

LITERATURE AS A TOOL IN DEFYING GENDER STEREOTYPES

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ABSTRACT

It was striking how much of the literature on women in the nineteenth century concerned the threatened westernization of women. This theme was taken up in virtually every form of written, oral and visual communication as in the essays of the Nineteenth century to novels, farces, skits and jingles, to the paintings of the 'putna (scroll painters). Social parody was the most popular and effective medium of this ideological propagation.

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INTRODUCTION

From Ishwar Chandra Gupta (1812-59) and the 'kabiya (songsters) of the early nineteenth century to the celebrated pioneers of modern Bengali theatre- Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73), Denabandhu Jyoti, Denbandhu Mira, Ravindranath Tagore, Amrit Lal Bose (1853-1929), everyone picked up to the theme.

To ridicule the idea of a woman trying to imitate the ways of western women were a theme to evoke laughter. It could be seen that this type of criticism was inspired with envy of the wealth and luxury of the new social high society emerging around. The literature of parody and satire in the first half of the nineteenth century clearly contained much that was promoted by a direct defence of existing practices and outright projection of the new. The nationalist ideal had still not emerged in clear outline, this period from Ram Mohan to Vidya Sagar was of great social turmoil and ideological confusion. And then a new monograph, began to form in the second half of the century the discourse of nationalism.

It was precisely the status and condition of women that nationalism claimed it would reform. Attainment by her own efforts of a superior national culture was the mark of women's newly acquired freedom. This was the central ideological strength of the nationalist resolution of the women's question. The form of this resolution gained the attention of social reformers in the nineteenth century.

The real threat was seen to lie in the fact that the early schools and arrangement for teaching women at home, were organized by Christian missionaries, there was thus the fear of the exposure of women to harmful western influences (Nandy 40).

The threat was removed when in the 1850 Indian themselves began to open schools for girls. From 95 girls' schools with a total attendance of 2,500 in 1863 the figures went unto 2,238 schools in 1890 with a total of more than 80,000 students. Chandramukhi Bose (1860-1944) and Kadambini Ganguli (1861-1923) took their Bachelor of Science degree in 1883 from Calcutta. Kadambini then went on to medical college and become the first professionally woman doctor.

The issues which attracted the attention of social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chandra Vidya Sagar were sati, ill- treatment of widows, illiteracy of women and so on.

The Indian national movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi led to further emancipation of Indian women in the twentieth century by involving them in the struggle for political freedom of the country. Gandhiji vehemently criticized the customs of child marriage, temple prostitution known as 'Devdasi' and the custom of 'purdah'. He had deep faith in women's inner strength and in his various 'Satyagraha' – Movement vast numbers of women participated.

With the growth of educational and vocational opportunities, the educated middle and upper class women, particularly in urban areas, became conscious of their rights. To quote Rajkumari Amrit Kaur :

We are aware of the necessity of finding and being judged by our own standards as free human beings, voluntarily accepted, we are determined to face the facts of life to fight the battle of our sex and take the issue. (Asthana 24)

The formation of India women's conference in 1927 was a crucial event with this regard. The A.I.W.C. has been instrumental in bringing about some reforms like the Sharda act (1929) banning child marriage, the dissolution of the Muslim marriage act (1939) and the bill for better supervision of orphanages and marriage bureaus (1940) were set up to promote the conditions of women. There are more than two thousand five hundred agencies in the country working for women and children some groups are involved in research and to improve women's issues like atrocities against women, wife-beating, rape, dowry deaths, alcoholism, violence in the family problems of working women, personal laws and health issues and both educationists and activists are member of such groups.

In the directive principles of state in the constitution of free India, sufficient legal and constitutional security has been ensured to women. The passing of certain acts like the Termination of Pregnancy Act, the Maternity Benefit Act and the Dowry Prohibition Act has brought some measure of relief to women of all castes, creeds and religions. A greater awareness and expression of women problems are coming to the force through the press and other media.

A feminist publishing house kali for women, is engaged is publishing book on women by women. A number of feminist journalist like Samya Shanti or Manushi have also started.

Despite the spread of education and some constitutional gains, the subordination of women preached by religion and perpetuated by conventions is the rule of the day. Social structures and cultural norms do not change as rapidly as law envisage. The performance of sati by Roop Kanwar of Deorala village in Rajasthan in September 1987 point to the age-old prejudices. Women are still subjected to depression of girls at the sex discrimination by the parents can be measured form the act of triple suicide by three sisters in Chandigarh on 9th march, 1989. The desire for a son can make the parents ignore their bright talented grown-up daughters resulting in catastrophe.

The media is also responsible for projecting the image of women in a distorted manner. In the T.V. or news paper advertisements, women are portrayed as sexy, glamorous and empty headed. With the exception employment of some girls in education and employment for middle class women, the women's position in practice is still very bad. She has to bear the burden of job and household responsibilities. Among the cases of dowry deaths, rape and sexual harassment not infrequently, then educated working women are the victims.

In the lower paid jobs women work for longer hours and still also bear full responsibility for the house hold work. The rural women, apart from looking after family and children, also work the whole days in fields, but instead of any word of gratitude they are tortured by various members of the family and are often victims of physical violence as well. Economically the middle class working women may not face hardships like their counterparts in the lower classes, still they are dependent on men, who may or may not provide them necessary comforts. But within the family, they do not have satisfying relationships as their individuality is never recognized. They are again subject to the whims of other members of the family, husband or children whose happiness is supposed to be the sole purpose of the woman's life.

The problem is raised by the literature is the colonial and post colonial period Henry Derozios the Fakir of Jungheea has strident feminine stance at the British period Toru Dutt is one of the distinguished authors in Indian English literature. Her Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hinduism (1882) attracted the position of women in Hinduism. The first poem 'Savitri' of the ancient ballads has a feministic appeal. It narrates the fortune of the princess Savitri and her courageous encounter with the God of Death. Then followed the philosophical conventions between Savitri and Death, Savitri started speaking in terms of Vedantic Philosophy. Yama was greatly pleased with Savitri and desired her to ask for a boon but the life a Satyavan. One after the other he gave three boons to Savitri but at the last boon he laid down no conditions. Savitri immediately caught the due and demanded:

Let my Satyavan live again
And children unto us be born,
Wise, brave and valiant (Diwivedi 73)

The modern women's 'lib' movement effects on impetus when the following lines are read with proper understanding:

In those far off primeval days
Fair Indians daughters were not pent
In close zenanas (Diwivedi 38).

That women enjoyed freedom of movement in ancient India is marvellously mentioned here.

There is the issue of female subalteran identity is Mulk Raj Anand's novel *The Old Woman and the Cow*. The female protagonost Rosie in *The Guide* by R. K. Narayan and R. W. Desais *Danyantis Delimma*. The partrayal of women by male artist must be deficient for even the most imaginative of male writers is by no means equipped to give an authentic rendering of female sensibility. Of late, there has been a tendency among the women Indian a group of women novelists who try to give their own side to the story from their own point of view. novelists writing in English to share their view. There has emerged.

CONCLUSION

Women writers of all ages have a natural preference for writing about women character. Such preference may be a limitation of their creativity. but this limitation does not in any way reduce the importance of women writers Anita Desais Cry the Peacock, Fire on the Mountain, Clear Light of Day, Baumgartner's Bombay, Nayantara Saghal's This Time of Morning, Storm in Chandigarh, The day in Shadow, Rich Like Us, Kamla Markandaya's Nectar in Sieve, some Inner Fury, Possession and two Virgins are feminist in subject. Bharti Mukherjee, Shobha De, Mahashweta Devi, Manmohan Rai Goswami, Ismat Ghugtai, Lakshmi Canay Shashi Deshpande, Vasireddi Sita Devi and so on are women writer who deal with women's subject and thus we can see how literature work as a tool against gender discrimination.

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