

## The Issues of Racial and Gender Inequality in Modern Literature

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### **Abstract:**

Modern age is an age of transition in social behavior, social evils, social prejudices and gender inequity and so on. Whereas the classical literature faced little complication of problems and social issues; it no longer felt concerned with such issues. But with the change of time, the old conventions and conceptions have changed, giving place to modern social, economic and political transformations.

Today's society is very much concerned about the new issues that humanity is facing. These issues are related to gender inequality, feminine criticism, social conflicts and women empowerment. Literature being a mirror of society, has the duty to expose the reality of such social abnormalities and malaise as a responsible organ of human development. That is why, the authors of modern time have raised their voice against the maladjustment between man and society, class and class, men and women.

In English literature, there are a host of writers and novelists who have been trying to achieve a kind of harmony and proper understanding between the opposing elements. My paper particularly focuses on a detailed emphasis on removing the prevalent social, cultural and political divisions and the people are required to be united so as to make this world a better place to live in with love and social harmony.

**Keywords:** Racial Inequality, Gender Inequality, Modern Literature

Literature is an essential study of man's mental, physical, social, political and aesthetic behavior and taste. Literature is not constant, but is a continuing process which goes on changing with the advance of time and age. Literature is called a store house of the social, moral, emotional and political progress of society to which man belongs. That is why, literature of classical times is different from medieval literature and both these are different from the modern literature. It is rightly said that literature is the mirror of society. However, at the same time it may be called a store house of all the conventions, traditions, customs and human behaviour. This way, literature and society are complementary to each other.

Whereas literature of old times is mostly a record of man's imagination, feelings, emotions and aesthetics. But as time advanced the mould and contents of literature also changed for it has a dynamic aspect. In olden days, literature mostly catered to the emotional and aesthetic achievements of man, with the change of time it started dealing with the treatment of various kinds of social inequity and discrimination based on race, religion or gender in literary works. In modern times, all these discriminations have grown many fold and complex. In some cases, the above discrimination have revealed the racist attitude that serve as underlying assumptions, but may not be immediately evident.

In modern literature some critics have approached the study of racism by exploring its characteristics in a genre. For instance Laura Niesen De Aruna has written about raciest currents in Caribbean Literature, while Frances A. Della Cava and Madeline H. Engel have given examples of prejudice against Blacks, Jews and women in their fiction. Some other journal approaches have included the discussion, how the role of whiteness treatment of the three main female characters in the play--Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca. A race reading would establish Lago, Roderigo and Brabantio as the major racist of the play. For the first few scenes Othello's position was clearly that of an outsider. Lago, Roderigo and Brabantio call him 'The moor'. Brabantio is most subtle when prejudicing Othello, the cause of this

may be of his higher social class than that of the other. The personality and strong character of the female characters of 'Othello' can be seen through the feminist point of view. The three main female characters-Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca, are all affected and oppressed by the society in different ways. Desdemona, the faithful wife and her servant Emilia are suppressed by the male domination. They are treated as articles of property but Bianca, on the other hand has more freedom than that of an average woman, due to her role as a courtesan.

The world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women empowerment. Steven G. Kelman has written the uneasy relationship between African American and Jews as seen in his novels. Other critics have focused on the theme of racism in individual works of literature. For example Frances W. Kaye continues a long standing and vigorous discussion about racism in Mark Twain's novel 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn'; Anna Shannon has explored Kate Chopin's manipulation of social and gender stereotypes in the novel 'The Awakening' while Andre Bleikasten has considered William Faulkner's depiction of outsiders and their treatment by Southern society. Thus, literary scholars and biographers have also made assumptions and reached conclusions about various authors' stances towards racism.

Even Shakespeare's 'Othello' supports many readings and the most obvious readings are the feminist readings and racial readings. Shakespeare informs the readers about the inequality between the sexes; oppressed women and dominant males. We can observe the feminist perspective in 'The Bluest Eye' by Toni Morrison. The girls continued to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, healthcare, decent work and representation in political and economic decision making processes which will benefit humanity at large. Toni Morrison is among the pioneers of those contemporary Black

writers who have redefined Afro-American writing in many ways<sup>2</sup>. Black women in America being poor, have been victimized by racism, sexism not only from the white world but also from their own men. These women have faced the problems of race, class and gender, which have pushed them towards a margin. In America the system of societal and psychological oppression has adversely affected the lives of blacks in general and African-American women in particular. Black community had to suffer atrocities like racism and exploitation irrespective of sex. However, black women were more oppressed physically and mentally. The woman in America is expected to be beautiful physically and mentally. The African women were pushed to the periphery on account of their gender and a black woman's life was full of horrors.

Racism with sexism scared the black's women mentally and physically. Sexism refers to gender bias which exists against women in all Patriarchal modes of thinking which subordinate women to men. The Patriarchal and endocentric ideologies provide women secondary role and focus on concepts of gender differences which are only man made. The black women had to suffer at the hands of both white and black men, lighting a battle for survival both inside and outside their homes.

Class exploitation is perhaps the greatest source of oppression of blacks in white America. The black women have been victimized not only by racist, sexist and class bias, but also by scholarly neglect. Morrison also belongs to this group of writers which have tried to trace the development of Black women's image from its infant stage to the present stage of self-definition and assertion. 'The Bluest Eye' portrays very poignantly the tragic condition of the Blacks in the racist America. Morrison's characters lose themselves to self-hatred and their only aim in life is to be white. The novel traces the environment that produces the crises of gender inequality. Morrison asserts that intra-racial violence can be lead to dehumanization of the entire race of men and destroy the female child completely.

The importance of gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly economic empowerment is at the core of UNIDO's mandate. Enhancing the role of women as drivers of poverty reduction, promoting female investors and recognizing the link between gender equality and safeguarding the environment to make life sustainable. Educating and investing in women and girls has a multiple affect on productivity, efficiency and economic growth. Wollstonecraft's<sup>3</sup> 'Vindication of the Rights of Women' is at least in part a reaction to the need for educating women. According to her, there are certain predicaments in this regard. One problem is that women writers can't cite with respect. The depressed condition of women was marked by an enfeebling education, no career, no economic independence. Thus, the character of 'Vindication of the Rights of Women' lies in the appalling contemporary position of women and their lack of education. That is why, Wollstonecraft's text is addressed to women in the sense that it concerns their rights and education. She wishes to persuade women to acquire strength, both of mind and body.

Shashi Deshpande in 'That Long Silence'<sup>4</sup> has presented a concept of a new woman with an appeal for the rightful place of a woman in modern Indian Society. Though equal status for women with equal opportunities in life has been guaranteed in our constitution, still she is neglected, embarrassed and harassed in wider circles of society. Baring a minor segment of society--rich, affluent and highly civilized and cultured, the vast majority of women are treated like menial at the mercy of men folk. Though the novel, 'That Long silence', Deshpande has conveyed her message to the world through the character of Jaya, the protagonist of the novel. She remained passive, submissive, and docile and danced to the tune of her husband, she lacks self-will and freedom of thought and expression, with the result that she failed, fumbled and stumbled at the very first and last of her trial and crisis in life. Later, she gathered inner strength to stage to normally. By introspection and retrospection, she made important discoveries about herself and redefined her relations with

the world. Her perception of life altogether changed. She developed moral courage and inner strength. Thus, through Jaya the authoress gave the message to the entire feminine world to stop thinking herself weak and helpless and prepare her to meet the struggle of life boldly and realistically with the weapons of self--confidence, self--reliance and inner moral strength. This is what I too want to support that our women must be conscious of their rights and strive for the same.

Further Simone de Beauvoir in <sup>5</sup>'The Second Sex' asserts<sup>5</sup> that in male centered society, women are not free like men. All important decisions about her life are taken by men as father or husband. She is told to follow their decisions or ambitions. She must accept their supremely. She is forced to lead life as a 'half slave'. Simone laments man's double standard in dealing with woman. Publically men oppose abortion and call it immoral but for family planning they will force women to go for this immoral act. Men are excused from guilt and call it a human weakness where as a girl would be punished for immoral trafficking. Simone points out that all talk of equality between men and women is false. Women are servile and men are lords in the present society. This kind of attitude must be transformed at the earliest. Equality between men and women thus, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women are free to develop their gender qualities and develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means fairness of treatment for women and men according to their respective needs. Prof. P.N. Kharu in his poem ' <sup>6</sup>Welcome to a Girl Child' laments on the biased treatment to a girl child. The Poet expounds that we must welcome a girl child and not to consider her a drain.

The modern literature inherited from the class tradition, the established rules of genres inherited from classical tradition placed considerable restraint is on what writers could achieved without seeming "low" or absurd. Money and commerce, in particular, were

regarded as ignoble subjects suitable to comedy and satire. These subjects could be combined only with great difficulty with the high forms associated with nobility and gentry. Writers like Fielding, Nicholas Rowe, Samuel Johnson have expressed this social or racial conflict in their works. Even Shakespeare bridged the social and political divisions of the age, for he dramatized human realities, shared down the ranks from kings to commoners. Even Garrick removed the difference between the grave diggers from Hamlet and the fool from King Lear. Samuel Richardson's sensational novel 'Pamela' concerns the servant girl who bravely resists attempted seduction by a rich gentleman until he agrees to marry her.

Thus, in my opinion the social class counts very much in the examination of literature between different ages. Doris Lessing's women protagonist often exhibit a strong will to change the society. In 'The Golden Note Book' the novelist makes a strong plea against artificial splits or divisions. Its final message is not fragmentation of society but unity and cohesion. The book examines the fragmentation of society into classes which are on a war path towards each other. It offers an understanding of issues such as political repression and class conflict. It makes an effort to reform the society into a classless society and get rid of all its ills and maladies.

To Conclude I can aver that racial and gender inequality is an important aspect of modern literature. Modern writers like Arundhati Roy, Mulk Raj Anand, Kushwant Singh, Marry Wallstonecraft, Prof. P.N. Kharu and many more have written about the racial and gender inequalities which have brought fruitful results in the society. People got aware about their wrongs and they improved a bit. The government also brought constitutional amendments for the rights of women but inspite of all this a lot more is required to bring racial and gender equality.

**References:**

1. Othello by Shakespeare
2. The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison
3. The Vindication of the Rights of Woman by Mary Wollstonecraft.
4. That Long Silence by Shashi Deshpande.
5. The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir
6. Welcome to a Girl Child by Prof. P. N. Kharu

