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A SKETCH ON FEMINISM

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Abstract:

Values in India make women's issues different from the western module of feminism. The idea of women as "powerful" is accommodated into patriarchal culture through religion. Indian feminist scholars and activities have to struggle to carve a separate identity for feminism in India. They define feminism in order to avoid the uncritically following western ideas. Indian women negotiate survival through an array of oppressive patriarchal family structures: age, ordinal status, and relationship to men through family of origin, marriage and procreation as well as patriarchal attributes-dowry, siring sons etc. -kinship, caste, community, village, market, and the state. Feminism, no doubt, is the move of the century, proclaiming equality for an already equal, but oppressed mass. There was no doubt, a time in our past, when a widow was pushed into funeral pyre. It would be preposterous if you think that is the past. Still the girl is murdered as a fetus, a girl is asked to work at home while her brother goes to school and still the majority of the people of the opinion that the male child is their heir apparent and the generation of them would evolve only through them. Religious practices also the male child a pre-eminent position in Indian psyche.

Key Words: *Patriarchal culture, feminism, oppression, equality, religious practices, Indian psyche.*

Feminism is a commitment to the struggle for the equality of women in order to emphasize the value of women as they are. Importance of women's perspective is being recognized in the literature today, because "For centuries, human experience has been synonymous with masculine experience", both in the texts and in the real lives. Today, feminism is viewed as a rapidly growing movement, a philosophy of life which opposes subordination of women in whatever form in family and in society at large.

Women have suffered shocking inequalities for centuries and continue to be discriminated. Women are revered in texts and words but in fact she is treated as second class citizens be it in family, in job market, or in education. Though one's sex is determined by birth, the concept of feminine and masculine has been a creation of the society. The oft-quoted comment of Simone de Beauvoir's "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature" stands as a testimony of the times. In this process, the male is identified as active, adventurous, dominating and the female as passive, submissive, etc. In an attempted revised version of universal Declaration of Human Rights by the unassembly, SarojIyer writes: "women shall not be seen in relationship to men but as independent entities. Man shall not be considered the natural head of the family or the natural guardian of children. Laws shall be enacted keeping this equality in mind".

Feminist criticism focused on this inequality and criticized literatures written by men depicting women as subservient, docile, without independent emotional needs, and having to depend on men for emotional needs. The male bias encoded in English language conventions, such as man, mankind, history, author, spokesman, chairman, God as a male figure or as 'He', woman as temptress, being to be rewritten in gender neutral language.

Women began to write in order to depict a distinctive feminine mode of experience the world of family, experiences of gestation, child-birth, nurturing, mother-daughter-woman-woman relationships, etc., in woman's language or feminine style of speech writing. When one considers Feminism in Indian

context, one notices that India is mainly patriarchal a society, where gender inequality exists between men and women, though both are equal before the law. The tradition bound attitude of the society is contained in *Manusmriti*, the patriarchal of Hindu laws: “the father looks after her during childhood, the husband protects her during youth, and the sons take care of her when she becomes old. The woman is never fit for freedom”.

In rural Indian families, women are less involved in the decision makings. Female literacy is far less in proportion to the male literacy rate. There are preference for the male child which led to female feticides, infanticides, lower literacy rate of females, and violence against women. In the north of India, if a male and female is born together as twins, the boy gets all the breast milk of the mother, the girl has to be content by just sucking the breast. The freedom which a man can take for granted is denied to a woman. The male does not need permission from the family to go the market, while the girl needs an explicit permission to do so. In Indian context, feminism is more an awareness of oppression and exploitation in society and family, and the actions being initiated to change these situations. Hence masculine and feminine as biological categories, open the way for equality for both men and women... female and male are not considered polar opposites one always oppressing the other, western notion of the 'self's rests in competitive individualism, by contrast in India, the individual is considered to be just part of a larger collective social self, dependent for its survival upon Co-operation and self-denial for the greater good.

In Indian context, our beautiful earth was full of female deities and mother goddesses. Hinduism depicts reality as both female and male. “Just as Parvathi is the very 'half' of the Lord, so also the earthly woman is the 'better half' of the male”. Forever, feminine goddesses are everywhere erected on the altars and worshipped. Hindu pantheon recognizes the 'Trimoorthy' as Brahma-Vishnu-Mahesh, and an equal female counterpart Durga-Lakshmi-Saraswati. One can know the depiction of female godhead as mother; even the earth 'Prithvi' is mother; she takes the entire burden of the earth. One finds an intense adoration, and complete veneration of the Supreme mother.

However, there are many myths prevailing in India which in fact uphold the status of women. Some of these myths are: “women are physically weaker than men; men need more food than women; nature has made women weak; a woman's place is naturally the home; marriage and motherhood are necessary for women than men; children are responsibility of mother than father; family stability depends on woman; property rights belong to men only; men are intellectually stronger. More and more women and girl children in India are victims of gender related violence than perhaps other forms of human rights abuses. Many are burnt alive, tortured, battered to death, sold as sex workers, etc. For many women family means terror deprivation, discrimination, be it dowry deaths, incest, forced prostitution. The comfort of the home is an illusion for many millions of women”....

Kamala Das, the modern feminist writer of India with a fierce feminine sensibility, dares to articulate the hurts that women have received. There is always a pressure on woman to conform to the traditional feminine roles, in spite of her desire to be even with the male world. In independent India, women have constitutional rights offered by democracy such as equality, franchise, civil rights, equal pay for equal work, fundamental rights. Today, Indian society is undergoing a radical reformation with large number of women entering new courses of study and jobs which once were traditional bastions of men, for example, pilots, Army, Aeronautics, police, Driving, industrial labor, and the large female concentration in Information -Technology industries and call centers. Today's woman is her own person, she has come out of the narrow confines of the family and society. A growing number of women have become heads of states, and others are making their presence felt in every sphere of life. There are also many communities in India where matriarchal system is practiced to a large extent, for example the Nairs of Kerala, Bengali families, North Eastern tribes like Khasi, Magazine. The idea of women as 'Shakti Mata' is incorporated into the patriarchal system in India. Like Mother Kali, the feminine is the mother goddess amongst us; she is ready to destroy the Evil today and bring in light to the darkness

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