



Feminine Mystique: Prognostication of Supremacy in Sukirtharani's *Anthology*

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Abstract

Of all the sprouting trends and innovative approaches for better understanding of literary texts, which have been implicitly influenced by the philosophy of Post-structuralism, among Feminist literature is one of the offshoots of it, that has been persistently disseminating male domination system prevailing in modern society, relentlessly promulgating the drastic rights of marginalized which are deprived of them by the male domination society, beside it propagates the unusual culture and way of life of Females. Authentically it has been emerging as branch of study since late nineties but not yet achieve its purpose in cutting-edge. However the concern for marginalized, downtrodden and the continuous misuses of our fellow beings poses on humanity have only recently caught the attention of the writers. It is this sense of concern and itself reflection in literature that have given rise to branch of literary approach called Feminist Literature “to give voice to the voiceless”. Hence in this sense of perception this article will argue with some historical facts that how one of the emerging writers –cum- feminists **Sukirtharani** vividly deliberates traditional domination of oppressors through her writings such as *Portrait of my village* and *Untitled poem*

Keywords: Post-Structuralism, Feminist, Downtrodden, Culture and Tradition

“If you want to understand the literature of movement, if you want to learn struggle of emancipation, if you want to listen to the cry of humanity, I think, you have to read Dalit literature. It is the literature of life”.

-Unknown

Of all the empirical studies of twentieth literary criticisms, has been profoundly affected by Post structuralism, is Feminist Criticism which examines complaints posed by women since the days of Aristotle. Feminist Criticism is a meaningful concept. It can be articulated in different ways as an

enabling concept despite the problem one inevitably faces while trying to define it. It seeks to challenge traditional notions, experiences and perspectives of women which had been marginalized for ages. The two drastic assumptions on which feminism is built are **i).** Gender difference is the foundation for structural inequality between men women and **ii).** The inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity, is constructed by construction of gender differences. It continuously seeks to offset certainties of patriarchy culture and eradicate sexist domination- the sperm versus ovum nexus.

Feminist literary criticism aims to study the ways in which cultural representations like literature, political, psychological suppression, oppression of women in the society. In fact, it would be proper to call the field **Feminisms**, if a plural of an abstract noun may be permitted. To liberate women from so called traditional way of viewing woman as a inferior, patriarchy domination and unequal distribution of law, enumerable movement have been emerged such as feminist movement, three waves of feminisms since 1940s , women's liberation movement to fight for women rights. This has become a global issue, to contemplate over there are very many platforms and media support but it is concerned with feminism as academic discipline, an intellectual inquiry goes by the name of **women's studies**.

Fall of 19th century women were scarcely an influential presence in public life, in advanced countries. A women's place was supposed to be in the home, "**angel of the home**" as the poet Coventry Patmore called and the political philosopher in his essay 'Lilies: Of Queens's Gardens says women are meant for bearing and rearing children, in the western context, women were preoccupied with getting access to the ballot box, family support and preservation, were content with private world of family and domesticity. Aristotle, Aquinas and Donne detained that view form is masculine and matter is feminine, even renowned religious poet John Milton wrote in his Paradise Lost, He (Adam) for God, she (Eve) for God in him.

Feminist theory generally chooses two areas to tackle these issues and develop what critics call a criticism of their own-woman as reader and woman as writer. The first task is to scrutinize the literature of the past with a view of exposing the notorious patriarchal ideology inscribed in it. This reading imbibes classic interpretation also; the curriculum of women's studies begins with a project that encourages students to read literature afresh. Critics often quote from the scripture: "the Lord God formed every beast of the field and fowl of the air, and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them whatsoever the man called every living creature, that was the name thereof (Genesis 2: 19). Language is synthetic and often this as a paradigm for patriarchal supremacy. Hence writers would examine female characters in male-authored as wells as in the works by women to show which of the images of women are more authentic and to expose the misogyny in famous literature.

Woman as Reader

In past, we had some seminal books on this subject Shelley's mother-in law Mary Wollstonecraft's book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1879) deserve special mention when male supremacy was taken for granted, these work articulated, in no uncertain terms, the sense of discrimination created by such an inequality between sexes. It seeks to liberate itself from time-honored and naturalized notions by subverting them and the goal is to expose the misogyny involved in the literary production and past. It is even fashionable these days to term it '**cultural politics**' than feminist theory. In the 20th century, some highly reputed women writers have discussed and raised fundamental issues on this view. Virginia Wolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Kate Millte's *Sexual Politics* and *The Feminine Mystique* are indispensable to an understanding of the case for feminism. Some of the basic issues raised by feminist literary criticism can be classified thus:

- a) Western society is entrenched in patriarchal ideology and controlled by it. Hence women are kept in subjugation.
- b) Men always establish norms; women are defined as the 'other'.
- c) Sex and gender are entirely different from each other, sex is biologically determined and while gender is created by culture/society.
- d) The be-all and end-all of feminist criticism is to promote gender equality.

Woman as Writer (Gynocriticism)

Elaine Showalter gives name Gynocriticism, which takes two factors to analysis, that are **i)** uncover forgotten woman talents in those literature and **ii)** to create body of literature by women and of women.

The focal elements of 'Gynocriticism'

- i) Biology:** To question biological essentialism, that is, the premise of patriarchy that woman is a womb, a receptacle for male domination.
- ii) Experience:** To portray woman as source of immense values in life as well as in art.
- iii) Discourse:** women are caught in up in a prison –house of language that is male specific.

Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* are two works implemented these ideas, brought neglected women's studies. Traditional historians define the movement in various ways: as a reaction to Victorianism, the after-

effects of World War I, ills of industrialization etc. The conventional view is that modernism, in art literature, was born against the tendencies of the age, from feminist perspective modernism can be interpreted as an outward expression of women's movement fighting for suffrage and equal rights. Feminism is multicultural and diasporic. It is a proven fact that women are subjugated patriarchal system and women's problems are shaped by their class, race, nationality, religion etc. As a critical movement, feminism is recent origin, yet its growth is phenomenon in terms of the volume of books and article. It promotes an idea that rings out the old and rings in the new.

As we all know the Feminist movement emerged to fight and liberate from traditional patriarchal domination but in Indian context its bit difference both in understanding and role of women in terms of economy, culture, freedom, and politics so on and so forth. At present though we have enumerable writers in Tamil Nadu, one of the writer –cum- feminist **Sukirtharani** vividly deliberates traditional domination of oppressors through her writings such as *Portrait of my village and Untitled poem*. The humiliation that she had in her youth was undoubtedly expressed in her poem *My room needs no calendar*:

What connection can there be
between offering your body
and knowing what time it is? I never keep track
of the time, or my body,
or the tally of men who visit me.
When they take my clothes off,
I must pretend that
I am bashful and
groan in pleasure.

Sukirtharani precisely describes how in the phase of “Gynocriticism” women writers foregrounded that literature of their own and openly described humiliation underwent by the women of her century as **Mary Wollstonecraft** says in her seminal writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that “My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their *fascinating* graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. She continues to describe mortifications and how a woman is being caught in hands of patriarchy. The following lines vividly tell us that how a woman is forced to have affairs with so many men to feed her children.

In the bruised, red tooth marks
they freeze their frothing sperm. At all such moments,
I yearn for the caress
of a season when the days
and nights that gobble up

my proud youth are over.
 What should I teach my children
 asleep in the room downstairs?
 My children keep pestering
 me to blow up the condoms
 lying scattered on the floor
 of my room that needs no calendar.

My room needs no calendar only explains the degradation of women who is caught in hands of men who is in need of money and room of her own. And in the following poem she describes how women are terrified of dominant society that:

I need a language
 still afloat in the womb
 which no one has spoken so far,
 which is not conveyed through signs and gestures.
 It will be open and honorable. (*Infant language*)

These lines express **Elaine Showalter's** idea of Gynocriticism, which takes a factor to analysis, that is to create body of literature by women and of women besides that she also implicitly tells one of the focal elements of aforementioned writer that is **Discourse**: which Elaine Showalter says that: women are caught in up in a prison –house of language that is male specific. Woman's language (WL) shall be feminine in its style and structure.

Sukirtharani is a prominent Dalit poet in Tamil. She is currently at work on a novel which she describes as dalit-feminist. In 2009, she organized a poets' protest against the violence against Tamils in Sri Lanka, in which a large number of poets read. She has published four collections of poetry: Kaippatri Yen Kanavu Kel, Iravu Mirugam, Avalai Mozhi Peyarthal, and Theendap Pataatha Muththam. Recently, she was given the Sundhara Ramasamy Viruthu Award by Neithal Ilakkiya Amaippu, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu. She as a historian projected how women's needs are mistreated in her book *Poems* besides politely he uses her writings as a lacunae for the oppressed people to fight back for their drastic needs and stand as fellow beings equally in all sphere of lives.

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