

### ***Feminist Literary Criticism (Second Wave)***

Women's movement of the 1960s and early 1970s set its subject (feminism) as women's experience under patriarchy. Patriarchy is a long tradition of male rule in society which silenced the voices of women, distorted their lives and put various kinds of restrictions upon them. Their problems were not at all even considered. Under such conditions to be a woman was not to exist at all. At various parts of the world feminism developed as a systematic, logical, scientific and persuasive theory which created an atmosphere of revolution in the male dominated society.

#### **French Feminism**

In May 1968 France witnessed massive unrest among students and workers. The power of language was considered to be the most effective weapon in order to fight against patriarchy. Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan influenced and inspired the feminists such as Annie Leclerc, Marguerite Duras, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous participating in advancing the notion of *l'écriture féminine* (a particular kind of writing by women). Helene Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of Medusa" used this phrase and associated it with feminine, facilitating the free play of meanings within the framework of loosened grammatical structures. The need for feminine writing was felt because it would issue from the unconscious, the body, from a radically reconceived subjectivity, in an endeavour to circumvent phallogocentric discourse.

#### **Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)**

Born in 1930 in El-Biar in Algeria in a Jewish family, Derrida failed his baccalaureate (University bachelor's degree) in 1947. He dreamed of becoming a footballer. He shifted to France in October 1949. After a miserable period at the prestigious lycee, Louis-Le-Grand, he was accepted into the Ecole Normale Supérieure, in Paris where he obtained an *aggregation* in philosophy. He came to the attention of the people in 1965 when he published his essay in *Critique*, a Parisian journal. In 1976 he published *Of Grammatology*. He wrote various other books of high repute.

Derrida's thought is based on his disapproval of the search for some ultimate metaphysical certainty of source of meanings that has characterized western

philosophy. In his works he offers a way of reading philosophical texts, called *Deconstruction*, that enables him to make explicit the metaphysical suppositions and a priori of assumptions used by those philosophers who are the most deeply critical of metaphysics.

His later works include- *Glas*(1974), *The Truth in Painting*(1978), *The Post Card*(1980), *The Ear of the Other*(1982), *Psyche: Luventious of the Other*.

Derrida's influence is felt on literary studies. He states that "language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique." His theory offers the readers a chance to create their own meanings out of the text by an activity of free play. He believes that a text inevitably undermines its own claim as processing determinate meaning. According to him a text (poem or novel or drama or philosophy etc) can be read as saying something quite different from what it appears to be saying. A text may betray itself. He suggests that in order to have the meaning, one should depend upon the text and not external evidence. One should not evaluate, criticize or construe a meaning for a text by reference to anything external do it.

Derrida further wants to suggest that the language of any discourse is at variance with itself and is capable of being read as yet another language. One may envisage an endless regression of dialectical interpretations and reading without any stable essential or fixed meaning. A Text may possess various meanings and not just one fixed meaning. There is no guaranteed essential meaning of the text. Without essential meaning there can be no truth and no authority and so power relations of the society fall apart.

It is by this idea of deconstruction or Derrida's theory of language that French feminists were inspired and influenced. Besides Derrida, feminists were also influenced by Lacan and Foucault. Feminists believe that a literary text is never primarily a representation of reality or a reproduction of personal voice expressing minutiae of personnel experience. Their concerns also deal with representation, psychology and philosophical issues. Among the major figures of French feminism are Julia Kriestava, Helen Cixous and Luce Irigaray.

**Julia Kriestava**

Julia Kristeva was born in 1941 in Silveu in Bulgaria. She came to Paris in 1965 as a student. She became immersed in Parisian intellectual life. She attended the seminar of Roland Barthes and became a part of the group of intellectuals associated with avant-garde journal *Tel Quel*, edited by Philippe Sollers. *Tel Quel* was a leading force both in writing and politics.

Kristeva published her *Doctorate de 3e Cycle* in 1971. In 1974 *Doctorate d'Etat* was published. And this work made her known to the academia. She was appointed professor of linguistics at the University of Paris and was elected permanent visiting professor at Columbia University and the University of Toronto. Her innovative works are related to the intersection between linguistics, culture and literature.

Kristeva is an admirer and critic of Lacan. She accepts Lacanian theory of phallogocentric symbolic order and says that women in the sense of feminine have no access to language. She is of the opinion that women's language need not refer to writings by women. Her Theory of subjectivity is based on an effect of language which has feminine and masculine. She attempts to locate negativity and refuses to accept the marginalised position of women. Her contributions to feminist theory are- to bring the body back into discourses in the human sciences, focus on maternal and pre-oedipal in the construction of subjectivity and notion of objection as an explanation for operation and discrimination.

Theory of the body is important because traditionally the body has been associated with the feminine, the female or women and has been considered as weak, unclean and decaying. Kristeva theorized the connection between mind and body, culture and nature, psyche and Soma, matter and representation.

Kristeva calls for a new discourse of maternity. Acknowledge is the importance of the maternal function in the development of subjectivity and in culture. She suggests that the maternal function cannot be reduced to mother, feminine or women. As a woman and as a mother, women both love and desires, and as such she is primarily a social and speaking being. As a woman she is always sexed.

**Luce Irigaray**

Born on 3rd May 1930 in Belgium Luce Irigary is a French feminist, philosopher, linguist, psycholinguist, psychoanalyst and cultural theorists. She is examined the uses and misuses of language in relation to women.

Irigary, after receiving bachelor's degree from the University of Louvain in 1954 and the master's degree in 1956, taught at high school in Brussels from 1956 to 1959. She moved to Paris in 1960 and pursued a Master's in Psychology in 1961 and completed her PhD in Linguistics in 1968. She attended the psychoanalytic seminars of Lacan. She was expelled from the Freudian school of Paris after her thesis was published. In it she was critical of both Lacan and Freud. But the expulsion from school made her famous.

Her initial research focused on dementia patients, about whom she produced a study of differences between the language of male and female patients. Later on she conducted empirical studies about language in a variety of settings such as differences between the way men and women speak. Focus on sexual difference lies in the fact that it provides a site from which a feminine language can eventuate. She sees writing as going through the looking glass into a world of women's self-representation. She associates the metaphor of secular mirror with feminine representation. The curved surface of the speculum produced a deformed image which river versus the reflections of masculine discourse.

### **Hèlène Cixous**

Born on 5 June 1937 in Oran, French Algeria do Jewish parents she saw many ups and downs in her family from her childhood. Her physician father, who had written his dissertation on tuberculosis, died in 1948. Her mother and brother arrested in Algeria, which got independence in 1962. After sometime they were released.

Cixous married Guy Berger in 1955 and was divorced in 1964. She served the European Graduate School in Saas Fee, Switzerland as professor. She also served at the University of Paris.

Cixous published a lot of works-poems, essays, plays and articles. With Derrida her work *Veils* was published and was termed as *deconstructive*. She also wrote a book on Derrida. With Kriestava and Irigary, she is also considered one of the mothers of

poststructuralist feminist theory. She was influenced by Derrida, Freud, Lacan and Arthur Rimbaud.

Cixous and Irigaray combined Derrida's logocentric Idea and Lacan's symbol of desire and created the term *phallogentrism*, which focuses on Derrida's Social structure of speech and binary opposition as the centre of reference for language.

Cixous is most recognised for developing the concepts of *écriture féminine* (writing which is typically and characteristically feminine in style, tone and feeling, and completely different from and opposed to main language in discourse) in her essay *The Laugh of Medusa* (1976), as a way of overcoming the limits of Western logocentrism, and for opening new ways to deal with subjective difference in both writing and social theory.

Cixous' entire life is devoted to emancipation of the self as well as other women from male dominance. She stands for women's struggle. As she studied the death camps of World War II, her experiences are reflected in writing.

She writes, "sensor the body and you sensor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself your body must be heard." She succeeds in giving the readers a concept of feminine writing.

French feminists consider language of the female to be one of the most important tools to empower women, Kristeva pleads that such language (maternal language) came from pre-oedipal state, from the realm of the semiotic, prior to the process of cultural gender formation. Luce Irigaray is in favour of undermining patriarchal discourse. Cixous she is a solidarity between logocentrism and phallogentrism (phallus signifies male power and dominance). she urges women to write their bodies, to unfold the resources of the unconscious. All of these writers reevaluate the significance of the maternal, viewing this as empowering rather than oppressed.

### ***American feminist criticism***

The civil rights movement took place in America in 1960s and with it the feminist criticism also received a major stimulus. It differed somewhat in its concerns from its counterparts in France and Britain all the impact of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir is also felt. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is a seminal work to take forward the second wave of feminist criticism. Friedan was born on 4th February

1920 in Peoria, Illinois. She was active in Marxist and Jewish circles. She had to face isolation from the Jewish community. Felt passion and injustice. She became politically active and mixed with Marxists. In 1966 she co-founded *National organisation of Women*, an organisation which aimed to bring women into the mainstream of American society in fully equal partnership with men. As the President of this organisation she called for nationwide women's strike for equality in order to ensure women's right to vote. She also fought for various other rights of women.

Friedan worked incessantly for the rights of the educated middle class women of America. She made them aware of their right so that they can also lead a comfortable and happy life, which was denied to them by the patriarchal system. Friedan made them realise that women were the worst oppressed group and men received the greatest benefit from their (women's) sexual exploitation. To her patriarchy, more than capitalism was responsible for women's oppression. Monogamy, marriage, child-rearing etc were all patriarchal traps to contain and oppress women. She contributed a lot to the feminist demand for liberation in 1970s. They wanted liberation from the role of the house wife and mother who lived in what Friedan called comfortable concentration camps.

Expectation that each day household affairs along with the care for children will be done by women is cited as oppression. So they must be liberated so that they can make their careers just like men.

Another influential feminist critic is **Elaine Showalter**. She was born in 1941 in Boston Massachusetts. As American feminist literary critic she has written a lot to address social and cultural issues. She has developed the concept and practice of gynocriticism (the study of women writers). According to her gynocriticism should look at the history, styles, themes, genres, and structure by women's writings. It should also look at the psychodynamics of female creativity and of female literary tradition. Her work *A Literature of Their Own's* title seems to reflect Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* but it is not so. Actually she has taken the title from John Stuart Mill, the philosopher who championed the rights of women in his polemical text *The Subjection of Women* (1869) in which he observed that had women been able to live apart from men, they would have a literature of their own.

Showalter traces the history of women's literature suggesting that it can be divided into three phases-

1. Feminine phase or the phase of imitation (1840-1880) - this phase is one of the modes of the dominant tradition; the artistic standard of tradition; and the social roles it implies, are internalized. Women wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of the male culture. They adopted masculine names or emphasized their marital status. The women writers narrated the exploration of the daily life and the values of women within the family or community.
2. The feminist phase or the stage of protest (1880-1920) - this phase protested against standards and values set by male. It advocated women's rights and values and autonomy. The women authors rebelled against the Victorian sexual stereotypes and try to explore women's position in terms of work, class and the family.
3. The female phase or the stage of self discovery (1920-continuing) - in this phase they turn to word in word freedom from some of the dependency of opposition, search for identity. Showalter perceives the post 1960s as a heightened and female phase, in which women's writing enters a new stage of self awareness.

### **Kate Millet**

Kate Millet, born in 1934, is a major American feminist whose famous work *Sexual Politics* (1970) contributed a lot to feminism. She attended Oxford University and was the first American woman to get first class honours from St. Hilda's College. *Sexual Politics* is based on her doctoral dissertation submitted to Columbia University. To her goes the credit of women's getting legal abortion, greater professional equality between the sexes and a sexual freedom.

Millet applies feminist perspective to sexual relations between men and women. She said that sex is not purely biological and isolated act. It has a political aspect which people generally ignore. In a patriarchal society men dominate women in the bed as they do in other spheres of life. On the basis of her study of the functions of Henry Miller, Norman Mailor, DH Lawrence and Jean Genet, she argues that these authors view sex in a sexist way. She sees romantic love as it is a means of manipulation which mail is free to exploit. She calls for an end to monogamous marriage and the

family as family to her is the chief institution of patriarchy. She proposes a sexual revolution that would bring the institution of patriarchy to an end. Her book *Sexual Politics* is a theoretical touchstone for the second wave American feminist theory. There are various feminist theories such as Liberal Feminist Theory, Radical Feminist Theory, Marxist Feminist Theory, Psychoanalytic Feminist Theory, Essentialist Feminist Theory, Cultural Feminism, Eco-Feminism, Lesbian Feminism, Postmodern Feminism, Post-Feminism and Black Feminism.

Other feminists who have discussed the relationship of female writers to male theories, the need for feminist theory and a female language, the relationship of feminism to poststructuralist perspectives and continuing problems of political and educational activism are Lillian Robinson, Annette Kolodny, Jane Marcus and others.

The connection of Feminism and Marxism has been established by some of the feminist writers such as Michele Barrett, Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt.

Feminist literary theory that moved into the 1990s has a firmer educational base and much greater cultural legitimacy than its early second wave practitioners could have envisioned.

Its frame of reference is more comprehensive and politically sensitive to the intersections between gender and other cultural determinants, race and nationality in particular. Feminist criticism has gone far beyond its initial revision of the canon and re-reading of particular texts. 'Gender' is located at the centre of cultural analysis. The politics of subjectivity remains at the heart of its concern with gender and representation. It has got new colours and shadows that have put questions, shaken up the traditional social patriarchal system. It has acquired an interrogative force which is its greatest strength and its most enduring contribution.

### ***References***

1. Seldon, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Pearson Education Ltd: New Delhi, 2005
2. Tandan, Neeru. *Feminism: A Paradigm Shift*. Atlantic: New Delhi, 2008



3. Cuddon, J.A.(ed). *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Maya Blackwell, Doaba House: Delhi, 1993.
4. [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/ElaineShowalter](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/ElaineShowalter)
5. [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/luce\\_irigary](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/luce_irigary)
6. Coyle, Martin. Et al. *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, Goyal Research inc: New York, 1990.
7. Habib, MAR. *Modern Literary Criticism: A History*. Blackwell Publishing: Victoria, 2005