

THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, status related issues concerning women is so widely spread that it has taken a global form. Women are the half a part of society, without them no sphere is complete and even development is also not possible out of this half neglected proportion. To eradicate this ignored black asset of the society we need to root up such efforts that can work to its best. Besides any step the very first step could be a deep insight to this scenario, core knowledge of what is happening to whom and of what kind of nature. Understanding women is not an easy concept but for this special step we need to. This could be made possible through Feminists Consciousness. Feminist Consciousness is “the state of being conscious; aware of female’s existence, sensations, thoughts, surrounding etc”. It also helps us to know the kind of treatment given to women in the past.

A feminist is one who advocates the rights of women and talks about equality. Many authors have written a lot of novels to depict women's situations and the way they deal with the society when gender inequality occurs. Two examples of these are Nervous Conditions and The Joys of Motherhood.

Before I begin with how feminist consciousness can improve the status of women, I need to clarify the following two concepts:

1. Quote by Jane Galvin Lewis:

“You don’t have to be anti-man to be pro-woman”

Feminism is not to hate a man. It is about sameness or equality to all genders. The concept of feminism could only be made clearer through the following example:

Feminism is NOT = Misandrists

Some of the feminists may be Misandrists, their theory of practice may show their attitude towards men but that does not mean their writings under feminism makes the term feminism equal to misandrists. In short, feminism doesn’t mean all men are rapists or the reason behind the tragedy of women.

2. This paper is a voice for those women only who really are considering those voices into consideration which really need amendment rather than talking about the bush. I do not favor those voices which cry for rights like security at night, going out at night. My focus is to understand their psyche, their consciousness, their hidden sentiments, their health and all genuine issues. For this I have one some beautiful lines to quote written by myself:

“Har awaz mein gunje hai nara ye hmara wo hmara
Hum brabar hai koi nainsafi nahin gawara
Kyu bhool jatein hai bhagwan ki us khaas tohfe ko
Jis se mile hisaab har us aude ko

Jo ikk admin na de ske is duniya ko
 Na wo mange is khudai ko
 Par sir jhukaye is aude ko
 Ye bandhan nai hai jo lge hai smaj k nari ko
 Ye SURAKSHA hai koi mudda nahi uthane ko

It means: We pose our hand up for everything that man has got on this earth but man has never asked a favor from God or someone to get the right or the gift of giving birth. We must know our limits as we are build beautiful by God's creation, its is we only who can run this world , we have given this special gift by Him , the boundaries that we feel are our limitations is our PROTECTION not to be putted under OBJECTION.

So keeping all these misconceptions aside, let us go through the actual concept.

In India women's movement had started by some social reformer and later joined by females. Nowadays we have seen the changes in status of women this all could be done by the consciousness of these people. Status is "a very wide term which includes all the Aspects of human life and the idea of status also connotes the notion of equality". Feminist consciousness and changing status of women is a social aspect which has taken a new form into existence.

All round the globe steps are taken in this regard and have proved successful to some extent. When we see that status of women has gradually changed in society then we need to unveil the history of women. Earlier the women were not supposed to get education and were not even allowed to put their thoughts down on a paper. Many women writers used to write under male pseudo names and were found really interesting and worth reading for example: Bronte sisters. Many women, infact all were confined to the four walls of the house and were supposed to dance to the music of their husbands. They were forced to do whatever said by their in laws. Then new system were also the part of the society like female foeticide, Purdah system, dowry system, sati system, child marriage, etc which ultimately led women to live a torturous life. They were not allowed to wear clothes of their own wish, not allowed to fulfill their desires. But, today that is not the case. She can enjoy freedom in almost all spheres but still restricted for some.

How does it work?

To understand this process one need to know "that consciousness is the process of perception, perceptions are instances of perception happening, and that the latter rests on the former, rather than the other way around. Perception is an element of consciousness. It's not strictly necessary to be perceiving anything to be conscious, but when you are perceiving anything, it is a conscious act. It's kind of like frogs and toads. Perception is consciousness, but not all consciousness is perception".

Feminist consciousness will deal with telling us how a woman thinks when she is happy or sad or alone. It will give us an idea of her mind's working and function. It comes in five parts. 1.) The awareness of women that they are

not lesser in any context to man, they belong to a subordinate group though they have suffered wrongs, 2.) This status of being subordinate is not by nature but set up by some social elements, may be some feminists, 3.) The development of a sense of sisterhood, 4.) The knowledge of their goals and desires and 5.) The development of an alternate vision of the future.

This consciousness is the recognition that one's physical sex shapes one's relationship to the political world. Gender consciousness can be seen as a step along the developmental path leading to feminism. According to Carroll, "gender consciousness-raising typically takes place in three phases. First, the individual begins to identify with women, acknowledging common interests. Second, by noticing disparities in how women are treated and feels this is unjust. Third, by recognizing that "the problems women face demand collective, political solutions and cannot be solved through individual efforts".

Feminist consciousness can play a supporting role in leading women to take political action, as noted by Tolleson Rinehart: "If women require special resources to overcome the lack of welcome they may find as they try to become political, gender consciousness can provide them. Gender identification and gender role ideology furnish these means by providing an intrinsic belief system: I can and should participate; and a sense of extrinsic support: I do this with and for others like me".

English Literature and its role

English Literature is filled with writings that deal with the female voices that can help us learn their consciousness. Whether it is Indian writing or American or any other, all the genres have space for feminist consciousness. However, during the colonial rule and through contact with western philosophies and movements, slowly but steadily, the strength of the women characters was focused upon in the writings of some authors, and this was certainly in contrast to the traditional picture of literary damsels. Indian women novelists in English have been presenting woman as the centre of concern in their novels.

Shashi Deshpande is one of the most significant novelists among them. She depicts women's issues and problems very deeply in her novels. Feminine consciousness for 'self' is felt in the novels of Deshpande. One has to consider Anita Desai's novels in such a social context or in such a transitional state of Indian feminism. As her novels deal with the middle and upper middle class society, the complexities of the "have-not" section would be safely left out while considering the feminist issues in her writing.

Considered as a whole, her novels reveal a progression in the psychic awareness of women about their position in a society. It is difficult to refer to any direct source for any of Anita Desai's novels. It is not only that feminists consciousness finds space in any only genre like novel or drama or poetry, rather it is found in whole throughout the literature. Toni Morrison is one of the foremost 20th century African-American women novelists. She is best known for discussing in her fiction the issues of gender, class and race. She highlights the theme of feminist consciousness in all her novels. Dorothy

Richardson is the English writer who is the pioneer in this field and who presents stream of consciousness writing at its purest. But among the stream of consciousness novelists in England, Virginia Woolf is the most important name. Mrs. Richardson's work is in fact unbearably diffuse and an average reader finds her almost unbearable. One should go by reading the following list of **2010s feminists writings**:

- *Big Girls Don't Cry: The Election That Changed Everything for American Women*, Rebecca Traister (2010)
- *Click: When We Knew We Were Feminists*, Courtney E. Martin, J. Courtney Sullivan, eds. (2010)
- *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*, Cordelia Fine (2010)
- *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism's Work Is Done*, Susan J. Douglas (2010)
- *NO EXCUSES: 9 Ways Women Can Change How We Think about Power*, Gloria Feldt (2010)
- *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*, Jennifer L. Pozner (2010)
- *Sensible Sensuality*, essays by Sarojini Sahoo (2010)
- *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*, Peggy Orenstein (2011)
- "How to be a Woman", Caitlin Moran (2011)
- *philoSOPHIA* (2011-present)
- *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, edited by Lisa A. Kemmerer (2011)
- *A Marriage Agreement and Other Essays: Four Decades of Feminist Writing*, Alix Kates Shulman (2012)
- *Cinnamon*, Samar Yazbek (2012)
- *We Should All Be Feminists*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014)
- *Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology*, edited by Ann VanderMeer and Jeff VanderMeer (2015)

According India's constitution, women are legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men (Indian Parliament). Because of lack of acceptance from the male dominant society, Indian women suffer immensely. It is women who give birth to a child still she has no right to take care of her health, she is considered as if she is a kid making machine. Till the time she is having a baby in her womb, she is taken care off because the fetus is going to get nourished but the sooner she delivers the child, all are concerned only about the newcomer. Working women has to take care of her home, her kids and all along with her job. She has to overwork but still under pressure either for one or the other reason. Most Indian women are uneducated. Although the country's constitution says women have equal status to men, women are powerless and are mistreated inside and outside at home.

India is a society where the male is greatly revered. Even the female prays to deliver a boy child so that she does not have to take another chance. She

forgets that she once was in a womb. People say girls are supposed to leave parents one day and have financial burden on the family. But, it is boys who if not get settled, parents have to sell all their properties for him, it is he also who after getting married or a good job has to leave the parents for either his family or his own betterment. Therefore women, especially the young girls, get very little respect and standing in this country.

Conclusion

Ultimately what I am trying to put forth is that to eradicate the gender inequality or the tragic face of women one need to peep into the women as a whole. The one who is running this whole world and is the master key to this existence has a great significance of her own. Saying a big NO to have knowledge of her wishes , desires, thoughts etc is a negative impact on the existing being itself. I would like to sum up by the words of Coco Chanel and Anaïs Nin:

“It’s probably not just by chance that I’m alone. It would be very hard for a man to live with me, unless he’s terribly strong. And if he’s stronger than I, I’m the one who can’t live with him. ... I’m neither smart nor stupid, but I don’t think I’m a run-of-the-mill person. I’ve been in business without being a businesswoman, I’ve loved without being a woman made only for love. The two men I’ve loved, I think, will remember me, on earth or in heaven, because men always remember a woman who caused them concern and uneasiness. I’ve done my best, in regard to people and to life, without precepts, but with a taste for justice.” —Coco Chanel

“What we call our destiny is truly our character and that character can be altered. The knowledge that we are responsible for our actions and attitudes does not need to be discouraging, because it also means that we are free to change this destiny. One is not in bondage to the past, which has shaped our feelings, to race, inheritance, background. All this can be altered if we have the courage to examine how it formed us. We can alter the chemistry provided we have the courage to dissect the elements.” —Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, Vol. 1: 1931-1934

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