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Feminism in India

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Beginning FROM the first inception of the Universe, there is a fascinating myth associated with the creation of woman by the Supreme Creator, Lord Brahma. And indeed, beginning from Brahma Himself, the idea of feminism in Indian literature, both oral and written, had begun to be established, though perhaps not as blatant as is today. It is said that Brahma had first created man and in his generosity, had desired to give man a companion.

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I. Introduction

The word 'Feminism' seems to refer to an intense awareness of identity as a woman and interest in feminine problems. The subjugation of woman is a central fact of history and it is the main cause of all psychological disorders in society. According to Janet Richards, "The essence of Feminism has a strong fundamental case intended to mean only that there are excellent reasons for thinking that woman suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex, the proposition is to be regarded as constituting feminism."

Feminist theory also devises the strategies to transform the social structures, which can help in the emancipation. The strong wave in the 1960s and 1970s helped to theories a woman's discourse. In 1980s,'Feminism' concentrated on transforming the individual fields and in 1990s began a major role in directing academic focus on the concern of the so-called otherness', differences and questions of marginality.

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Margaret Homans has rightly pointed out that the concept of feminism raises fundamental queries about reading, writing and the teaching of literature. It operates as an interdisciplinary tool for social and cultural analysis and as a political practice. Feminism has transformed the precision of life and literature.

Feminism is multicultural and diasporic. The needs of women who live in different countries are dissimilar, and they are conditioned by several factors: familial, societal/racial, marital, economic, and cultural and individual consciousness (subjectivity). In such a diverse context, it would be far wrong to associate Indian feminism with the western, which is marked by radical norms, and invoke western feminist critics on the problems that women in India confront.

Jasbir Jain's *Indigenous Roots of Feminism* seeks to analyse the feminist movement in India in a historical perspective, free from the hangover of western concerns She says: "Draupadi deconstructed the notions of chastity and sati; Sita, of power and motherhood; Kali, of violence; Puru's young wife, of sexuality; the *bhakta* women, of marriage and prayer."

Jasbir's conviction is that "feminism is more than a voice of protest or questioning. It is moral self-reflection, a conquering of inner fears and are alisation of self-worth ... It does not abandon values or relationships, but goes on to create new ones."

Our epics and *puranas,* with their plurality of narrative strategies and multiplicity of interpretations, touch upon all possible aspects of human life helping us to raise — and comprehend — some of the basic questions that govern family and public life. Kalidasa's Shakuntala and Ilango Adigal's Kannagi are supreme instances of women who, though brought up and nurtured in a domestic set up of patriarchal exclusion and total surrender and subservience to authority, fight for their moral rights, putting the kings to shame.

There has been no major political or social uprising against male domination. Remarkably, women in the *bhakti* movement defied all restrictions and achieved gender equality. They even challenged patriarchy and revolted against the caste divide. Meera, Avvaiyar and Karaikal Ammaiyar, for instance, protested against patriarchy and subverted the hegemonic structures by staying outside the domain of marriage.

II. Feminism in Ramayan and Mahabharat

World's two of the most prehistoric greatest epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata written by two

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sages Valmiki and Ved Vyas have been composed pivoting around two central characters Sita and Draupadi, both women. It was during this time that the nascent stages of feminism was born in ancient Indian literature, the illustration of which needs no further introduction - the tribulations of both Sita and Draupadi is perhaps realized by every Indian presently. The key role women played in literature and life in the past and present in both parts of the globe is equally significant. In ancient Vedic literature, women were elevated to Devis (Goddesses); they were turned into myths and legends. Her real identity of a woman however was provided by the primordial myth, that is social stereotypes which have been suggested, are two poles of feminine experience in the world. Sita absorbs all harshly imposed desolation and mortification of the male ego, whereas, Draupadi challenges the male ego to the epitomic limits of human excellence. Sita accepts, accommodates and withdraws; Draupadi resents, rejects and involves herself in the process of life as a protagonist. These two feminine archetypes define the limits of feminine experience in reality, especially the Indian literary reality. Even in the present day Indian literature, the gender division moves between new 'iconisations' of these two bold and prehistoric figures.

In the Ramayana, many of the female characters are interesting. I find Trijatha interesting, she has a prophetic vision that foretells the destruction of Lanka, and her father Vibhishan as witches sides and joins Ram, but Trijatha seems to feel that it is her dharma to remain in Lanka and that is such an interesting choice. Tara, Vali and Sugriva's wife, is also interesting; she critiques the idea of dharma and points out how women lose out when men pursue their dharma.

The difficult bit was retelling the war, because Sita never saw it, she was imprisoned in a garden in Ravana's palace. We had to take a call—do we find another character who sees the war firsthand, or do we stay with Sita? I felt it was more powerful to stay with Sita, to create this sense of fear and anticipation, of not knowing.

But to relate the major events of the war, I had to find a character who would tell this to Sita, and I found the perfect character in Trijatha, a Rakshasi. She is Sita's jailor, who is a seer gifted with foresight and prophetic abilities. And because she's from Lanka, she has a different take on the war, which was interesting to explore.

III. Feminism in Shiv Puran (Hindu Mythology)

Adiparashakti again took human birth at the bidding of Lord Brahma. Daksha and Prasuti named their daughter Sati.

To win the regard of the ascetic Shiva, the daughter of king Daksha forsook the luxuries of her father's palace and retired to a forest, there to devote herself to austerities and the worship of Shiva. So rigorous were her penances that she gradually renounced food itself, at one stage subsisting on one leaf a day, and then giving up even that nourishment; this particular abstinence earned her the name Aparna. Her prayers finally bore fruit when, after testing her resolve, Shiva finally acceded to her wishes and consented to make her his bride.

An ecstatic Sati returned to her father's home to await her bridegroom, but found her father less than elated by the turn of events. The wedding was however held in due course, and Sati made her home with Shiva in Kailash. Daksha, depicted in legend as an arrogant king, did not get on with his renunciative son-in-law and basically cut his daughter away from her natal family. Daksha organized a prayer ritual and invited all the Gods, Goddesses and princes. But he did not invite Shiva or Sati because he was unhappy that his daughter had married Shiva. Sati learnt about the yagna and asked Shiva to go with her. When Shiva refused, Sati insisted upon going and was escorted by Shiva's troops to her father's kingdom. Upon reaching, Daksha got angry on seeing her and yelled at her telling her she was not welcome. Sati tried to make him understand but it was no use.

It is said that when Daksha did not stop yelling, the angered Sati took the form of the goddess, AdiParashakti. Lightning and thunder threatened to destroy the Earth. All sorts of calamities arose as Mother Earth couldn't bear her strong radiance and power. The Gods, saints, sages, Goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati, her mother, father and her sisters trembled in fear and respectfully saluted her, who was the Mother of the Universe (Jagadamba). AdiParashakti introduced herself as the Eternal Power to Daksha and cursed him to be killed by Shiva, inclusive of all the Gods, princes and Goddesses. Finally, She sat in meditation and with the help of pranayama combined her prana and apana and eventually left her prana in yogic manner from the top of head. A very angry and grief-stricken Shiva learnt about Sati's death and he rendered a terrible "Tandav Dance of Destruction", the more Shiva danced, the more destruction arose. Later, Shiva pulled two locks of hair and fell it on the ground. We find a feminism in Shiv puran in the character of mata sati who raised her voice against her father Daksha. (Patriarchal society).

IV. Today's Feminism in India

Feminist writers in India today proudly uphold their cause of 'womanhood', through their write-ups. The literary field is most bold to present feminism in Indian literature in the hands of writers like Amrita Pritam (Punjabi), Kusum Ansal (Hindi) and Sarojini Sahoo (Oriya), who count amongst the most distinguished writers, making a link between sexuality and feminism and writing for the idea "a woman's body, a woman's

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right" in Indian languages. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Leelac Kasturi, Sharmila Rege and Vidyut Bhagat are some other group of essayists and critics, who write in passionate favour of feminism in Indian English literature. However, not only the contemporary times and British Indian times, feminist literature in India has existed in India from the Vedic Period, with the gradually changing face of women coming to light in every age, with its distinctiveness.

I agree with Sarojini Sahoo (Oriya) at one time in India - in the ancient Vedic period - there were equal rights between men and women and even feminist law makers like Gargiand Maitreyi.

But the later Vedic period polarized the sexes. Males oppressed females and treated them as 'other' or similar to a lower caste. Today, patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies which keep females down, oppressed by the traditional system.

In India, arranged marriages are always preferred. Love marriages are viewed as a social sin and are regarded with shame. Many Indians contend that arranged marriages are more successful than marriages in the West, where staggering divorce rates are the rule. They argue that romantic love does not necessarily lead to a good marriage, and often fails once the passion dissipates, whereas real love flows from a properly arranged union between two individuals.

Unwed mothers, separated, single or unfaithful women are considered outcasts. Living out of wedlock with a partner is still virtually unheard of. An unmarried daughter -- seen as a spinster even in her late twenties -- brings shame upon her parents, and is a burden. But once married, she is considered the property of her in-laws.

In financial matters, although women are permitted to work outside of the home, their rights on any household matters have always been denied. A woman has to take charge of the kitchen, even if she is a wage- earning member of the household and holds down a job outside of the home. The husband will not take charge of kitchen even if he is unemployed and at home all day, as a man who cooks for his family violates the laws of manhood.

Legally, although the court recognizes that sons and daughters have equal rights regarding patriarchal property, those rights are never exercised; today as in generations past, ownership changes hands from father to husband to son and the rights of a daughter or a daughter- in-law are denied.

I (Dr. Vandana) would like to write about feminism that Woman should have own life. Woman should have own respect. Today's woman (New Woman) don't depend on others. She can earn the money she can do any job. They want to get a great success. I want to become a smart woman who doesn't have secrete. Who doesn't bleed. Who doesn't cry. Who stay on top.

I want to become a successful women and get a space equal as man so i would like to say that one must stop dreaming and expecting perfection in his/her partner.

V. Conclusion

A woman in Indian society marries to live the life of freedom, which remained denied to her in her natal family. Contrary to this, she subsequently loses her identity and freedom in marriage and sets about pleasing everybody, But, the new generation of women release themselves from matrimony. For them, the bond of marriage becomes a bond age. They adopt different perspectives and revolt against the old social system. New women in India are such liberated ultramodern women who project their passions onto others as a 'power-play' in order to deflate the male ego.

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