

Post Colonial Discourse and Feminism: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract: This paper presents an overview post-colonial discourse and feminism with a focus on Indian perspective.

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1. Introduction

Feminism is an integral component of the post-colonial discourse. It raises such issues as are deeply related to the problems of nearly half of the marginalized and exploited creatures of the world recognized as women. Post-colonial literatures across the four continents of the world are replete with the texts which are gynocentric and take up the questions that women were not allowed to tackle with in the past. Post-colonial literature in fact deals with the issues and the persons which remained on the periphery and could not get articulated due to the fear and terror perpetrated on them by the colonizers. The very term 'colonial' in itself sometimes creates confusion as it is consciously or unconsciously related to the British empire and their colonies. But the term has broadened its meaning and includes feminism, racism, apartheid, colors consciousness and the voices of the underdog and downtrodden which have really been featured by the writers of developed and developing countries alike. Since we are concerned in this paper only with the issues of feminism, we are not taking up other prominent issues articulated in world's literatures. Women as the prominent feminist writers of the east and the west opines that they are still not free because they are everywhere in chains. In other words, they are still colonized by the dominant male race throughout the world. According to a report published by the International Labor Organization, all the countries of the world, whether developed or developing have somewhat similar treatment towards women.¹

It is a fact that all the societies of the world have phallogocentric, colonial and oppressive attitude towards women. Women, introspective of their caste, class, colors and community are undergoing the same discrimination all over the world. Therefore, it is now said that all the colonies of the imperialism have been freed except one and that is the women, who is definitely the last colony of the world to be freed from

the clows of imperialistic and phallogocentric societies that have played a crucial role in the colonization of women. This colonization dates back to several years and the women have been indoctrinated to think and behave in terms of the male superiority and their own inferiority in every respect.

The colonizers work with the specific aim to colonize the subject both mentally and physically. To achieve their goals, they formulate such rules and laws that mould and shape the psychology of the subjects in accordance with the desire of rulers and in course of time the colonized race instinctively starts behaving and thinking accordingly. Women being aware of the fact that phallogocentric world mistreat them, socially and economically exploit them and brutally attacks and subjugates them, but they cannot resist it as they are weak. The cause of this colonized psychology lies in cultural indoctrination that they are inferior to men and it is their pious duty to follow the guidelines set for them by the patriarchy in the field of Social-Behaviour. They think that they deserve this maltreatment at the hands of men and their colonizers. The patriarchy destroyed the matrilineal system of society thousands of year ago and made women fully its dependent. The philosophers, artists, religious preachers, writers, sculptors united together to subjugate women by creating ground for the perpetuation of phallogocentric view of the world.

In the post-colonial literature, the sexual politics has been explored and investigated by the male and female writers such as Germaine Greer (Australian writers), Kate Millett, Toril Moi, Catherine M Rogers, Levi Strauss, Tasleema Nasreen, Mahadevi Verma, Kamla Das and innumerable others. All of them reached at the conclusion that the view of the world is entirely male-centric and all forms of art smack of sexism in which women is commodity and man is her user.

It shall be better here to have a glance at Indian Perception of feminism as the main aim of this paper is to search the root of male-oriented world-view developed by the patriarchy in which Men are 'we' and women are 'they', all men are colonizers and all women are colonized slaves. Indian literatures are not for behind in taking up the analysis of gynocentric issues such as gender discrimination, male chauvinism, persecution of women within and without the four walls of homes etc. Such writers as

¹ Rakesh Kumar (2011), *Narivadi Vimarsh* P.23.

Vishakhadutta, Maitrayi, Pushpa, Rajendra Yadava, Rakesh Kumar, Shudesh Pachauri, Katyayani, Arvind Jain, Krishna Sobti, Manoo Bhandari, Chitra Mudgal, Mehruunisha Parvez and several others have critically analyzed the issues of feminism in their writings. Kondapuri Nirmala has very well shed light on Indian feminist writings:

“Feminism has assumed a new language and a new perspective. Our silence has broken and we have started to be reasonable and inquisitive. Our free try is betraying the sufferings, anguish and problems of women with spontaneity, gravity and force. It is a revolutionary change”² Also, it is more than true that women writings in India have undergone a sea-change in the last four to five decades. In the writings of women, we find a strong manifestation of Indian women’s awareness to their fundamental rights and sheathing attack on patriarchy. Women writers such as Krishna Sobti, Manno Bhandari, Gagan Gill, Mridula Garg and Mahashweta Devi have provided a new identity to women writings in India. Feminist discourse started analyzing the issues of morality, chastity, virginity, motherhood by correcting them with women’s exploitation.

In a phallogocentric set up male have got the innate right to use women as commodity. He may have the body of women by marrying her legally and later on he is free to dispose off her in the name of divorce by calling her characterless, unchaste or morally depraved. Women is simply an object of use for him neither less nor more. In the matrilineal societies, women were free to decide their relationship with men. The meaning of such words such as love, sex, morality and chastity changed completely when the patriarchy came into existence to exercise its power by defeating matrilineal set-ups.

In Mudra Rakshas, Vishakhadutt has very pertinently pointed out that the oppression of women in India Dates back to the time of the ‘Rigveda’ or even to an earlier period. He gives textual proof in his essay entitled ‘Buddha Purva Bhartiya Itihas’, ‘Ved Virodh Ki Parampara’, ‘Dalit Aur Stree’. By quoting from the Vedas and the Smritis which were pro- establishment against women and downtrodden. Some time it is misconstrued that women were very free in the Vedic period because such women as Lopamudra etc. were supporters of the established social system and came to India along with brahmins from central Asia. Otherwise, the Rigveda makes it clear that women were treated as slaves and commodity. It is mentioned at one place of the Rigveda that Brahmins are found to worship Indra to enrich their race with women by defeating the enemies. In the Skand Puran, it is clearly written that a chaste and husband worshipping-women should cry loudly when her husband beats her. It has also been suggested that a thin stick and rope should be used in binding and beating the women.

In one place it is written in The Rigveda that women have the heart of the wolves. It is argued in the Mudra Rakshas that perhaps these women might have belonged to the category of slave women, who would have won the battle after defeating their husbands. Women were deprived of education and all forms of knowledge just as Sudras were prohibited from even

listening to the words of the Scriptures. It is also mentioned in these scriptures that in case of the Sudras venture to trespass their limit were sentenced to death. They were not allowed to participate in religious rituals Jap and Yagya. They were even disqualified for undertaking Pilgrimage, Sanyasa and chanting of Mantras. In the same way women too were not authorized to chant the Mantras and participate in any Yagya. In Mahabharat Bhishma, who is idolized by Indian masses as a great hero, says: क्षुरधारा विषं सर्पो वह्निरित्येकतः स्त्रियः, meaning by you may put women on the one side of fence and sharp-edged knife, poison, snake and fire on the other side. Bhishma also says, न स्त्रीणां क्रियाः करिष्विदिति धर्मो व्यवस्थितः thereby no religious rituals are allowed to be performed by women. In the Shanti Parva, it is said that women is as devoid of Sanskar as that of the Sudras. She should not chant the Mantra- न चापि संस्कारम् इह अर्हति] the brahmin religious sculptures equate the Sudras with women- स्त्रियो हि मूलम् दोषायाम् meaning by woman is the source of all evils. दृष्टैव पुरुषम् हृदयम् योनिः प्रक्लिष्यते स्त्रियाः that is, the Genitals of women get moistured on seeing men). Goswami Tulsidas the writer of Ram Charita Manas is of the same view as:

भ्राता पिता पुत्र उरगारी
पुरुष मनोहर निरखत नारी।।
होइ विकल सक मनहि न रोकी।।
जिमि रविमनि द्रव रविहि विलोकी।।³

In Maitrayani Samhita and Manu Smriti, women is said to have been originated from falsehood or lies, “असितो वा एष संभूतो यत् शूद्रः स्त्रियो अनृमिति”¹ In Shatpath Brahman, the oldest book for proper execution of Karmakand or religious rituals, it is stated that falsehood, sin and darkness are always found in women, sudras, dogs and crows. In the 30th Sukta of Rigveda’s fifth mandal, it is said that the women are the weapons and army of slaves. We shall not go in detail, but it is to be noted that women were in the position of slaves in the ancient time and they could not be allowed to go independent in any stage of their lives-“न स्त्री स्वातंत्र्यमर्हति”³ । Women could not have any economic control says Manu Smriti- भार्या, पुत्रश्च, दासश्च त्रयः एव अधनाः। The despicable position of women was the consequence of the state power that was operated through the great sages and scholar who defined what is to be done and what is not to be done by the Sudras and women. It is said that the Vedas are the root of all the dharmas and scholars framed laws only after thorough study of the Vedas. It is clear from above discussion that the Sudras and women were brain washed by the religious prescriptions under the compulsions having been prescribed by the state. If anyone dared to violate it, he or she was to be punished and killed mercilessly. In course of the time, he or she behaved and acted instinctively. The enormity of this brainwashing can be surmised from an anecdote that occurs in the Daan Dharma Parva of Mahabharat. Brain washing pushed the victim to do all the undoable things which he could not do in normal circumstance. The Story in Dan Dharma parva goes like this-

² Ibid p.40.

³ Sandhan, pp. 37-42.

there comes a Brahman guest to the house of Agniputra Sudarson. He is welcomed and properly served by host Sudarson. The guest Brahmin, then says that he wants to have sex with the host's wife and the host readily agrees.⁴

Post-colonial discourse strongly attaches the phallogocentric values which were framed to enslave and enchain women at a certain turn of history. Feminist have started questioning the validity of such religious texts which were male-oriented and prejudiced against women. The old myths of Savitri and Sita have been exploded with a bang without any fear-psychosis by the modern feminist writers. Women are bent upon exposing the male hypocrisy, double-facedness and textual politics. Previously they were exploited in the name of religion, good and evil, but now they have understood the power-game. Maitreyi Puspa has well written as: "You have only two pictures of women- Goddess and Monstress; chaste or characterless but believe us women is busy decorating the signboard in the metros, cities, towns by roads and highways. These Sursas are not selling themselves on a high cost in the market, they are buying males. Their glistening faces are making them run hysterically. The people of great name and fame have gone bankrupt, but these marauding beauties are swaying their bodies elegantly. What an age is this!"⁵ Women is free to express her feelings openly because there is no Manu to check her movements and sentiments under the threat of religious prescriptions.

It shall be pertinent here to refer to a few poems and works that have appeared in the post-colonial discourse to reinterpret the existing texts. Efforts are on to rewrite the text of Ramayana and Mahabharata to view women in different light. It is need of the hours to shatter the old mythology created by patriarchy. A collection of short stories entitled 'Sita se shuroo' by Navnita Devsen is an attempt to see and interpret the Indian Mythologies in a fresh perspective. In the first story of Mool Ramayana, the writer has given full freedom to Valmiki to write in any way just like a post-modern writer. This is the main substance of this short story. The short story opens with an epigraph- "whatever you shall write will be truth, that which occurs is not a truth."

The statement is as good for Valmiki as for the writer herself. In the text of the short story Pawan Putra Hanuman goes to Lanka with Ram's ring and comes back to Ram by seating Sita on his back through the air-route. Ram and Sita start exchanging their views which are amorous in nature. At this juncture Valmiki appears on the scene and starts condemning both of them in a fit of uncalled for anger because Ram and Sita thwarted original design behind the abduction-episode of Sita which was meant for Ravan's death along with his race and maintaining the cosmic order. Sita too gets angry and calls Valmiki thief, robber and white ant-sage and goes back to Lanka again placing herself on Hanuman's back through air route. Valmiki gets extremely enraged at Sita's misconduct and declares- "She is very smart women. I shall see her. I am also the great sage Valmiki. I shall see her! I shall see

!.....One who has the power of pen in his hand has the whole world under his power."⁶

In another short-story Raj Kumari Kamvalli alias Shurparnakha comes to Ram and asks for his love. Ram is enamoured by her extraordinary beauty but he is so much afraid of Sita that he does not accept her love proposal. She approaches Lakshman, who is very hungry and does not find himself prepared to reciprocate her love. Both the brothers torment her and at last Lakshman is afraid of her physical power and stats a false game of love with her only to bite her nose with his sharp teeth. The story is powerful recreation of the earlier popular story in the Ramayana. It shows Ram and Lakshman as shallow, cunning, deceitful, mean, lustful whereas Surparnakha has been shown as brave, free and straightforward. The text of the short story is definitely deconstruction of the mythological characters so that the freedom of women could be emphasised. The new text makes it clear that women were so free even thousands of year ago that they could take initiative in love and marriage. women were so much powerful as to force male to agree with their decisions.

The deconstruction of the plays of Kalidasa also projects the male-centric vision. Shakuntala, who becomes a victim of Dushyant's lust suffers a lot in the play. Instead of making her rebellious, Kalidas inserts the theory of curse by introducing sage Durvasa. Dushyant instead of being condemned goes scot-free for his misconduct as the reader is made to understand that he is innocent because he was acting under the shadow of the curse. Prejudice and hatred against the women can also be glimpsed in the myths of marriage between Kalidasa and Vidyttama who had to bow down to the tricks played on her by the cunning pandits who could not tolerate the supremacy of intellectual power of a women. The feminists insist for an urgent need to rewrite these myths as they support the patriarchy.

The feminist movement that began in the sixties with the publication of Simon de Beauvoir's 'Second Sex' in 1949 and Betty Frieden's 'The feminine Mystique' in 1963 has come a long way in India too. The post colonial discourses in Indian English writings has taken up men-women relationship in the new way. Writers like Shobha De have emerged in the recent years as great feminist writers. Shobha De's novel such as 'Starry Nights' and Kamla Das's autobiographical work 'My Story' explore women's sexuality uninhibitedly. Extra marital relationship are no longer taboo in Indian English writing. More women writers such as Shashi Desh Pandey, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri etc. are coming up to explore women's issues in their creations. They are quite different from the early breed of writers like Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala as they presented the suffering of women in phallogocentric set up as it was their destiny. It shall be great injustice if we exclude the male writers such as R K Narayan as well as Arun Joshi too raised the problems pertaining to the domain of women in their fictions. R K Narayan's two fictions namely 'The Guide' and 'The Painter of Signs' take up the

⁴ Buddha Poorva Itihas, P.40.

⁵ Matrayi Pushpa's *Stri: ek Safar*, P.77.

⁶ Ravindra Katyayan's *Book Review: Sita se Suroo*, P.282.

problems of women in a male dominated world order. Rosie in the *Guide* and Daisy in the *Painter of Signs* are two facets of the feminism. Rosie defies the social order by separating herself from her feudalistic husband Marco who does not accept her freedom for the expression of her dancing art. She trusts Raju, who deceives her by being too much possessive. Daisy on the other hand epitomises a sort of radical feminism who deludes Roman the Painter to the very end of the novel. She enters into a physical relationship with Roman, but forsakes him next day as if nothing had happened between the two.

The post-colonial discourse in Indian literature deals with feminism and its various facets in an open and transparent way. Women writers have shed behind their inhibitions about sex, love, virginity and chastity. Even the male writers too come forward to attack the hypocrisy and double-facedness of the phallogocentric set up in their discourse. The upsurge of the new writers in Indian literatures reveal that the feminism has come of age in the land of Sita and Saviri too.

2. Conclusion

This paper presented an Indian perspective of post-colonial discourse and feminism.

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