

FROM MARGIN TO CENTER: A RELOOKING OF NATIVE WOMEN

WRITERS CONTRIBUTION TO THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE MOVEMENT

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Abstract:

The Patriarchy is not the sole architecture to the construction of the Indian Renaissance movement. The native Indian women coming out against the clutches of domestic liability and helps in the reconstruction of modern nationhood. The classical feminism in India begins not only as a struggle against all hierarchical, patriarchal norms. But it also plays a pivotal role in building a new modernized society which would be free from all age-old hegemonic ideas and beliefs. Thus the margin i. e. the Indian feminist challenges the center of power and tries to create their own separate discourses & heterogenous feminine identity.

Key words: Classical feminism, Feminine identity, Hegemony, Nationhood

According to Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'Renaissance' denotes any revival or period of mark improvement and new life in art, literature, culture, etc. Derrida in his famous essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences' has said the center is thus, paradoxically both within the structure and outside it. The center is center but not part of what Derrida calls the totality. i.e., the structure. So, the centre is not the centre. The concept of the centered structure, according to Derrida, is contradictorily coherent. The Indian Renaissance movement is a broad intellectual and cultural movement that took shape during the 19th and early 20th centuries, which aim to revitalize and modernize otherwise the classical Indian society during pre-independence movement. Though the history of imperialism power in India tries to dislocate or subordinate the entire classical or native ethos of Indian society by

forcefully integrating Western culture or ideology within it. But the contribution of native Indian intellectuals towards uplifting Indian society from its age-old prejudice is no less important. Though few of these intellectuals like Raja Rammohan Roy imbibe English education and Christian religion to bring a vociferous Change to native's own cultural and intellectual outlook. But it is he who through English education and Brahma Samaj tries to eradicate the age-old superstitious belief prevalent in pre-independent India. The Community Brahma Samaj is a reformist movement made by Raja Rammohan Roy and his followers to promote monotheism and social reform through Western education and culture. The women during this period came out from their domestic liability and actively involved in the movement of Brahma Samaj. Thus, some of its female members that actively took participation in this reformative movement include Kadamberi Devi and Annetts Akroyd. Swami Vivekananda, another prominent member of the Indian Renaissance, emphasized the importance of education and how it plays a dominant role towards women rights and liberalism. He believed that women education is highly essential to the progress and modernization of Indian society. Further, Swamiji believed that women education is not only a moral dharma but also a practical necessity for the development of the nation. He believed that woman carries the same intellectual potential as man. And by denying this right to women, it will harm the progression of Indian society at large.

Though there were innumerable women who came out from the clutches of hierarchical patriarchal power and actively took part in the revolutionary movement to

modernize Indian society and culture. But Sarojini Naidu and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (a female writer) deserve to be mentioned for their contribution to the Indian Renaissance movement. Let's first talk about Sarojini Naidu and her contribution towards reforming Indian society. Historically Sarojini Naidu has been named as the 'Nightingale of India' who is a prominent Indian poet and a political activist who tries to remodel Indian society and culture by fusing western ideology with Indian belief systems. Naidu was a great orator and she fully uses her oratory skills along with her poetry to advocate for the cause of Indian independence and social reform movement. She was a member of the Indian National Congress and worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi for the cause of freeing India from the imperialist regime. To this act, she actively participated in the 'Salt Satya Graha' and 'Quit India movement'. Besides Sarojini, Naidu is vocal for the cause of women's rights and was the first female contender to become the president of the Indian National Congress. As a poet, Sarojini Naidu works reflects the true spirit of the Indian Renaissance and how it contributed to India's rich cultural heritage and traditions. Her poetical lyrics often reflects the issues of social injustice and sought for the empowerment and liberty of women. 'The Golden Thresold' which was published in the year 1905 A.D. is considered as an illuminating voice in the history of modern Indian poetry.

Sarojini Naidu is known as a champion of educational reform and believed that it is education which only can bring progress to Indian society. She is regarded as a pioneer in setting up the 'Women Indian Association' during 1917 A.D. It helped in

promoting women education and welfare from grassroots levels. Further poetry and a political activism played a pivotal role in inspiring the Indian masses to fight for independence and brings drastic social reforms. while serving as president of 'Women's Indian Association', Naidu vehemently worked to improve the educational opportunities available during that time to women in India. Sarojini Naidu set up several schools and colleges meant exclusively for girls' students in India. She had established the National College of Women in Bombay and also made the first-ever vocational training programs exclusively meant for women in India such as the Women Industrial School in Lucknow.

As an educationist and a female poetess, Sarojini Naidu is of the view that education is the only weapon to empower women and enabling them to become self-dependent. She is of the view that the early child marriage not only physically doomed a woman. But she also underwent tremendous psychological pressure, which result in early suicide. She, thus, encouraged women to pursue higher education and to enter in professions that were traditionally meant for male domination. Thus, her effort towards female education plays an advancing role towards social and economic progression of Indian women. So, Sarojini Naidu's contribution towards women education in India was impeccable. Her tireless efforts to promote women education and empowerment had a lasting impact on Indian society. And, her legacy continues to inspire generations of Indian women who were striving to pursue education and equality in society.

Another native Indian reformer who contributes to the legacy of the Indian Renaissance movement is Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, who is famously known as 'Begum Rokeya' among Indian women intellectuals. Begum Rokeya is a pioneering Bengali feminist and writer who also works as a social reformer and fights for the justice of women in India. He is an ardent writer and educator who lend her voice towards women's rights and education. Begum Rokeya is the first woman to establish girls' school for minority muslims in Kolkata during the year 1909 A.D. It is a radical move considering muslims girls' education was almost negligible during that phase of time. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Muslim women were forced to remain behind the veil forever in their life. They were even barred from simple human needs and aspirations. The native women during that time were meant to serve only patriarchal desires or wishes. But Begum Rokeya is a revolutionary figure who tirelessly works for self-education of native Muslim women and paint the real agonies faced by women who were even aid deprived of simple educational needs. She realized that awakening of women against patriarchal brutalities is must to gain freedom among themselves. Her novels 'Padmarag' (1924) and 'Avarodhbhasini' (1931) narration of forty-seven historical and true events which portray the miserable plight and indignities faced by women under the dogma of purdah system. The purdah or veil not only serve as a resistance to male gaze. But it acts as a dominating force against the independence of Muslim womanhood. In this contemporary era, it is beyond imagination to think about the hardships and sufferings faced by women during Rokeya's pre-independence

time. At her time the society not only have conservative mindset but the women also lacked self-awareness. In some cases, the elite women herself were against female education. So, the awakening of these native women was not possible without overcoming the burden of religious orthodoxy and social obstacles. Thus, Begum Rokeya realized that education is a powerful tool which can enlighten women to conquer the ground of endless fear and false prejudicial believe that were prevalent during that time in the society. If we closely follow her writings, we will find two major aspects that come out of it. The first is that she shows how the patriarchal power deprived women from their due rights and self-dignity. And the second is how Begum Rokeya, through her novels depicts a clear picture of imaginative utopian land where women were treated as equal in terms of knowledge, intelligence, vision, thinking etc., and in some cases excel men in intellectual power and spirit. She vehemently opposed women folk against wearing of ornaments to beautify themselves. Instead, Begum Rokeya suggest that they should adorn dogs and animals with their ornaments in order to mark a protest against servitude which the ornament symbolizes. The Bengals women wore are nothing but handcuffs and in order to attain freedom the women must get rid of these artificial glorious belongings. In “Istrijati Abanati”(Women’s Downfall) Rokeya discusses the inferior status faced by women and the cause of their self-degradation. She in this literary work further stressed that the patriarchal society gives property rights solely to ‘men folks’ and debarred women from gaining any natural inheritance to ancestral property rights. Thus, keeping women's liberation at the center

of her writings, she portrays how patriarchal power continuously tries to suppress the liberty of women and considered themselves as non-entity who can be compared only with dogs and animals. So, from the first decades of the twentieth century till her death Rokeya struggled hard to established the rights and freedom for women at large.

Simone de Beauvoir in her famous work 'The Second Sex' has said "one is not born but becomes a woman" (Beauvoir,1953, p.23). Thus, challenging this context, we must acknowledge that though at fast Indian women were forced to remain inside domestic sphere where their sole right is to satisfy the desire of patriarchal needs. But, the Indian Renaissance movement vis a vis the great independence movement challenges women to come out from self-subjugation and to fight for their own rights along with helping the nation to gain independence from imperial power.

So, the margin i.e., woman challenges the power of center 'patriarchy' and itself move to the center of power destabilizing the notion of margin/ center dichotomy forever. It should be noted that the Western feminism liberation movement came much later, than the Indian feminist were native Indian women at the middle of the nineteenth century itself started acquiring a privilege position in society. So, at last the so-called Indian feminist authors during the uprising of the modern India Renaissance movement not only focused on creativity in various literary genres. But they also try to brings holistic changes to Indian gender-rigid society by incorporating their own belief systems and culture.

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