

Representation of Indian Women in 19th century Indian Poetry and 21st Century Indian Poetry.

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Abstract Language is a medium to express the feelings. Writers travel through the world of letters to present the passing ages with hidden reality through the world of literature. This paper focuses on the representation of Indian women in nineteenth, and twenty-first century Indian poetry. In the context of poems reviewed, Feminist theory forms the framework for analysis and interpretation. Standing position of Indian women differ in different era. In Indian poetry, nineteenth century poets recreated a picture of laden Indian women. Analysis shows that the protagonist in twenty-first century Indian poetry is woman with freelance thoughts. Male dominated society perpetually suppressed the identity of women. However, within the gift state of affairs woman started raise her voice for her identity. As time passes identity of women changes from futility to fruitfulness.

Key Words: Indian woman, Feminism, Indian poetry, Nineteenth century, Twenty-first century.

I. INTRODUCTION

“If you do not allow one to become a lion, he will become a fox. Women are a power, only now it is more for evil because man oppresses woman; she is the fox, but when she is not longer oppressed, she will become the lion”⁽¹⁾

Swami Vivekananda

India has witnessed the role of women being evolved through ages. The constitution of Asian country permits men and women equal rights, but still gender discrimination remained in society. It is widely accepted that society is reflected through literature. The status of women varies in totally different amount. Nineteenth century Indian Poetry brought up the picture of woman in a male dominated society. Poetry – the imaginative power and experience of poet is expressed through languages with metre and rhythm. This paper makes a study on periods from Nineteenth, and Twenty-first century Indian poetry to get the image of how Indian women are presented in poems. The ‘New Woman’ is the term used to explain those women, who were pushing against the limits that are imposed on them by the society. Poets like Shiv K Kumar, Nissiem Ezekiel, and R.K. Ramanujan resuscitates the image of Indian women in their poems. Nineteenth century Indian poems replicate women with suppressed nature and in twenty-first century poems of Kamala Das, Meena Kandasamy, Gauri Deshpande etc portray the image of suppressed and women with freelance thoughts. Through the writings, poets discuss the evolution of women from ancient era to immoderate trendy era. The paper discusses the feminism by taking women as central roles with the issues they visage through society.

Revised Manuscript Received on May 28, 2019.

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II. OBJECTIVE

The paper brings up the study over the illustration of Indian women in nineteenth, and twenty-first century Indian poetry. It shows how women face their life in a male dominated society. The study first shows the evolution of women in Indian poetry in various eras using feminist theory. Poems by Shiv K Kumar, Nissiem Ezekiel, R.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Meena Kandasamy, Gauri Deshpande, and Taslima Nasrin are the subjects of study and research. This shows how each poet represents woman character in their poems in a male dominated society. The poems are analyzed with a detailed study of its context along with the female characters on different era.

III. HYPOTHESIS

3.1 Women in India

Over the past few millennia, the standing position of Indian women was subjected to many changes. Indian constitution brings up a lot of rights for both genders. History shows that woman during the Vedic Period get equal status with men in all aspects of life. But as time passes, the rights / position of women get changed. The Muslim conquest in the Asian subcontinent brought lot of changes in Indian society, during medieval period. This change, manipulates the life of Indian women on the web of darkness. During the past decades, women were restricted to enter in certain places, and they were not allowed to venture outside without a male guardian. Both positive and regressive practices against women were conducted in the Indian society. One negative practice was Sati, in which widows sacrificed their life on their husband’s funeral pyre. Family is the central point in the life of an Indian woman. As time change, the position of Indian woman changed and she may be well referred to as a liberated woman or a feminist. Women started thinking and raised their voice for their identity. In society, she found her place as an independent woman with dreams, and she started earning for her life. This independent view shows the evolution of Indian Women.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Theory of Feminism

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, fictional or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It examines women’s and men’s social roles, experiences, interest, chores, and feminist politics in a variety of fields. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, objectification, oppression and patriarchy. Feminist theories first emerged as early as 1794 in publications such as A Vindication of the Rights of Woman. The word feminism is often a shivery and confusing word to some. Many of us believe



that feminism suggest hating men or wanting women to rule over everything. Feminism merely suggests the cognitive process that men and women are equal neither is stronger than the opposite and neither ought to be treated with additional respect than the other – everybody should be equal on all levels. While feminism is meant to achieving equal rights for both men and women, we tend to bear in mind that women face a lot of inequalities than men. From several years, women are seen as weaker than men. Gender roles are harmful to each men and women. The popular belief is that women are meant to look after the household works while men are meant to go out without any restrictions. Being a feminist doesn't mean that you want to give up all things in life or change that who you are. You will be able to still fancy your muliebrity, while being a feminist. Feminism shouldn't degrade men. As long as you think that each man and woman ought to tend the identical responsibilities and learn to satisfy equal challenges to grasp that they're capable of solving any issues they face.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

5.1 Representation of Indian women in Indian poetry
“Because you are women, people will force their thinking on you. They will tell you how to dress, how to behave, who you can meet and where you can go. Don't live in the shadows of people's judgement. Make your own choices in the light of your own wisdom”⁽²⁾

Amitabh Bachchan

The poem *Indian Women* by Shiv K Kumar has taken from the *Anthology Cobweb in the Sun*. The poem deeply captures the plight of Indian women passively waiting in an expectation in an exceedingly male dominated society. Family is considered as one of the central points in the life of an Indian woman. Woman in the poem is considered as one who has no hope in life. The word 'hope' gave an urge to humans in their life. Hopelessness and futility are the only outcome in the life of Indian women. Male dominated society will force their thinking upon women, and they conclude that patience is the most required quality of a woman.

“Patiently they sit
Like empty pitchers

On the mouth of the village well
Waiting for their men's return”

From the above lines of the poem, it's clear that women are patiently waiting for their husband's return. Shiv K. Kumar compares the life of a woman like empty pitchers. Woman is not supposed to express her feelings or raise her voice in front of a male dominated society. Masters in the society decide how a woman should behave in the front of others or how to dress or with whom she could go. The life of a woman is completely suppressed with the thoughts of others or there is no choice for her to be independent. Women are just passive receivers in the male dominated society. Those women who raise their voices against opposite gender are not accepted by the society.

“In this triple baked continent

Women don't etch angry eyebrows
On mud walls”

Woman always face endless number of limitations in life. From the above lines of the poem it is clear that women are not supposed to etch angry eyebrows. Mud walls in the poem considered as the boundaries in the life of Indian

women, and they are not allowed to overcome those boundaries for the sake of life. In some cases representation of the woman is so unsatisfactory. A world with no gender discrimination is fantasy. In the nineteenth century women are completely under the control of dominant gender 'male' that points out through the poem lines:

“They guard their tattooed thighs

Waiting for their men's return”

Both sexually and mentally women are in a controlled stage of life. The ownership of men is shown through the tattooed thighs of women. In ancient era, society treated women as angelic figures, innocent, physically weaker and nothing less than household commodities. Some male poets watch at love and women from a male point of view only, whereas in some case poets look at love and women from a female point of view. Nissim Ezekiel is one among the poets who view love and women from a male point of view. In the poem, *Night of the Scorpion* by Nissim Ezekiel marks the tendency to probe a typical incident in an Indian village. The selfless love of motherhood is the main theme in the poem. Mother's love and care for children and family are made clear through these lines:

“My mother only said

Thank god the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children.”

The Indian woman's identity is a sort of continually connected to and outlined by the society, and cultural norms of the patricentric familial code. One sees that the poems offer a deep insight into the lives of women in India. The poems of twenty-first century show the evolution of women from futility to fruitfulness. Women started protesting for her identity, and this protest leads woman from household worker to independent one.

“You may have freedom

As much as you want
My soul balked at the diet of ash
Freedom became by dancing shoe
And danced without rest.....”

The woman protagonist in the poem of Kamala Das reflects her restlessness as a disciplined woman. The above lines are from one of her notable poem *Old Playhouse*. In this, she just speaks about the extra ordinary feminine sensibility. Somehow marriage is considered as bondage in the life of a woman, she loses her identity and freedom. Boundaries are hidden behind the so called social practice 'marriage'. She has her own identity, hope and dream in her life. Poets of twenty-first century tried to bring women out of their limitations that are created by the masters of the society.

Gauri Deshpande a poet from Maharashtra brings an ungainly out site through her poems titled *The Female of the Species*. As a result, in our society Male of the Species is more acquainted and it shows the power of male society. Another notable issue is that in our society majority of women don't seem to be career oriented women, but they have the thought of earning their bread too. This sturdy thought attain them strength for achieving their goal. The poem *Lakshmi Unbound* by Sanjukta Dasgupta points out that the ultimate wish of a woman is to be seen as human being, and not being confined to roles fixed by gender stereotypes. The following lines of the poem discuss the new attitude of women. They just want to break all barriers created by the masters of the society in



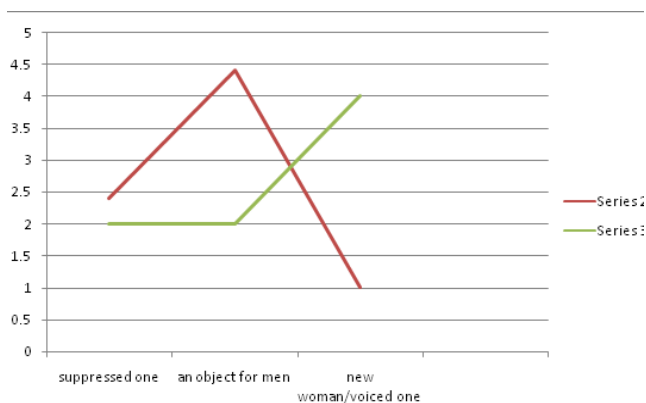
their life. Women started to believe in their own spirit. Their new attitude makes them to break the silence.
“I just can’t be Lakshmi

I have to break the silence”

Poet Taslima Nasrin reveals the bare reality of women through her poetry. She tries to present a new woman in her poetry by breaking the rules of the society. Her characters are the epitome of independence, intellectual and identity. Her poems delineated the demand for women’s inclusion within the life. In modern poetry, a common theme is the exploration of the man-woman relationship. And it’s clear that round the flip of 21st century great changes transpire, during which women competes central roles as A New Woman. Poetry. As it can be read from the graph, it is clear that during 19th century poets represent women as suppressed one or as an object for men. At the beginning of 21st century there is a slight change in the representation of Indian women in Indian poetry. Attitude of writers changes and bring a new outlook for women as New Women.

VI. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

The red line in the above mentioned chart shows a representation of Indian women in the 19th century Indian Poetry. The green line in the above mentioned chart shows a representation of Indian women in 21st century Indian



VII. CONCLUSION

Society expects men and women to perform their roles according to the whims and fancies of the society. Men considered themselves as superior one; they were expected to live a public life. On the other hand, women were considered as fragile creatures and good for nothing. Women were considered as ‘Abala’ her only work is to bring forth children and look after household works. The evolution of women from ancient period to present scenario is represented in the poems of 19th century, and 21st century. Man occupied a prominent place in the society and considered themselves as independent but women were expected to live their lives largely home bound. But time brought a change in the thinking of men, because those men who thought they were superior to women have now recognized the spirit of woman and accepted the fact that women are no more a fragile creature.

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