



POST-FEMINISM : AN EMERGING TREND IN ENGLISH LITERATURE



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ABSTRACT :

Give me the liberty to know, to think, to believe and to utter freely according to conscience, above all other liberties". - John Milton. After contemplating this, it seems that Milton has particularly uttered the innermost feelings of entire womankind on this planet. For many centuries, much ink has been spent in levelling a woman with man, ignoring her biological and psychological differences and the cry of her conscience. Under the umbrella of feminism she has been made equal with man on the paper but kept miles away in reality in the conscience of present social set up. On the otherhand, somewhere we witness the current of rampant and anti-male feminism which is destructive not for the male-side but for female part of the society itself. In such a scenario, post-feminism is emerging as the harbinger of rain-bringing clouds who proves instrumental for showering of the rain which soothes the desert hearts of the people. Therefore, it is by practising the ideology of post-feminism, the woman and home can be kept alive and woman will be empowered in a true sense.

KEYWORDS : Post-feminism , English Literature , biological and psychological .

INTRODUCTION:

With the beautiful dawn of new era, the world of feminist ideology is witnessing the sunrise of post-feminism on the horizon of English literature. Gone are the days of the old perspectives on feminism. Now it's a time to redefine and re-discourse it in the constantly changing scenario of modernity where post-feminism is emerging as the brighter and positive cult of writing in the domain of feminine sensitization. The post-feminism took its birth in the late twentieth century (1980s) in many cultural, academic and political contexts. It spread widely in popular journalism, media, feminist analyses, post-modern theories and new-liberal rhetoric. According to stephanie Grenz and Benjamin Brabon :

*"The term 'post-feminism' is employed to describe a critical position in relation to the feminism of women's liberation, signifying both the achievements and challenges for modern feminist politics."*¹

The term post-feminism is multi-dimensional and has colourful contradictions with academic variations. It has varieties in nature with pluralistic outlook. Because of the multiplicity and variations, the confusion occurs between feminist and post-feminist discourses :

*"--- as post-feminism is variously identified or associated with an antifeminist backlash pro-feminist third wave, Girl power dismissive of feminist politics, trendy me – first power feminism and academic post modern feminism."*²

In the post-feminism, the prefix 'post' doesn't denote 'anti' or 'after' approach on the other hand :

"The prefix is understood as a part of a process of on going transformation.... change rather than assuming that patriarchal discourses and frames of reference have been replaced or superseded. In this sense,

*the 'post-ing' of feminism does not necessarily imply its rejection and eradication but means that feminism remains in post-feminist frame."*³

The journey of feminist movement can be observed under three different waves. The first has been the political wave which worked for women's right. The second wave attacks on the patriarchal domination in aggressive, militant tone. The third wave feminism fights against the gender discrimination and criticizes the second wave for neglecting differences between women with regard to race, class or sexuality.

*"The fourth wave feminism may possibly be the term for the postmodern feminism and may be called 'post-feminism' which lays emphasis on individual woman's inner awakening and freedom, on resolving the issues and problems raised by feminism and on understanding the relationship of interdependence between man and woman."*⁴

DIMENSIONS OF POST-FEMINISM

Backlash / New traditionalism, girl power, postmodern feminism, chick lit, brave new world, pluralism etc. are some of the conceptual tenets of post-feminism. It is considered as a reaction against anti male second wave feminism which especially describes the housewife as a 'political prisoner'. At the consequences of second wave feminism especially in western countries many families started breaking and millions of women found themselves lonely, unhappy, childless and unfeminine. Post-feminism's new traditionalism redefines the domestic sphere and re-signifies it as a domain of woman's autonomy and independence, attributing her freedom of choice to retreat from public sphere and restrain from paid work in favour of family values. The New Traditionalism advocates the rejection of second wave feminism and coming back to the new traditional values of family and motherhood in order to save home from the dangers of feminism. The post-feminism has reconstructed the concept of man-woman equality in its true sense. The concept of equality in second wave feminism has always been mistaken and misconstrued. It has been redefined and restructured in post-feminist view. In this regard, Kanwar Dinesh Singh has aptly commented :

*"It is not exactly the attainment of 'sameness'; it is rather about understanding the differences. The 'equality of sexes' thus refers to recognizing and learning to live with individual differences and identities. It is the 'mutual understanding'."*⁵

'Girl power' represents a new, robust, young woman with a strong sense of self. The impact of girl power has been notified and women are represented by media and literature as more assertive, confident, bold, self-reliant, individual and liberated in the present supersonic scenario.

POST-FEMINISM IN SOME FICTIONS

The reflection of these post-feminist tenets is observed in the fiction of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Nayantara Sehgal, Arundhati Roy and Bharati Mukharjee. The women, manifested in the fictions of these novelists are more assertive, self-assured, confident and self-reliant establishing themselves as the individuals.

Anita Desai's fictions are catapulted by the women who are desperate to assert their freedom and individuality. They crave to constitute themselves as the individuals and react against patriarchal society. Maya, Monisha, Sita all of them suffer because they decline to play the traditional role in the family. Bim represents the new woman of post-feminist phase. She is independent, self-assured and having post-modern mind set. According to Mrs. B. R. Agarwal :

*"Bim's protest is not a feminist protest for equality but a post-feminist claim to be acknowledged as an individual – capable of intelligence, feeling her true potential, along with the struggle to fulfill her urges and needs; she craves a niche for herself in the man-made world. She succeeds in defeating the patriarchal forces by refusing to accept the chain of matrimony by taking up the masculine role of bread winner of the family and finally by achieving autonomy and self-identity that transcend gender politics."*⁶

Shashi Deshpande's protagonists are bold and having inner awakening and freedom. They appear 21st century women. Sarita who craves to take education represents the educated intelligent woman who shows her freedom and boldness in her decisions of taking education and choosing a lower caste life partner by herself.

In Indian family, even today, the situation becomes critical when a girl decides to marry a man of her own choice and it becomes worst when the boy is from a lower caste background. Self-reliant Sarita who attains economic independence by becoming a doctor, succeeds in marrying a lower caste boy, Manohar against her middle class family-will represents truly the woman of post-feminist phase.

Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* illustrates how patriarchal society can treat feminine sensibility and masculine world equally by accepting the differences of both of the sexes. Post-feminism means acceptance of differences and living with them.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* shows the facets of post-feminism. Sethe's struggle is observed to seek individuality and autonomy and her search for self is the post-feminist phase. In spite of being a slave mother she is the maker of her children and asserts her right of motherhood and attains her goal.

Thus, it is concluded that with the passage of time the feminist movement is going under change and post-feminism is coming into force to unite both the sexes to keep the home happy and its reflection is seen in the fictions of a number of women writers.

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