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## Role of feminism in literature

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### Abstract

In order to become an important part of the living society, women need to go through various problems and social obstacles. But Feminism came as a torchbearer for all the women in the world. In the past, situation was worse, they were isolated and neglected and even treated badly by the dominant gender i.e. Male. Now, the image of the women has been changed completely. The truth lies within the fact that the society has separated the roles of two genders. In the world community, men have been considered superior and women have been considered as the creatures. Feminism is born out of tiredness and frustration against the inequality. It has been used to raise the voice for their rights in the world of every possible aspect.

**Keywords:** Feminism, feminist, gender, equality

### Introduction

Literature is the mirror to the society. It depicts the close association of people and life because literature revolves around people and their thought processes over the time. Literature has always been considered as culture and it is a value. So, literature can easily affect the mindset of the people. The mindset of the people living in a society can be molded and can also be formed through literary works.

What is literary work? In simple words, it is the expression of the people in different forms like feelings, ideas, beliefs etc. So, true feelings can be taken out through any form of literary work.

Our society had already passed the judgment that men are superior and women are inferior. Yes, they are different. They are different in terms of biological, psychological and cultural aspects. But, these differences cannot give power to any one gender to be seated at the top most seat.

According to Dagun (in Ratna: 2004: 187) <sup>[1]</sup>, there is no research that shows a correlation between biological conditions and differences in behaviour. In the contrary, the impact of cultural characteristics is way more prominent on the behaviour.

Feminism in Literature has been used as tool to fight for equal rights because literary works have often shown the differences on the basis of group interests. In order to show the difference, they have depicted male as a superior and powerful on the other hand woman has been shown as object which is very weak and safe under male domination.

The fight is for equal position; neither high nor low; just equal position with men in the political, social and economic fields. To understand it better, the approach of the research should be reading as women. This will help in growing awareness regarding gender differences in literary sense.

### Discussion

The following paper will discuss the role and the focus of Feminism in Literature

### The origin

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the book 'A Room for One's Own' (1929) by Virginia Woolf gave birth to Feminism. Later on, In 1960s there was rapid upliftment to this thought.

According to A Teew, the feminist movement in the western world was uplifted due to several factors (Ratna: 2004: 183,184) <sup>[1]</sup>, such as

1. Contraceptive techniques developed drastically which male power or dominance to see downfall.
2. Irrationality of politics.

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3. Educational development.
4. The liberation movements and traditional ties.
5. Rise of secularism.
6. Reaction to literary approaches such as New Criticism and structuralism.
7. Dissatisfaction with the theory and practice of Orthodox Marxist Ideology.

The liberation movement played a vital role in the Feminist Movement as it wants to fight for the rights of women. It wants to engage in the fight of weak groups and strong groups and wanted the system of domination and hegemony to be deconstructed.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, feminism was one of the most important symptoms as it was closely related to class and racial conflict. It is the movement of liberation. It is the movement of equality in all parts of the social structure of mankind such as political, economical and socio-cultural fields as well.

Feminist analysis includes multi-disciplinary research by considering the background of the origin of this theory. Researchers include various other studies with literature; to name such as Female figures, popular novels and so on.

The cultural studies focus on women's problems in relation with gender equality. Apart from the above point, it also focuses on the deconstruction of the assessment system of the literary work as it usually see any literary work from a male perspective.

### **Major flag bearers of feminism (feminist figures)**

The only reason of the birth of feminism was the demand for equal rights between men and women in all parts of social structure. It was not just born, it was emerged by many prominent feminist figures such as: Mary Wollstonecraft, Julia Kristeva, Virginia Woolf and many more.

### **Mary Wollstonecraft**

She was a British writer and great advocate of women's rights. She is one of the founding Feminist Philosophers. 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792) <sup>[4]</sup> was the book which laid down one of the stepping stone in the coming long journey for the equal rights.

In the above cited book, she argues that women are not naturally inferior to men. They are being made in a certain way as they lack education. She pointed towards the root cause of the problem and suggested that women should be treated as rational beings.

### **Julia kristeva**

He was the Bulgarian writer who depicted the text as a production material and gave rise to feminism. He is a linguist but his interest in Feminism departed him from other linguistic theorist.

He paid attention towards subjectivity and talked about the fact that language is very complex system and should be free from tagging.

### **Virginia wolf**

She was an English writer, most important modernist author and a pioneer in using stream of consciousness as a narrative device. She is known for one of her essay 'A Room of One's Own' (1929) and became one of the important part of

1970s Feminist Movement. She was known as the "inspiring Feminist".

She uses many metaphors to point women's lack of free expression. She stated that as soon as woman starts to think of an idea, a guard enforces a rule under which she is not allowed to walk on the grass.

### **Feminism studies**

In literature, feminism is directly related to Feminist Literary Criticism which directly focuses on analysis on women. But, the point which should be noted down that is does not only mean female critics, or criticism on women or on female authors. In the simplest words, the critics will view the work with special awareness related to culture, literature and life.

When feminist critics use the phrase "Reading as a Women", they want to spread the awareness regarding the prejudices and ideologies of the patriarchy society and the patriarchal men.

Judith Fetterley states that "Feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it by changing the consciousness of those, who read and their relation to what they read."

It all started with the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s and all the feminist critics believe that the major part of the literature is phallogocentric. It only aimed to reveal patterns of male discourse which oppress women and benefits men.

So, they examine gender politics in all the literary works and try to make a subtle bridge between masculinity and femininity. They also worked on the positioning and marginalization within works.

Feminist Elaine Showalter in her essay "Towards a Feminist Poetics" (1979) <sup>[7]</sup>, coined the term Gynocriticism which exclusively focuses of the work written by female authors.

Activists like Susan B. Anthony and Victoria Woodhull contributed to the women's suffrage movement.

Writers like Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex, 1972) <sup>[9]</sup> highlighted the dissemination of feminist theories, which are linked with American Civil Rights Movements.

A major interest of feminist critics (some mentioned above) was to reconstitute the ways to deal literature in a way to do justice to female points of view, concerns and values.

### **Analytical view towards feminism**

Analysis in feminism should reveal aspects of women's oppression of men. Feminist issues are always linked with the major issue of equality and to be specific gender equality. In contemporary theory, now attention is not focused on women's lives or on women's rights but now it has been shifted to gender analysis. There are many assumptions have been put forward by feminists:

1. Feminists consider and believe that human nature can be changed.
2. 'Facts' and 'values' cannot be differentiated easily.
3. Knowledge and power are closely related.
4. The postmodern feminists have a commitment which is common and it is to the social progress and freedom of women.

Apart from the above assumptions, there are many misconceptions in understanding Feminism Theory, to name:

1. Men cannot become feminists.

2. The position and the status of women cannot be understood without the reference of general ideas of gender.
3. To analyze gender issues, we should take men as an example to evaluate the status of women.
4. All feminists are lesbian.

Feminism Literary criticism is the criticism of literary work not criticism of women or female critics. The critics view the literary work with awareness and focus about literary culture and life.

Interestingly, women have experience; race and culture similarity but they have different ideology. It could differ on perspectives of different group, culture or race. So, the research cannot be done on any particular ideology but it can be done as a whole.

### Conclusion

The emergence of the Feminism was the need of the hour. It came into existence because of the intolerability by the women against the patriarchal society. Initially, it was about the fight by women for equal rights and position in every corner of the society. Eventually, it took the shape from equality to gender equality.

The main focus of feminism was to draw the attention towards them by building a theory. Many feminists came and became the part of the journey with their works.

Women tried to become the part of the society which should be considered as important as another gender. They fight to uplift their status from a creature to a productive asset to the society.

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