writers in the Golden Age of Victorian Era such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Brontes, Mrs Gaskell, Harriet Martineau and George Eliot have contributed their best works. Multiple times 19th century is called as the wave of Feminism. Aptly we can see the influence upon the readers and the Movement flourished with striking energy and impact. The right to vote in 1920 which proved a milestone pushed away all the hierarchical thoughts and gave way to a new journey with a new centre for world's population. A strong difference in Literature written by women and Feminist Literature must be understood. Intentionally connected with the experiences and driving their own impulses would be considered as Feminist writing. The present paper is an effort to describe the feminism and its traces in 19th century literature.

Keywords: Feminism, Womanhood, Writers, 19th century literature.

Introduction:

Writing a new chapter in literature 19th century comes with new trends in the history of Literature. J.S. Mill writes the struggle with patriarchal thinking as well as writing won't be easy. But it is already well known to everyone that breaking the traditions is not a soft task. Some authors like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony stick their pen with female sufferings, right to vote, education's access, etc. Radical movement with the demands like the abolition of covertures and access to employment rose from the hearts and took the same in front of the world. It was the time when working class and black women were kept outside the category 'Women'. The middle class leadership formed the ideologies of the movement leading the movement. Feminism is a concept where women with their contribution is valued.

Women writers have always got encouraged from the audience. They can be of many types but encourage the writers. Same is the way of critics about giving attentions. The fiction writing was prominently dominated by women in the 19th century, clearly answering the male dominant world with potentials. From self experience to self expression is the journey of writer to be accomplished. Writer's clarity of thoughts guides the readers throughout the book; strongly focused, critical in developing the thought process. Self consciousness develops in women in writing novels, but very rarely they define their selves. Once being clear about the self identity and experiences, they must lead the way chosen as their non trodden path. The experiences define the form of art and unfold the chapters of history. Moving away from the male world but reaching the culture centring on female oriented scenario must be inculcated while wishing a woman her own space. Struggling with men can never be the motif but creating oneself a better place to live in; and this must be thrust upon the male dominant thinking. Most critics who have feminine peculiarities at the first place to think; have quickly found themselves expressing their own cultural biases rather than explicating sexual structure. Sentiment and observation can be identified by Lewes as feminine literary traits.

Women readers also find it difficult interpreting women writer's book explaining their capabilities. George Eliot says different from male experience and aptitude a precious speciality exist; It can be located in maternal affections, sentimental connections with other human being and the touch of humanity in the creation of every particular thing. Personal and psychological qualities of women novelist are witnessed while reading the characters. They are impressionistic. Women's traditional history underwent a change due to extreme form of traditionalism. The range and diversity of a thin band has been condensed and reduced due to derived theories.

Critics found it difficult considering women's literature due to mainstream practice. Extreme opposites can be visualised in women's writing; hence it is an eternal opposite to the traditional creativity. Victorians

expecting women writers to show the conventional stereotypes received a vice versa as they had outgrown the constraining feminine role. Eminent and charming can no longer be stuck to them; but they are exploring varied thoughts, of course unconventional but still raising the curiosity. Traditional thinking of suppressing the women suddenly thrown away by the generation of women writers and empowerment helped securing a space for themselves.

Projection of the sensitivity in literary history, the information we need to understand the evolution of female literary tradition had been provided. Using a pen name, especially of a man clearly reflected the biased scenario of society. Though earlier but still these differences can be visualised. The path of female self awareness can be conceptualised and seen in English novels. With new framework, the existence of unnoticed and neglected becoming potentially powerful member of society gets effective presentation. Ellen Moers refers this movement as international movement and hardly subordinate to the mainstream. A solid difference between the perception of man and woman in connecting with the world marks the basic stereotypes.

Jane Austin's novels revealing the young women's marriages and social scenario, shows the class structure in 19th century. She shows the women with thoughts, behaviour and desires. Feminism as a movement started in the latter half of the 20th century still the scenario of Austin's novels give us accurate form of the same. With the use of irony and ridiculing the social manners, Austin is described many times as moral, realistic and social critic. Variety of characters with different personalities revealed with the context and treatment.

So many women give voice to the vital issues in their life. They compare and analyze the sufferings as victims of discrimination in society. Talking about the self realization of women is also a method developed during feminist movement. Problem of identity and feeling a vacuum are some issues which are strongly addressed currently through feminist writing. Resistance signifying the rising power in fictional narratives shows dominant power structure and disobedience at the same time. It is the mode of expressing literary, cultural feminist dilemmas; having soft corner for feminine aspects. Feminism is a series of campaigns of social reforms like equality, violence, etc. Though a single term, Feminism is attached to multiple theories and concepts, sometimes connecting the altogether different ends. The modern world feminist writers are vitally aware of the key points of the movement and are focused with purpose. Protagonists also were shifted from male to female and more attention with minute observation in development of the characters was also possible due to the same.

Conclusion:

Hence it is apt to say that the female literary tradition in 19th century and its effect which can be seen in the centuries in succession. Taking into notice the female literary tradition in terms of women's self awareness and finding a medium of self expression; we can witness the changes society is having. In other words every generation has the opportunity to discover themselves a new; without a history in another sense. Feminism can simply be defined as a wish to make the world equal without boundaries, abolishing the idea of inequality. Many new experiments were conducted in 19th century with fruitful results who left the readers with multiple masterpieces to read. Understanding the contribution of feminism definitely draws our attention to the fact that new world is the fruit these uproars and hullabalos during the earlier centuries.

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