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FEMINISM CONSCIOUSNESS IN INDIA- A PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Feminists have a specific critique of state services and social security because of the way women are made individually dependent on men and yoked with the state in meeting needs. There are two key guidelines for planning any socialist welfare policy in capitalist society: (1) advances are possible, because popular demands are not merely antithetical to capitalist interests, but (2) advances that would destroy the capital-labour relation cannot be achieved under capitalism. In this context the feminist campaign for 'disaggregation' is a promising one. Feminist campaigns involve work within and in alliance with many existing organisations and men should recognise that feminist demands are central to any socialist strategy on social policy.

Keywords: Feminists, disaggregation, philosophy, mobilization,

INTRODUCTION

Feminism brings many things to philosophy including not only a variety of particular moral and political claims, but ways of asking and answering questions, critiques of mainstream philosophical views and methods, and new topics of inquiry. Feminist contributions to and

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interventions in mainstream philosophical debates are covered in entries under "Feminism, interventions". Entries covered under the rubric "Feminism, topics" concern philosophical issues that arise as feminists articulate accounts of sexism, critique sexist social and cultural practices, and develop alternative visions of a just world. In short, they are philosophical topics that arise within feminism.

What is Feminism?

Historical Context

The term 'feminism' has many different uses and its meanings are often contested. For example, some writers use the term 'feminism' to refer to a historically specific political movement in the US and Europe ; other writers use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices against women, though there is no consensus on the exact list of these injustices. My goal here will be to sketch some of the central uses of the term that are most relevant to those interested in contemporary feminist philosophy. For an overview of the history of feminist thought see: "Feminism, history of". The references I provide below are only a small sample of the work available on the topics in question; more complete bibliographies are available at the specific topical entries and also at the end of this entry.

In the mid-1800's the term 'feminism' was used to refer to "the qualities of females" , and it was not until after the First International Women's Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term, following the French term *féministe*, was used regularly in English for a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Some feminists trace the origins of the term "feminism" in English as rooted in the movement in Europe and the US beginning with the mobilization for suffrage during the late 19th and early 20th century and refer to this movement as "First Wave" feminism. Those who employ this history often depict feminist as waning between the two world wars, to be "revived" in the late 1960's and early 1970's as what they label "Second Wave" feminism. More recently, transformations of feminism in the past decade have been referred to as "Third Wave" feminism.

However, other feminist scholars object to identifying feminism with these particular moments of political activism, on the grounds that doing so eclipses the fact that there has been

resistance to male domination that should be considered "feminist" throughout history and across cultures: i.e., feminism is not confined to a few women in the west over the past century or so. Moreover, even considering only relatively recent efforts to resist male domination in Europe and the US, the emphasis on "First" and "Second" Wave feminism ignores the ongoing resistance to male domination between the 1920's and 1960's and the resistance outside mainstream politics, particularly by women of color and working class women.

The term "Feminism" comes from French and has its origin from the Latin word femina meaning woman, and thereby, it refers to the advocacy of woman's rights seeking to remove restrictions that discriminate against women. It relates to the belief that women should have the same social, economic and political rights as men. Feminism has often focused upon what is absent rather than what is present. The word feminist refers to the person who advocates or practices feminism and it assumes a political position. Female is the matter of biology and feminine is a set of culturally defined characteristics.

Normative and Descriptive Components

In many of its forms, feminism seems to involve at least two claims, one normative and the other descriptive. The normative claim concerns how women ought (or ought not) to be viewed and treated and draws on a background conception of justice or broad moral position; the descriptive claim concerns how women are, as a matter of fact, viewed and treated, alleging that they are not being treated in accordance with the standards of justice or morality invoked in the normative claim. Together the two claims provide reasons for working to change the way things are; hence, feminism is not just an intellectual but also a political movement.

So, for example, a Liberal approach of the kind already mentioned might define feminism (rather simplistically here) in terms of two claims:

- i) (Normative) Men and women are entitled to equal rights and respect.
- ii) (Descriptive) Women are currently disadvantaged with respect to rights and respect, compared with men.

On this account, that women and men ought to have equal rights and respect is the normative claim; and that women are denied equal rights and respect functions here as the descriptive claim.

Disagreements within feminism can occur with respect to either the descriptive or normative claim, e.g., feminists differ on what would count as justice or injustice for women and what sorts of injustice women in fact suffer. Disagreements between feminists and non-feminists can also occur with respect to both the normative and descriptive claims, e.g., some non-feminists agree with feminists on the ways women ought to be viewed and treated, but don't see any problem with the way things currently are. Others disagree about the background moral or political views.

Review of Literature

As indicated by Janet Richards, "The pith of Feminism has a solid key case planned to mean just that there are phenomenal purposes behind suspecting that ladies experience the ill effects of orderly social foul play in light of their sex, the suggestion is to be viewed as constituting woman's rights." The enslavement of lady is a focal certainty of history and it is the primary driver of every single mental issue in the public arena. Woman's rights goes for comprehension the force structures in the general public, male mastery, social practices and social foundations, which are instrumental in doling out an underestimated position to ladies. Women's activist hypothesis likewise devises the methodologies to change the social structures, which can help in the liberation of ladies.

Indian feminists have fought against cultural issues within the patriarchal society, such as inheritance laws and practice of widow immolation known as sati. Unlike the western feminist movements, India's movement was initiated by men and then joined by women. The feminist literary criticism spent most of its energy describing how women were represented in literary works by both men and women writers.

Women writers believe that art is a major weapon for social change. Many of the women writers have moved towards the noble profession of activism through art. Mary Wollstonecraft

published one of the first feminist treatises, “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” (1792), in which she advocated the social and moral equality of the sexes. Wollstonecraft is regarded as the grandmother of British Feminism and her ideas shaped the thinking of the suffragists, who campaigned for the women’s vote. The majority of first wave feminists were more moderate and conservative than radical or revolutionary. Whereas the first wave of Feminism focused mainly on suffrage and overturning legal obstacles to gender equality, the second-wave of feminism broadened the debate to a wide range of issues-sexuality, family, the work place, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and official legal inequalities. At a time when mainstream women were making job gains in the professions, the military, the media, and sports in large part because of second-wave feminist advocacy, second-wave feminism also focused on a battle against women’s shelters, and changes in custody and divorce laws.

Writing is human experience through creative written work. The early period of women's liberation was set apart by a self-portraying or even confession booth composing which saw the relationship of writing to individual experience. It is through writing being a noteworthy social practice that woman's rights as basic hypothesis and in addition governmental issues, created following 1960. The second rush of woman's rights saw a more radical edge in the women's activist development than was available in speculations of the prior period. Radical women's activists requested equivalent rights as well as affirmed predominance of ladies over men. They needed ladies to be instinctive, supplement, steady and genuine. They organized the fight against sexism to the fight against free enterprise or that against legitimate and political change, that is, liberal woman's rights.

During the post-Independent period, feminism in Indian English literature was largely a part of the western feminist movement. It got sustenance from our freedom struggle under the dynamic humanitarianism of Mahatma Gandhi, independent spread of education, employment opportunities and laws for women’s rights. The third wave of Feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave’s definition of feminism, which often as summed a female identity and overemphasized the experiences of the upper- middle class white woman. The third wave ideology focuses more on post-structuralism interpretation of gender and sexuality. The third wave theory usually incorporates elements of queer theory- anti-racism, womanism, girl

power, post-colonialism, post-modernism, eco-feminism, individualist feminism, new feminist theory and a rejection of the gender binary. The Feminist thought and the feminist movements in the west had some influence on the woman's movement in developing countries like India. Yet, feminism as it exists today in India has gone beyond its western counterparts. As Uma Narayan Rightly puts it, "Third world feminism is not a mindless mimicking of Western Agenda in one clear and simple sense. Indian Feminism is clearly a response to the issues related to Indian women."

Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. The hierarchy within the family concreting age, sex, congenial and fine relationship or within the community referring to the caste lineage, learning, occupation and relationship with ruling power has been maintained very strictly. To understand and sympathize the sensibility of feminism, it is important to observe that Indian feminism presents a completely different picture .The long and painful suffering of women, the bitter struggle for the exception of the idea of equal pay for equal work, the continuing battles on behalf of woman's right to abortion and to practice birth control are some of the visible marks of the gender inequality that have persisted and that women had to fight for the commitments they were made under. Feminist situation in India possesses a dissimilar dispensation. Describing the reaction to the feminist movement in India, Suma Chitnis writes,

"The most distinctive feature of this movement was that it was initiated by a man." It was only towards the end of the century that the women joined the fray. The list of those who, championed the cause of women is long –Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidya Sagar, Keshav Chandra Sen, Matahari, Phule, Agarkar, Ranade, Karve to mention a few. The record of the reform they undertook to achieve is impressive. It reveals that their efforts spanned actions to abolish the practice of Sati, the custom of child marriage, custom of distinguishing widows, the ban on remarriage of the upper caste Hindu widows and many other civil practices that affected women.

In the Indian context, several feminists have realized that the subject of women's invasion in India should not be reduced to the contradiction between men and women. The woman in order to literate herself and advance, needs to empower herself against different institutional structures and cultural practices that subject her to patriarchal domination and

comfort. Indian writing in English is gaining ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era, has earned many laurels abroad. Indian woman writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. Today, the works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Geetha Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai and Manju Kapur and many more have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English. A major development in modern Indian fiction is the growth of a feminist or women centered approach, that seeks to project and interpret experience, from the point of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. As Patricia Meyer Specks remarks: "There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries."

Numerous Indian ladies writers have investigated female subjectivity with a specific end goal to build up a character, which is forced as a patriarchal society. The subject is from youth to womanhood created society regarding ladies when all is said in done. Women's liberation in its artistic sense, is the physical and psychic liberation of ladies from the brutal conventional grips of man. Female journey for personality has been a pet topic for some a lady's author. Shashi Deshpande is one such author and she tries to comprehend the inward measurement of the female characters. Deshpande, as an incredible women's activist and Indian writer, shows a touchy depiction of Indian womanhood treading the overly complex ways of human personality and reveals insight into the nuances of the human female. Her books are in themselves the schools of mind in light of lives and issues of ladies as it were. Every novel is a voyage of revelation for her, a disclosure of herself, of different people, of our universe. For the depiction of the difficulty of middleclass instructed Indian ladies, their inward clash and mission for personality, issues relating to parent-tyke relationship, marriage and sex, and their abuse. Shashi Deshpande's books speak to the contemporary current ladies' battle to characterize and accomplish a self-sufficient selfhood. Her female heroes are at extraordinary agonies to free themselves from choking, conventional limitations. The social and social change in the post-Independence India has made ladies aware of the need to characterize themselves, their place in the public eye, and their environment.

Shobha De, a celebrity journalist and the well-known author stands as a pioneer in the

field of popular fiction and ranks among the first to explore the world of the urban woman in India. With her extraordinary ability, she presents a very sensitive aspect of human life. Her way of narrating every aspect of human relationships is wonderful. Really, she is frank in narrating the incidents and situations with a touch of open heartedness. The most famous Indian woman novelists along with De are Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Bharti Mukherjee, and Shashi Deshpande. Among these women writers, De is entirely different. She has given importance to women's issues and they are dealt with psychology in her style of intimate understanding. Her novels indicate the arrival of a new Indian woman, eager to defy rebelliously against the well-entrenched moral orthodoxy of the patriarchal social system. Eager to find their identity, in their own way, her female characters break all shackles of customs and traditions that tie them in the predicaments and rein in their freedoms and rights. They are not against the entire social system and values but are not ready to accept them as they are. Her female characters are modern, strong and take bold decisions to survive in society. This secures her position in literature as a feminist novelist.

Earlier, women were not recognized as individuals or autonomous beings. Women had to face many obstacles in the academic circuit, which symbolize the effects of an educational culture that radically restricts the scope of women's intellectual exposure. It is observed that men have written many books about women. The male authors highlight the strength and weaknesses of women. They did actually celebrate the virtues and vices of women. They had been written in the red light of emotion and not in the white light of truth. Art did not give way to activism in the writings of men, as they were more or less didactic. In contrast, women were more concerned with activism as a tool of social change. Activism is an "effective agent of social change than electoral politics". Women writers believed that art is a major weapon for social change. Many of the women writers have moved towards the noble profession of activism through art. It is only through art and activism that a radical change can take place for the good of the society. Women writers like Mahasweta Devi, Sara Joseph and Arundhati Roy are considered as a major source of inspiration to women on the path to activism. They are all socially committed to serve the humanity and extend their helping hand to the poorest of the poor. A major pre-occupation in recent Indian women's writings has been a delineation of inner life and subtle relationships. In a culture where, individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and

the women's role at home is a central focus, it is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural diversion. Manju Kapur thinks: "There is a man within every woman and a woman in every man. When manhood is questioned, womanhood is fragile."

Mahasweta Devi established herself as the major novelist during the second phase of her creative writing. In one of her works, Mahasweta Devi portrayed the inner struggles of a lower caste boy to fight against human rights. Mahasweta Devi deals with radical left Naxalite movement and its effects on the people. There was a major shift in the third phase of Mahasweta Devi's creative writing, art gave way to activism and she tried to depict the struggles of the people against exploitation and tyranny. Mahasweta Devi has created an indelible mark on her fictional and non-fictional writings. In her fictional works, Mahasweta Devi has included a wide range of topics, such as demands for law, minimum wages, roads, schools, drinking water and various oppressions against the minorities. Mahasweta Devi insisted on the need for literary campaign in tribal areas and she carried out this mission with the help of educated people in the locality. She has played a crucial role in forming various organizations among the tribal people as the first step for development. She could put an end to bonded labour system that was prevalent at Palamau District in Bihar with collective force of the organization.

Arundhati Roy seems to be iconoclast in „The God of Small Things. The stylistic innovations make the novel unique and the variety brings vitality and exuberance to the novel. This novelist and human rights activist was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004 for her work in social campaigns and for her advocacy of non-violence. Arundhati Roy is now chairperson of the "Jury of Conscience" of The World Tribunal on Iraq. In her opening statement on behalf of the Jury of Conscience of The World Tribunal on Iraq, Arundhati Roy says, "We truly do live in the Age of Irony, in an age when satire has become meaningless because real life is more satirical than satire can ever."

Now, women in India have started questioning the age-old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in hands of man. They have shown their worth in the field of literature

both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it today without any hurdle. Today the works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayan Tara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Shobha De and many more have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English.

A major development in modern Indian fiction has been the growth of a feminist or women centered approach, an approach that seeks to project and interpret experience from the viewpoint of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. Feminism assumes that women experience the world differently from men and write out of their different perspectives. Feminism in Indian fiction has not developed suddenly but it has developed slowly and steadily. Bankimchandra Chatterji, Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali, Jitendra kumar in Hindi, Saratchandra Chatterji, who created perhaps the most remarkable portraits of women in Indian literature were somewhat feminists. In Urdu language, Ismat Chughtai had scandalized many by her outspoken themes. Rashid Iqbal, 1930's had written stories of „Angare“ and 'Aurat' (The Woman) that had dealt with the problem of woman.

A growth of Indian Woman novelists in their in-betweenness, hybridity of thought and multi- cultural, multilingual and multi-religious social dimensions have contextualized and lifted the women problem in general and middle class and upper class woman in particular. Women in many countries speak the same language of silence. Some Indian Women Novelists like Geetha Hariharan, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur and Shashi Deshpande, tried with sincerity and honesty to deal with the physical, psychological and emotional stress syndrome of women. Manju Kapur feels that, "A meaningful change can be brought only from within by being free in the deeper psychic sense." In her writing Manju Kapur has emphasized on the issues in the context of patriarchy, inter-caste marriage, family bond, male- female bond, co-existence of past and present in the socio-political facts. She has narrated her woman protagonist as a victim of gender, domestic violence and circumstances.

The subtle have now started speaking and the margin has occupied the centre. Their writing have to some extent changed the mentality of males; the result is that many seminars and symposia are being organized on woman literature. Feminism is a political perception based on the fundamental premises that gender difference is the foundation of a structural inequality

between woman and men, injustice and that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of the biological necessity but is produced by the cultural contradiction of gender differences. To understand and sympathise the sensibility of feminism in its holistic perspective, it is important to observe that Indian Feminism presents an altogether different picturesque scene. The long and painful sufferings of the movements constituted by women, the bitter struggles for the acceptance of the idea of equal pay for equal work, the continuing battles on behalf of woman's rights to abortion and to the practice of birth control are some of the visible marks of the gender inequality.

Celebration of femininity by the practical culture is actually a subjugation of female autonomy. In order to destroy the supremacy of patriarchal culture, human beings should be identified as male and female based on their sex and not as men and women. The term „woman“ connotes the quality of woman, which the society attributes to a female. She should be obedient, patient and servile in her behaviour towards others. The moment a woman does something different, the society would call her either a bad woman or lunatic. Human beings are not products, which come out of a factory to be alike. It is high time that the patriarchal culture ceased to exist for the all-round development of women.

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