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An Inspiration to Womanhood through the poems of Kamala Das and Maya Angelou

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Abstract

History reveals that the girls and women had been kept in darkness from ages. They had no right to enjoy their fundamental rights. Women had been treated as inferior to men. They were tortured, suppressed, humiliated, and sexually harassed in all the fields. They were, not respected, and given importance and marginalized politically, economically, socially, culturally and emotionally. The condition of women had been very pathetic and, where rape,

female foeticide, infanticide, dowry deaths and various kinds of exploitation were happening almost every day. The women were considered as a sexual object and to take care of the family over the years in the history. But gone are the days, where women were known by her husband's name or by the name of the family. Now women are educated equal to men. Women can get empowered in their own choices by selecting their own jobs, own life partners, own places to study, and professions etc. They are working in all the fields and in every profession. They are in good positions in their work places. They are recognised by the society. They achieve many things and do wonders in their work places. They have become policy makers in their work places. They are recognised and respected in the family since they are working and earning money and taking care of their family. You can find women as president, chief minister, prime minister, director, principal, pilots, astronomers etc. Women have freedom to make their own choices. And now they have so many facilities announced by the governments where they can enjoy their freedom. Since there are special laws relating to women empowerment in favour of women, they feel free to enjoy their fundamental rights. This paper throws light on how women were leading their lives in the past and how they are leading their lives in the 21st century through the selected poems of Kamala Das and Maya Angelou. Both have been marginalized and subordinated, but difference lies between the way, they were victimized.

Keywords: Women, Society, Feminism, Marginalization, Empowerment, Laws

Introduction

If you turn back to the history, women were under the clutches of men. The social evils like child marriages, lack of education among girls, female infanticides, sati, polygamy etc. were the hindrances and threat to women to come up. But now women have freedom to have education. Thus, education and social media have brought so many changes in the lives of women. They are conscious in everything. They read books, newspapers, watches news and they have awareness through the incidents whatever they come across and find out solutions. The more they are educated, the more they are enlightened. Slowly the changes have arrived step by step and in 21st century we can find the changes, they become bold and strong. They work and earn money equal to men and balance both work and life which men won't be able to do. Thus, they play a very important role in both work and family. Earlier, women were highly dependent on men and no freedom was given to take any decision. They were not having enough education, no exposure where they could climb on the ladder of victory.

Review of Literature

M. S. Shabnam Azhar, (2012), research on "Feminism and Post-feminism: An Outlook of Women and their Role in Society" highlights upon the concept of feminism and post feminism. In the past, the position of women was bound to home and family but today's women want to have an equal role in society too. And in this regard, what role the feminism has played. What could be the future role? What are the barriers? The writer wants to discuss

all these questions in this research. She has discussed different types of feminism in 'historical' waves, she wants to say that post feminism is also used variously along with feminism. The article starts with a beautiful quotation by 'The father of political science', Aristotle i.e. "Healthy society with happy families is the pillar for a well-developed state." (www.scribd.com). Nature has ordained woman to be the mother and nourisher of society, while this function of woman as a pillar of society has been always recognized. Society has not given woman the rightful position due to the stereotypical traditions and patriarchal male dominated society. In early 1960s the positions of women were different in compared to today's position. Here the author writes: "Although many feminists tried equality is not yet maintained in the professional world, most people believe that feminism has dramatically expanded women's job opportunities." But again the author says, feminism has doubled women's responsibilities as it creates a crucial issue to find balance between work and family. Here, she shows different views of post-feminists and feminists. Moreover, she discusses feminism not just as women's welfare but also welfare of society as a whole. On the other hand perhaps feminism is both personal and social. However, feminism needs to change the thinking of women and encourage them to question those aspects of society which are affecting their lives. Feminism is the progressed shape of women's liberation movement. It has been used variously to signal an epistemological break with (second wave) feminism. So, the main ambition of feminism is to change the ancient thinking of society that woman is a property that, can be owned, controlled, and disposed the way they like. This is a long and bitter struggle through the conflict between the ancient tradition and emerging new ideas. The main goal is to protect women's rights and to remove the discrimination in society. We have to accept the fact that man and woman have to complement each other and one is never a whole without the other. Woman is indispensable to man's life. These lines are the foundations to create a happy family and happy family is the unit to create a developed state as Aristotle says. So, here, I will conclude this review by saying that the discussion carried by this article is the best for improving our knowledge. I appreciate author's way of input to every related aspect.

By seeing the sufferings of women some feminist writers started writing their views in order to bring their issues to the lime light. Feminist movements have been trying to remove this marginalization. The strong wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s helped to bring out women's sufferings to the lime light giving a call for liberation after woman from certain forms such as equal opportunity equal pay for equal work and recognition and respect in the society close the gender based discrimination that deprived women half the opportunities for self-promotion and equality with men simply because they are women but the awareness that are unjustly discriminated against and their inferior status against men have been deliberately constructed can be traced much earlier

The term of feminism was coined in the year 1960. The name "Feminism" was given to a political movement which gathered momentum in 1960s giving a call for the liberation of women to get equal opportunity, equal pay for equal work and respect and recognition in the society. It echoes the gender-based marginalization and discrimination which deprived

women from self-promotion, equal opportunity and equality with men just because they were women. Though many wrote about women's problems in India, Rabindranath Tagore was one of the first known Indian feminist writers among them whose writings were exclusively for women. After seeing the condition of women in the society. He says;

"O Lord Why have you not given woman the right to conquer her destiny?

Why does she have to wait head bowed,?

By the roadside, Waiting with tired patience,

Hoping for a miracle in the morrow ?" (www.eprpinformation.org)

The first-wave of feminism has happened between the mid 19th century and the early 20th century. The purpose of this was mainly to gain the basic legal rights for women.

The second wave of feminism, which supported radical ideologies began in the 1960's and lasted till the 90's. In the second wave of feminism, the demands of the women were broadened. And the emphasis was given on family, sexuality, equality at workplaces, gender, domestic violence and reproductive rights.

The third wave of feminism came into existence in the early 1990s. It was the reply of bridging the gap led by the second wave of feminism. It was born with the privileges achieved by the first and second wave of feminism respectively. Riding ahead with confidence, they came out as very strong and self-assured social agents.

Fourth-wave feminism argues for equal pay should be given for equal work and that the equal opportunities sought for girls and women should extend also to boys and men to overcome gender norms. Even though the feminism and feministic movement brought tremendous changes, it has even doubled the responsibilities of women. Everyone should accept the reality that both have to complement each other. Maya Angelou and Kamala Das are two women poets. Through their poetries they wanted to remove the discrimination and patriarchal system. Their poetries are good lessons to male domination. They clearly give the message of establishing their own identity by breaking the dominance of male over their body, mind and soul.

Maya Angelou is a black American writer. Right from childhood, she did not enjoy her life, Once she was molested by her mother's friend at the age of eight. He threatened her, if she would reveal it, he would kill her brother. Thus, she was depressed and disappointed. Her progress from a mute girl to a strong woman took a turning point in her life to the level of writer, director, and producer who always has optimistic attitude towards life. Maya emerged as an independent woman writer after doing various jobs such as singer, club dancer.

Through the poem "Still I Rise" she expresses her views very strongly. It deals with the condition of woman. The Black American people were under slavery. Here, she had double suppression because she was a woman and also a black woman. She tolerated the humiliations whatever she underwent. Finally she had to rise without having any other option. Because during those days, the black American women were biased and not liberated

from slavery too. Many were fighting for their liberation. Maya Angelou showed her boldness through the poem "Still I Rise". She says that even if people try to kill her (a black woman) she will rise.

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

"Still I Rise,
Still I Rise,
Still I Rise'. (And Still I Rise p.41)

Kamala Das is an Indian writer. She was born in Kerala to a very well reputed parent. She wrote several novels, collections of poetry and short stories in English as well as in Malayalam. She also did not enjoy her childhood right from the beginning because of societal restrictions. Her parents married her off at the age of 16 to a bank Manager. When she got married, she was not aware of how to lead a life. Her husband treated her very badly. She struggled a lot because of her unloving husband. She wrote down about her sufferings and humiliations. She boldly confessed all her issues in the form of novels, short stories and books. Her novels, short stories and books are the realities of her own experiences which have come out of pain. They gave confidence and boldness to many women who were leading a false life and living in disguise. She won many awards and achievements for her writings. She wrote

In the poem Anamalai she reveals that
They called me a winner, for, with words I did
weave a wondrous raiment fit for Gods and with
riinble footsteps climbed the stairways of my thoughts
finding even the heaven's portals ajar. ("Anamalai Poems", Best 155)

Both the authors strived hard and struggled a lot to get the recognition. Those days, there were no laws in favour of women. They were considered as exceptional. Because those days, women were not even allowed to come out of their houses. We have to appreciate these people for their hard work and perseverance. This gender bias is still prevalent in the society. It's more in workplace. An intelligent and talented woman faces mental abuse from her male counterparts (seniors) who consider her as to be a threat to their designation. They always want to pull her down just because she is a woman. Predominantly, women face the glass-ceiling effect. Despite of talent and skills a woman employee gets less number of promotions and her wages are often lesser than her male colleagues. But still, there are women achievers who are struggling hard to achieve the positions and they do achieve and emerge victorious. Nowadays you can see

women in higher positions. They are working as judges, police officers, presidents, prime ministers, Chief ministers, pilots etc.

Conclusion

There is an unframed law that women must obey their husbands. They must depend their husbands in all aspects. Daughters are still not having the right in their parent's property as sons. The custom of 'sati' was practiced in our country even though the custom of Sati is abolished, widows are not allowed to marry again and are often ill-treated and even till date cases are reported. The evil system of dowry is continued and there are deaths related to this evil system. The constitution grants equality to women and empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law to prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or [lace of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens n matters relating to employment Article 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a) 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard. There are special laws for equal Remuneration, Dowry Prohibition, Indecent representation of women, Commission of Sati, Prohibition of child marriage, Prohibition of women from domestic violence, Sexual harassment at workplace which helps them to enjoy the freedom in 21st century. Women are caring, giving, tolerant and powerful, A man cannot be a whole without a woman. Women should be given due respect in the society. She should be appreciated and loved by men. If she is a working woman, he must understand that she is working for the family and the status of the family will be promoted and the quality of life will be enhanced. Though women are empowered, and there are laws in favour of women, women are not fully liberated and empowered in many areas where they can shine completely. Still there are some hindrances which stops their empowerment. That situation should be changed. There should be a total emancipation of women where they can celebrate the victory of women's emancipation

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