

1 Feminism in India

2 Dr. Vandana Shrivastava¹

3 ¹ GURU NANAK KHALSA COLLEGE

4 *Received: 14 December 2015 Accepted: 2 January 2016 Published: 15 January 2016*

5

6 **Abstract**

7 Feminism in Indian literature, as can be most commonly conceived is a much sublime and
8 over-the-top concept, which is most subtly handled under restricted circumstances. With
9 advancement of time, however, feminism has been accepted in India, setting aside the
10 patriarchal predomination to certain extent. Leaving aside the activists and crusaders of the
11 political and social scenario, perhaps massive work of feminism is also accomplished through
12 Indian literature. Yet, prior to comprehending a more intense look into feminist literature in
13 India, it is necessary to grasp the essential concept of the term 'feminism' in the country's
14 context, beginning from its inception. The history of feminism in India can be looked at as
15 principally a "practical effort". Beginning FROM the first inception of the Universe, there is a
16 fascinating myth associated with the creation of woman by the Supreme Creator, Lord
17 Brahma. And indeed, beginning from Brahma Himself, the idea of feminism in Indian
18 literature, both oral and written, had begun to be established, though perhaps not as blatant
19 as is today. It is said that Brahma had first created man and in his generosity, had desired to
20 give man a companion. But by then he had depleted all the material in the creation of man
21 and hence he had borrowed umpteen components from the handsome creation of nature and
22 had thus made woman out of them. Lord Brahma had introduced woman to his earlier
23 creation man stating, "She will serve you lifelong and if you cannot live with her, neither can
24 you live without her". The primeval myth carries an unambiguous implication of woman's
25 image in life and literature for centuries.

26

27 **Index terms—**

28 **1 Feminism in India**

29 Dr. Vandana Shrivastava Abstract-Feminism in Indian literature, as can be most commonly conceived is a
30 much sublime and over-the-top concept, which is most subtly handled under restricted circumstances. With
31 advancement of time, however, feminism has been accepted in India, setting aside the patriarchal predomination
32 to certain extent. Leaving aside the activists and crusaders of the political and social scenario, perhaps massive
33 work of feminism is also accomplished through Indian literature. Yet, prior to comprehending a more intense
34 look into feminist literature in India, it is necessary to grasp the essential concept of the term 'feminism' in the
35 country's context, beginning from its inception. The history of feminism in India can be looked at as principally
36 a "practical effort".

37 Beginning FROM the first inception of the Universe, there is a fascinating myth associated with the creation
38 of woman by the Supreme Creator, Lord Brahma. And indeed, beginning from Brahma Himself, the idea of
39 feminism in Indian literature, both oral and written, had begun to be established, though perhaps not as blatant
40 as is today. It is said that Brahma had first created man and in his generosity, had desired to give man a
41 companion. But by then he had depleted all the material in the creation of man and hence he had borrowed
42 umpteen components from the handsome creation of nature and had thus made woman out of them. Lord Brahma

43 had introduced woman to his earlier creation man stating, "She will serve you lifelong and if you cannot live with
44 her, neither can you live without her". The primeval myth carries an unambiguous implication of woman's image
45 in life and literature for centuries.

46 2 I. Introduction

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

52 Feminist theory also devises the strategies to transform the social structures, which can help in the
53 emancipation. The strong wave in the 1960s and 1970s helped to theories a woman's discourse. In
54 1980s, 'Feminism' concentrated on transforming the individual fields and in 1990s began a major role in directing
55 academic focus on the concern of the socalled otherness', differences and questions of marginality.

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

59 Feminism is multicultural and diasporic. The needs of women who live in different countries are dissimilar, and
60 they are conditioned by several factors: familial, societal/racial, marital, economic, and cultural and individual
61 consciousness (subjectivity). In such a diverse context, it would be far wrong to associate Indian feminism with
62 the western, which is marked by radical norms, and invoke western feminist critics on the problems that women
63 in India confront. Jasbir Jain's Indigenous Roots of Feminism seeks to analyse the feminist movement in India
64 in a historical perspective, free from the hangover of western concerns. She says: "Draupadi deconstructed the
65 notions of chastity and sati; Sita, of power and motherhood; of violence; Puru's young wife, of sexuality; the
66 bhakta women, of marriage and prayer." Jasbir's conviction is that "feminism is more than a voice of protest or
67 questioning. It is moral selfreflection, a conquering of inner fears and are alisation of self-worth ... It does not
68 abandon values or relationships, but goes on to create new ones."

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

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

78 3 II.

79 4 Feminism in Ramayan and Mahabharat

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

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

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

101 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
102 perfect character in Trijatha, a Rakshasi. She is Sita's jailor, who is a seer gifted with foresight and prophetic
103 abilities. And because she's from Lanka, she has a different take on the war, which was interesting to explore.

104 **5 III.**

105 Feminism in Shiv Puran (Hindu Mythology)

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

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

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

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

132 IV.

133 **6 Today's Feminism in India**

134 Feminist writers in India today proudly uphold their cause of 'womanhood', through their write-ups. The literary
135 field is most bold to present feminism in Indian literature in the hands of writers like Amrita Pritam (Punjabi),
136 Kusum Ansal (Hindi) and Sarojini Sahoo Feminism in India (Oriya), who count amongst the most distinguished
137 writers, making a link between sexuality and feminism and writing for the idea "a woman's body, a woman's
138 right" in Indian languages. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Leelac Kasturi, Sharmila Rege and Vidyut Bhagat are
139 some other group of essayists and critics, who write in passionate favour of feminism in Indian English literature.
140 However, not only the contemporary times and British Indian times, feminist literature in India has existed in
141 India from the Vedic Period, with the gradually changing face of women coming to light in every age, with its
142 distinctiveness.

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

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

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

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

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

160 Legally, although the court recognizes that sons and daughters have equal rights regarding patriarchal property,
161 those rights are never exercised; today as in generations past, ownership changes hands from father to husband
162 to son and the rights of a daughter or a daughter-in-law are denied. I (Dr. Vandana) would like to write about
163 feminism that Woman should have own life. Woman should have own respect. Today's woman (New Woman)
164 don't depend on others. She can earn the money she can do any job. They want to get a great I want to become a
165 successful women and get a space equal as man so i would like to say that one must stop dreaming and expecting
166 perfection in his/her partner.

167 V.

168 7 Conclusion

169 A woman in Indian society marries to live the life of freedom, which remained denied to her in her natal family.
170 Contrary to this, she subsequently loses her identity and freedom in marriage and sets about pleasing everybody,
171 But, the new generation of women release themselves from matrimony. For them, the bond of marriage becomes
172 a bond age. They adopt different perspectives and revolt against the old social system. New women in India are
173 such liberated ultramodern women who project their passions onto others as a 'power-play' in order to deflate
the male ego. Works cited ¹

Figure 1: ?

174