



RESEARCH PAPER

Feminism in Pakistani English Literature: A Study in Post-Colonial Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial, man and woman have always been the subject of interest for researchers. The following paper also aims at the same subject of gender study. It will offer a thorough examination of how females got themselves adjusted in Pakistani society with respect to the post-colonial background. This paper will also highlight the empowerment of females in Pakistani Society with respect to the patriarchal background. This entire task will be achieved with the view of the impact of colonialism on women's role in Pakistani literature. The pioneering work description of feminism can be seen in literature written by Muslim writers even before partition as reformists. The main change and shift were seen in the second phase as the Progressive Writers Movement started which paved the way for feminism in Pakistan which is obvious by modern Pakistani writers living in or outside the country. It was the outcome of these writers that they largely discussed and analyzed the issues of female characters in Pakistani English Literature. This paper will highlight the harmful aspects caused by this slogan of feminism. It will also highlight its effects on Pakistani strata at large with respect to post-colonialism.

Introduction

Allan (1997) terms feminism as a notion of gender equality and a sense of their rights. The writer asserts that it is not just a concept. It is a global movement of awareness about the rights of women. In Pakistan, it is not easy to study the evolution of feminism in social, political and cultural paradigms. Literature always portrays the true picture of society. It is possible to understand feminism in Pakistan through the lens of Pakistani English literature especially by focusing on the introduction as well as the development of female characters in Pakistani English

literature. These characters always remain a keen subject for writers like Zulfiqar Ghous, Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid, Muhammad Hanif, and even Kamila Shamsie. Writers like Shahid Soharwardi and Ahmed Ali laid the foundation of feminism even before the partition. *Twilight in Delhi* is a good example where all female characters like Bilqees and others are shown with a different perspective which was never thought before. The basic reason for this feministic approach was British Imperialism which brought the thought of women empowerment and rights for women in the name of feminism and feministic theory (Rahman, 2015).

Later in the post-colonial era, this theory thrived in the country and writers like Sa'adat Hassan Manto and Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi put their share in Urdu as well as in English to highlight this important question of the hour. Bapsi Sidhwa, Hina Faisal Imam and Zulfiqar Ghous were also the pioneers of these voices. But with the advent of a new century, modern writers like Mohsin Hamid, Muhammad Hanif, Muneeza Shamsi, and Kamila Shamsi gave this feministic thought a whole new direction and raised the issues which were yet to be considered. This paper is an effort to study feminism in Pakistani English literature by evaluating and analyzing important work in a post-colonial perspective.

Material and Methods

This paper is based on qualitative research which includes critical analysis and comparison of text. This paper covers three different eras. The first is the later age of the colonial era. This age has been covered by Ahmed Ali's "*Twilight in Delhi*." The second and third pages are post-colonial. The second phase encompasses the decade of the 1960s. It focuses on the changes brought in the era under the influence of post-colonial thought by Zulfiqar Ghous' novel *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. After the transition phase which lasted for almost three decades from the 1970s till the 1990s, this paper covers the first decade of the new millennium through a classic piece of Mohsin Hamid named *Moth Smoke*. This paper is a qualitative comparison of the colonial and post-colonial status of Muslim women in society. It aims at focusing on the radical changes which are brought in the status of Muslim women in society and literature keeping in view the time frame under the influence of colonialism. It is an effort to seek the reasons and effects of a foreign construct in the form of feminism in this paper.

Literature Review

The story of human history and its evolution cannot be narrated merely by the existence of a male or a female. Both Man and woman have their part to play in this saga and are a complement to each other. They are indispensable to each other and to human survival. So, it would be unfair to deny the importance of either sex. Whenever men accepted the importance of women, it was done either due to some personal interests or the unusual importance which was given to Eve's daughter just to exploit her in a new way (John, 1999).

It is a fact that as awareness increased regarding women's rights in the West, modern philosophy and Modernity (product of Renaissance and the Project of Enlightenment) also started there. Though after Capitalism and the promulgation of Marx's Socialism, masses were stirred heavily from top to bottom, even these massive movements at large were unable to break the taboos as long as women were concerned. They (women) remained in the same position. Instead in a very treacherous way, women were started being presented as a product and their sexual exploitation started in the era which appears to be the aftermath of Capitalism and Industrialization. They were awarded grand status and titles but actually, this all was done at the cost of their body and physical beauty. One will have to admit regretfully that this is to be continued even in this so-called enlightened and contemporary modern world of today (Pandey, 2003).

Great Britain and the US-led this awareness movement of women's rights and spread throughout the West and later it was echoed even in the East. These movements of women's rights awareness awakened the women and as a result, Feminism Movement started ultimately (John, 1999). Feminism not only raises the voice for equality of men and women but also asks for the strong and durable bondage between men and women. This movement raises its voice against sex working, blame games, *baanjh*, family planning, pornography, sexual harassment, and lesbianism. It guides a woman towards raising and rearing a child and demands in the following words; "Control of their bodies, an end to sexual objectification and reproduction right" (Joan, 2018).

Besides this there is a famous slogan of this movement which is written in golden words as follows; "The personal is political" (Carol, 1970). It was the outcome of this gigantic and unusual movement that stirred the minds of women at a massive scale and they started raising the question of their status and position in such societies where they had no role in decision making, where their will was meaningless even absurd. They raised the question of their existence even though they were the part and parcel of reproduction. The discrimination between male and female, the dominance of male in every aspect of life, and the exploitation of women in every walk of life has been the burning questions raised by the feminists (Whitson, 2004).

Today's woman looks at herself as a completely different personality from her opposite sex. It is the expression of her quest for existence. This very movement has made her realize to be self-dependent and she looks no more to be dependent on her spouse or counterpart at large. She has a keen urge to go out for her earning and be independent. Now she is trying her best to come out of the typical and outdated trap of so-called values and ethics made by the male. This awareness which was the outcome of Feminism is now depicted through varied forms in arts and literature (Margaret, 1989).

Feminism is described differently all over the world in countries like America, England, France, and Russia. Though in India and Pakistan there is not a particular narrative of this construct as there in the western countries, yet there are

differences in its understanding and interpretation and implementation. There have been many books written in English in Pakistan like 'Faith and Feminism in Pakistan' by Afiya Shehrbano Zia; and Aisha Sarwari's Navigating Pakistani Feminism but with respect to Urdu literature, society and at large civilization there have been no serious attempts to understand feminism (Avasthi & Srivastava, 2001).

As a matter of fact, this movement aims to end gender discrimination. It wants to equal men and women socially, politically, and economically. Professor Ateequllah, a feminist, brings into light the patriarchal society with the perspective of women of his contemporary society. He elaborates on how women see the male dominant society around them with the following points. The woman is a fragile and weak gender in comparison with her counterpart (Huda, 2012). Men and women are bound to be divided on the basis of the difference of certain physical features between them and men. And this very difference of physical features provides the base on which both are kept in different genres. On the basis of this division, there is a prominent difference between their performances whether domestic or professional. There is a revolutionary difference between these two on an emotional level and both perceive things with different feelings and emotions.

The feminism movement attacks all prevailing contemporary ethical and civilization systems and demands to put an end to all these exploiters. It not only demands women to beware of their rights even it calls for men to play their part in giving the due share to the women. Qazi Afzal Hussain a Pakistani feminist writes of feminism in the following lines as:

"Men and women both are essential and necessary for the formation of a society. But it is the economic and cultural need of the specific society which shapes out the form of their relationship. In many societies, this relationship between the opposite genders is on the prior level and is given preference" (Kanwal, 2015).

Almost in every society, this attribution is fixed. According to these theorists feminism's foremost duty is to highlight this gender discrimination through the different social, political and literary texts. In 1970 a mini-festival was organized in a workshop that was related to women empowerment. In this festival, a group of London women raised their voices against the ongoing oppression upon them. They agitated on economic and domestic oppression (Avasthi & Srivastava, 2001).

19th century's important feminist John Stuart Mill who is considered to be the pioneer of the western feminist movement writes in his papers with the title "On the subjugation of the Women" that it is men who are responsible for the present miserable condition of women. By the year 1975, all kinds of gender discrimination were considered to be illegal which were being taken up in society or at home. Professor Ateequllah explains this situation with the following words:

"Through the amendment in the Act, any sort of discrimination relating to gender was thought to be illegal and illegitimate. This discrimination was being

exercised in two domains; at domestic level and societal level. This new movement also attacked those who were just posing a woman to be a product as long as sex is concerned and the profession is concerned" (Shamsie, 2017).

Discussion

Literature is an impulsively descriptive world view of any nation. One can find civilization, ethos, traditions, religion, societal norms and even political and economic values in one's literature. The feminist movement was launched for securing women from the clutches of inequality, oppression and ensuring equal rights of health and education. Advocates of this movement support gender equality on every forum—the legislation, the state and society. The question of feminism is not new in Pakistani English literature. After partition, in 1947, it soon became a significant trend among English writers in the country (Ijaz, 2017). A number of Pakistani English writers addressed this question including Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Zaib-un-Nissa, Hameedullah, and Zulfikar Ghous. The next lot of writers kept the same tone up. They included Mohsin Hamid, Mohammad Hanif, Talat Abbasi, Kamila Shamsi and Uzma Khan. (Zia, 2018). And as long as Pakistani English literature is concerned it also shows the same characteristics as shown by any literature in any part of the world. But Pakistani English literature is specific in a way that this literature is deeply rooted in colonialism and British Imperialism. The traces of this colonial legacy can be seen quite vividly in the works of Muneeza Shamsie, Muhammad Hanif, Mohsin Hamid, and Bapsi Sidhwa as postcolonial writers of Pakistan.

The first lot of Pakistani fiction writers focused on the changing societal roles of Pakistani women. They portrayed women as the victims of patriarchal oppression while the 20th-century lot of writers questioned the nature and reasons behind this oppression (Ijaz, 2017).

The story of Pakistani English Literature starts with the classic saga of "Twilight in Delhi" by Ahmed Ali (though before partition) who laid the foundation for the Pakistani English writers. He and Shahid Soharwardi became the ideal and torchbearers for the later writers like Mumtaz Shahnawaz, Zulfiqar Ghous, Bapsi Sidhwa, Hina Faisal Imam, Mohsin Hamid, Muhammad Hanif, Taufiq Rafat, Kamila Shamsi, and Muneeza Shamsi and many more. But right from Ahmed Ali till Muneeza and Kamila Shamsi one theme looks to be preoccupied with these writers and that is feminism (though they chose many other touchy subjects for their literary writings and to throw light upon and highlight). There have been a lot of issues discussed by Pakistani writers, but the issue of women has always been a key factor for them. And the way the female characters have been portrayed right from classical to modern era has been stupendous in Pakistani literature written in English. If one reads between the lines, one can find quite convincingly that women living in Pakistan have to surrender to the struggle for their identity owing to the prevailing political system as well as overwhelming (so-called) religious thoughts. Pakistani women are desperate in their struggle to get their rights as they know that

social religious and political taboos will not allow them to achieve their most cherished goal quite convincingly (Huda, 2012).

Pakistani women, at the start, were under the patriarchal influence but as the time passed under modern education and writings of feminist writers benign the boundaries of patriarchy. Gradually, the approach of society changed regarding women. A careful analysis of English novels written by Pakistani writers shows that the role of women in society modernized with the promotion of modern education and usage of modern means of communications including print as well as electronic media (Krolokke, & Sorensen, 2006).

Earlier in Pakistani English literature, women were displayed as tools that give nothing except services and satisfactions. They were portrayed as easy preying the face of different kinds of doldrums by the hands of their male masters. Previously women were made up to clutch a load of cultural ethics as a derivative of post-colonialism. As per Young (2005) the post-colonialism feminism addresses the overall effect of social oppression while ignoring the individual issues (Singh, 1991) Writers like Zulfiqar Ghous, Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid, Muhammad Hanif, Talat Abbassi, Qaisra Shahraz and Kamila Shamsi are keen in the depiction of female characters in their literary works. The character of Aaya in Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* highlights the victimization of women mentally, emotionally and physically. (Sidhwa, 1989).

Murder of Aziz Khan by Zulfiqar Ghous portrays a female character with a different perspective. The most important woman character in the novel is Razia. She has two daughters. She is simultaneously happy and dejected. She is happy over having two daughters and dejected due to the suffering of Faridah, the sister-in-law of Razia as she is childless. Her husband is responsible for her infertility. But she feels melancholic as she is heirless and none is there as an inheritor. Her illicit relationship with the youngest and the third of Shah Brother Afaq symbolizes the social taboos responsible for her being so. Zarina the illegitimate daughter of Akram who does not acknowledge this thing publicly, portrays the women's victimization at the hands of men in a patriarchal society. The characters of Koukab and Surayya in *Maps of Lost Lovers* (2004) by Nadeem Aslam portray the same oppression and injustice in the face of Masculinity. "*Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*" by Muhammad Hanif also depicts the very brutal and oppressive patriarchal mind where Alice Joseph Bhatti meets her tragic fate at the hands of her skeptic and a conserved-minded husband.

To sum up, the whole debate one must agree that female consciousness is a theme dominating in Pakistani literature written in English through its representation and interpretation have been different in decades from the 50s to the present. This most notable thing which has happened with the arrival of the new century is that it's not that women issues are being highlighted by the females of the age only but equally being taken up by the men. They are rather more curious and critical towards this issue and determined to highlight the psychoanalysis of the

inner self of their opposite sex. Modern and contemporary writers like Muhammad Hanif are one of the best examples in this context. His novel "Our Lady of Alice Bhatti" is the best example of mounting awareness of female characters that have traversed across the decades to reach this milestone (Rahman, 2015). Shamsie (2017) has pointed out the fact that the feminist movement has benefitted the women a lot as their problems have been highlighted as the fiction writers portray their ideal picture and these writers, especially the women writers have added an extraordinary strength to their characters. (Shamsie, 2017) This new development of Pakistani fiction characters, as Bilal (2016) claims, is a source of inspiration for Pakistani Women.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no doubt that before the colonial era in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, there was an orthodox society. The people at that age were leading a peaceful and calm life according to their own point of view. There were traditions, ethos, moralities, love, concord and most importantly religion amongst them. But when the colonizers came here, and as they got access to the throne, they initiated such a project that reshaped and redesigned the whole structure of the British Indian society. They brought with them their own epistemology, philosophy, and theories. Among these Western theories, they brought the enchanting and innovative thought of feminism. Professor Ahmed Ali was amongst those earlier who portrayed the alarming situation of changing horizons of women paradigm through their writings. They got the motive and objective hidden behind this so-called feminism and emancipation of women. In "Twilight in Delhi" almost all the female characters display this mounting awareness in the face of self-realization. But as society was on the verge of being colonized by the hands of the colonizer so it didn't have much impact on it in that age. But one can clearly sense the rapid change in social values as one can attend to quite convincingly the clamor of the change in society and its norms. Later on, after the creation of Pakistan, this tree of change on the name of gender equality became much more fruit and shady tree. Razia in Murder of Aziz Khan is its classic example. She is autonomous, envious and a woman of the late '60s of Pakistan showing all traits of feminism. She is what colonial power of the subcontinent India wanted a woman to be. She is shrewd. She has the ability to get her right by hook or by crook. She is sensuous, she is lusty. She plays every trick to get her desires fulfilled. In the end, she manages to get rid of Afaq and makes it possible for her husband to get Shah Industries ultimately. What a feminist wants today is emancipation, freedom, and power. That's exactly Razia wants and represents the thinking of the women of that time. Later this feminism traversed on the road of three more decades in Pakistan and reached the new millennium where women like Mumtaz of Moth Smoke were waiting anxiously for it to reach. She and women like her made the most of this liberal feminism and gave the women's thought a new dimension. Mumtaz according to this paper is the apex of that project which started almost two hundred years before here in the Indian subcontinent. And this project in the words of Lord Macaulay was to make the Indians (of that time) colonized. This means apparently they would be Indians but internally they would be British. And to accomplish this gigantic task feminism played its part with its

introduction to western society in the late '90s of the 19th century. The presence of Mumtaz and women like her in the majority of the orthodox society (especially Muslim) was the endpoint and ultimate goal they wanted for this society to achieve. And at the end, with the arrival of the new century and the new millennium, this happened. They succeeded in transforming our society though not in the colonial era but even in the post-colonial era as they sought such tools, gadgets, and mediums through which it became irrelevant to conquer a country and make it colonized. They obtained their desired results (and even so far obtaining also) even sitting at a distant place. Now women are working in Media channels, Banks, Schools, colleges, universities and offices, and they don't have any hesitation in working shoulder to shoulder with their opposite gender. They are well aware of themselves and are eager to demand more than their due share. They have been enlightened to get their rights against patriarchy by none other than the feminism theory. And last but not the least, that they have made it possible at the cost of their culture, traditions, ethos and most importantly their religion.

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