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## Research Article

# Beginning of Matriarchal Era

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### ABSTRACT

Education supplied determination and courage to women and they started standing with men and not besides men. They came out of narrow domestic walls and writing gave freedom to them. The article speaks about the beginning of matriarchal era.

#### Key words:

Matriarchal, Education, Women

Modern education and modern economic life are compelling Indian women more and more to leave the narrow sphere of the family and work side by side with men. This breaking down of the traditional segregation of male and female spheres of life must give rise to completely new problems for women. Among the various social evils which the reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century attacked as degrading and unworthy of a human being was the *purdah* system, which to a great deal regulate the life of women in North India. But *Purdah* is also the symbol for a comprehensive system of rules, codes of conduct, folk-ways, the principle of which is the most radical form of sex segregation and seclusion of women.

Patriarchy dominated and women could see a ray of hope only with the independence movement which brought about a decisive change in the degraded social, political and religious status of women.

From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, when a national consciousness began to develop among the Western educated Indian elite, up to the final attainment of Independence, the women's question was most closely connected with the political freedom struggle and the active participation of women in this struggle has made important contributions to its success. The awareness that they have fought side by side with men against an overwhelming colonial power and taken part in the building up of a new national order has since remained alive among Indian middle-class women and has strengthened their self-confidence.

For the early pioneers of social and religious reform, women were at first objects of their emancipatory efforts but in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries they became more and more subjects in the political and social sphere. The struggle for the uplift of women took place mainly in three major fields which included legislation, education and politics.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the efforts were concentrated on the introduction of laws for social reform and women's education. The political emancipation of women took place in the active phase of the independence movement in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The introduction of English education in India opened the eyes of the Hindu elite to the disgraceful social conditions of their own people. Educated Hindus began to feel the practice of killing female children the practice of *Sati* (burning alive of widows), prohibition of widow marriage, child marriage and in general the degradation of the woman in Hindu society as a shame. One of the first fighters for the cause of women was the social reformer and nationalist Raja Rammhan Roy, who in 1828 founded the Hindu reform movement, the Brahma Samaj. The Brahma Samaj not only preached one God as against the many Gods of the Hindus, but also fought for the emancipation of the woman from the old "social evils", as in future, the various degrading institutions like *sati*, *purdah* etc. were called and for the admission of women to higher education. Also the other religious and social reform movements which came up in connection with the Hindu revival like the Arya Samaj, the Ramkrishna Mission and the Theosophical Society became, despite ideological differences, defender's of the women's cause and stood up for reform laws and for women's education.

It has been pointed out by some scholars that the role of English education in the generation of new ideas of social reform regarding the status of women has been marginal. Vina Mazumdar points out that the more radical social reformers like Vidyasagar, Jyotiba Phooley and Lokhitavadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh had little English education and yet fought for the uplift of women. Phooley, above all saw a close connection between casteism and patriarchy; he attached both as instruments of

Brahmanism. Vidyasagar exposed the patriarchal bias in the Ramayana by pointing out that Sita, though proved to be faithful, had been repudiated by Rama.

Interestingly, the paternalistic attitude, on the other hand, made sure that the women's movement did not go beyond the basic structures of a patriarchal and hierarchical society: the patriarchal family and the caste system. Nowhere have the leading women of this epoch tried to transcend the area of political and theoretical activity which had been carved out for them by men. This area is by and large circumscribed by their family. Therefore, Vina Mazumdar rightly points out that the reformers were hardly concerned with liberating women from age old bonds but rather that "the women's roles within the family as wives, daughters and mothers re-emphasized and extended to be in tune with the requirement of the family in a changing society.

To draw women into the political struggle is a tactical necessity of any anti-colonial or national liberation struggle. But it depends on the strategic goals of such a movement whether the patriarchal family is protected as the basic social unit or not. The fact that the women themselves accepted their limited tactical function within the independence movement made them excellent instruments in the struggle. But they did not work out a strategy for their own liberation or struggle for their own interests. Even today the ideal of womanhood is widely accepted by the educated middle class.

Ironically, the women never reaped the harvest of movements started in their favour either by the government or by individuals – women remained weak because they were projected as weak characters by the male writers in their writings. Consequently, they thought that they have to bell the cat themselves and started sowing the seeds of women identity in literature. It is genuinely felt that women writers from across the globe have been making the headlines in the recent year which seems to be the perfect way to resist patriarchy.

The themes and concerns picked up by women have changed over the years. In the 1950s, critics – both men and women – felt that "women wrote only about womanly subjects, limiting themselves to domesticity or particular womanly experiences". Now they are basing their works on a broad spectrum of themes and exploring the gamut of social and political experiences. Though they are more open to exploring the 'dark' side of life, many still fight shy of mentioning homosexuality lesbianism and sexual aberrations in their work.

Women writers of the last quarter of the twentieth century have come a long way and the writers like Carol Ann Daffy, Dorris Lessing, Irish Ann have dominated the literary scene. In postmodern literature images of women have been destabilized, deconstructed and reconstructed. No longer does the writing of women concern itself with the search for identity alone. Increasingly, women's literature has striven to establish a separate ethos, an exclusive feminine myth as a counter-point to the existent myth of male standards. Adrenne Rich, the feminist writer observes, "for women writers in particular, there is the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography to be explored.

The women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s in the First World empowered women with self-confidence as never before women writers of fiction Kate Millet, Erica Jong, Diane Johnson and Marilyn Frech interrogated and rejected conventional images of women. Even before the Movement however Margaret Fuller, Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, Doris Lessing and Simone Beauvoir among others registered their sense of outrage in their texts in no uncertain terms.

Feminist writing is not merely by women but for women as well. *Ecriture feminine*, as defined by the French feminist writer Helene Cixous relates to writing by women which is typically feminine in theme, style and approach, steering clear of phallogocentric features. *Ecriture feminine* establishes a bridge of communication and communality between women irrespective of race and colour. This is realized through projections of exclusive feminine codes of responses peculiar to women writers, free from the influences of phallogocentric, bourgeois ideologies and male power structures.

Feminist writing whether radical, socialist or liberal forges new directions in thought and expression. Helene Cixous states in her seminal essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa'. By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself your body must be heard. Such discourses expose gender inequality sexual/textual politics and marginalization, encouraging in women the confidence and courage to speak out in their true voices of power regarding self and the other.

Muriel Rukeyser's Clarion call, "No more masks! No more mythologies", can be regarded as an appropriate and significant slogan for women's writing since the seventies. The impact of the Movement can be perceived from the serious emphasis on the reconceptualising of the role of women and their gradual inclusion in the mainstream socio-economic, political and cultural construct. Increasing awareness about the false separation of public and private spheres, emphasis on the fact that the personal is the political has led to women recognizing themselves as independent individuals and not property and labour dependent upon patriarchy.

In the past two and half decades, literature in general and fiction in particular has reflected the rejection of certain 'malestream' traditions and stereotypes summarily – "The influence of feminism has meant that women no longer have to see motherhood, heterosexuality and marriage as the only possible lifestyle and myths portraying women's happiness as being confined within these parameters have now been exploded".

A new woman is the by product of feminism which implies the assertion of human rights by women who are trying to falsify the myth propagated by patriarchy that women are weak, docile dependent, subservient and demure and that they require protection by man. The roots of feminism lie in the distant past when woman was regarded inferior to man both physically and intellectually. Woman was considered only a bearer and rearer and just an object of pleasure. She was rated somewhere between man and child. The assertion of rights by women dates back to 15<sup>th</sup> century and Christine De Pisan of France is regarded as 'the first modern woman'. Present day feminism is rooted in French Enlightenment (Mary Wollstonecraft) and British Liberation Movement (J.S. Mill). Mary Wollstonecraft (1750-1797) and J.S. Mill (1806-1875) were the early crusaders for the emancipation of women. Struggle for equal rights attained new heights with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792). It proved to be the first major feminist manifesto which influenced thinking men and women both in the U.S. and U.K. It anticipated all the major demands of women's movement i.e., education, legal representation, the right to

vote, the right to property and admission to professions. She argued that women were endowed with reason and man's superiority over woman was not explainable and hence subjection of women was unnatural and unjust.

J.S. Mill, one of the first eloquent spokesmen of the rights of women, came out with his essay "The Subjection of Women" (1869). This was the first suffrage petition presented to the Parliament where he pleaded for women's rights. This essay, a kind of "Feminist Bible", made an enormous impression on the minds of women all over the world. Mill argued that subjection of women; legal and social was indefensible. He demanded full equality for women so that society could be made perfectly human as development of society needs liberty of individual.

The aftermaths of movements and initiatives taken or started in favour of women supplied a great deal of courage to women and they started resisting patriarchy through their literary endeavors. As literature is the image of society it presents, position of women and their treatment gets reflected in literature. So, the literature related to this aspect is termed as Feminist literature. In feminist literature, women refuse to be passive, docile and self-annihilating creatures. They are out to subvert the patriarchal norms to reject marginal position and to occupy the centre. It is based on the assumption that gender is not a given sex. It is a construct, a historical construct which can be deconstructed. Patriarchal literary tradition defined women as men viewed them and since 'femininity' is always associated by men with passivity, the male literary tradition presents women as victims as helpless beings. Feminist literature, which is a reaction against the entrapment of women in male literary constructs presents women as heroes, as agents, as doers, as subjects – trying to create feminist world view. It helps in raising consciousness amongst women and enables them to develop faith and their own power and potential, refuse subordination, deprivation, marginalization and victimization. They aspire for subject position and establish their own individuality and identity and prepare men to treat women as complementary.

This type of literature got under way with Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own" (1928) and Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" (1949). In "A Room of One's Own", Woolf brings forth the reasons behind the conspicuous absence of women from the sphere of creativity in the previous centuries. Simone de Beauvoir, an early prophet of Feminism created ripples with the publication of "The Second Sex" (1949). She strongly criticized and rejected the mainstream (male stream) thought where man is the norm and woman is defined negatively in relation to that norm. "He is the 'subject' the 'Absolute', and she is 'other' (Beauvoir 1949)".

During late 1960's, the Feminist movement got impetus from the works of Betty Friedan and Kate Millet, Betty Friedan, through her *Feminist Mystique* (1963) suggested women to shed the image created for both by men. She should come out of the private world of domesticity into the public world. Culturally and politically, public sphere dominates and hence men dominate women. Kate Millet's "Sexual Politics" (1970) drove home how foundational and manipulative the image of woman actually was Millet held literature as mirror in which this image making was reflected. Further manifestation of this view came in Patricia Spack's "The Female Imagination" (1975), Ellen Moers' "Literary Women" (1976), Elaine Showalter's "A Literature of their Own" (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "The Mad Woman in the Attic" (1979).

To understand feminist literature, certain terms like female, feminine, feminist, sex and gender require elaboration. As 'female is related to the biology, so all women are undoubtedly females but every female need not be feminine. In the same way, it is not necessary that all females are feminists. Having the same body does not necessarily make them one political group. Toril Moi makes a clear distinction in the meaning of these terms in her essay 'Feminist literary criticism. "Female is a matter of biology and therefore represents 'Nature'. Feminine is a set of culturally defined traits. It refers to the patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed by cultural and social norms. So, feminine represents 'nurture'. Feminism/feminist is a political position a political label, indicating support for the aims of new women's movement which emerged in late 1960's. Accordingly, a feminist is one who advocates equality for women" (Moi, 1986: 204).

Patriarchy creates a series of feminine characteristics and makes women believe that they are natural. Patriarchal oppression consists in imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women and one who refuses to conform to these chosen standards is labeled as both unnatural and unfeminine. Patriarchy makes women believe that there is such a thing as an essence of femaleness called femininity having a whole series of traits like sweetness, modesty subservience, humility etc.

Sex and gender are the two sides of a same coin. Gender is not a given but a construct, a psychological or cultural construct. Social construction of gender takes place through the working of ideology. Male and female are the categories according to sex while those according to gender are masculine and feminine:

*One is not born but rather becomes a woman.*

*It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature. (Beauvoir: IX)*

Patriarchy links masculine with power, independence, self-assertion, domination and activity. Feminine is linked with weakness, dependence, helplessness, docility, passivity and subservience. She is always required to find fulfillment in submissive domesticity. Gender defined roles serve male need for domination. Thus is what Kate Millet calls sexual politics. Patriarchy provides congenial environment for the exploitation of women thereby promoting sexual politics. As patriarchy promotes feminine qualities, women also see themselves in the image created for them and the myth of masculinity does not let them enjoy equality and freedom. Rather, it silences and marginalizes them and makes them believe that femininity is inherently linked with inferiority and that their inferiority is natural.

The terms Female, Feminine and Feminist also apply to literature. "Female refers to the writing by women. This label does not say anything at all about the nature of writing. Feminine stands for the writing which seems to be marginalized by ruling social/linguistic order. Feminist writing takes a discernible anti-patriarchal/ anti-sexist position" (Moi, 1986: 220). As all females need not be feminists, in the same way, all female writing need not be feminist.

The attitude of the author towards the gender defined roles is the basic criteria to decide feminine text. Women in it must occupy central position.

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