

Study Of Women Empowerment In Literature

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ABSTRACT

Escalating social, economic, political, legal and social strength of women in order to ensure an equal status to women is known as 'Women Empowerment'. It aims to raise the status of women in society through education, spreading awareness, literacy and increasing participation of women in economy. It advocates offering them these kinds of rights in order to uplift their status in society. The status of women cannot be well-defined not because we are living in a complex world but because ours is a patriarchal society. Here, a woman is considered second sex as said by Simone de Beauvoir in her famous book 'The Second Sex'. She iterated that man is considered default and woman is considered the other. This famous French feminist writer threw light on social position which women are confined from an ancient time. Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Astell, Alfred Lord Tennyson all spoke for the rights and education for women. They supported women education. Thus, they helped in women empowerment. Women empowerment is not only helpful to in improving the quality of life of women but it will build economy stronger.

Keywords: Empowerment, Education, Male Dominance, Patriarchy

If all Men are born free, how is it that all women are born slaves? -Mary Astell.

A woman is a human being who also deserves happiness, she can claim for her rights. It is true that with the advancement of technology and development of society, she has also developed psychologically and has made herself capable of being self-dependent. She is ready to take greater responsibilities either these are political or economical. . The status of women refers to her position in social structure and the duties assigned to her along with the rights bestowed upon her. Outer world is not considered a safe place for her. Perhaps this is due to their physical structure, due to patriarchal society or the modern man's mental design is responsible for her

present condition? In modern age we use the heavy terms for women, one of such terms is 'feminism'. But there can be no existence of feminism without women empowerment.

Many female writers because of social stigmas of their own period preferred to write under male pen names. Mary Ann Evan wrote as George Eliot. Bronte sisters also wrote under their male pseudonyms (Curer, Acton and Bell). Jane Austen wrote under pen name 'The Lady'. When Charlotte Bronte sent her poetry to Robert Southey He answered in a disapproving tone and wrote to her that "Literature cannot be business of a woman's life". This shows century's disregard towards female writers. Feminist writers have pointed out from time to time the importance of Women Empowerment.

Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Astell are the two strongest feminist who philosophized and analyzed the condition of women as dominated by male dominance and depicted the importance of education for women nearly a century before. Mary Wollstonecraft's work 'A Vindication of the Rights of women' (1792) emerged as a response to the political theorists of the eighteenth century (Charles Maurice De Talleyrand) who wanted to deny women an education. Wollstonecraft argues that women are human beings who deserve same rights as men deserve in society. She said that women are essential to the nation because they educate its children and because they could be "companions" to their husbands, rather than mere wives. Instead of viewing women as ornaments to society or property to be traded in marriage she considered them equally important to a nation.

As a spinster Mary thought the unthinking married women are inferior to him. In the 18th century it was considered that women were not able to think rationally, so it was not necessary to educate them rationally. During that time she wrote two famous feminist books 'A Vindication to The Rights of Men' and 'A Vindication to The Rights of Women'. She had not explicitly stated that men and women are equal. This made her statement even complex and ambiguous. As a result it becomes difficult to categorize her as the modern feminist.

According to Wollstonecraft, women should be educated rationally so that they can play their role in the progress of society. It was a time when women were considered excessively emotional and devoid of rationality. Wollstonecraft advocated for women education. For Wollstonecraft, "the most perfect education" is "an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attach such habits of virtue as will render it independent. In Chapter 12, "On National Education," she states

that all children should be sent to a "country day school" as well as given some education at home "to inspire a love of home and domestic pleasures." She emphasized on co educational schooling to ensure same model of education to both genders.

'Maria or The wrongs of women' is another book written by Mary Wollstonecraft deals with the issue of divorce and the wrongs done by men to the women. This book starts with Maria in an asylum her husband was responsible for her present unjust imprisonment and has taken their child away from her. She manages to establish a friendship with one attendant and Jemima, a lower class woman in asylum. He gave him some books and notes to read after realizing that she is not mentally ill or mad. These notes included some scribbled notes by Henry Darn ford who was another inmate in the asylum. Maria falls in love with him. They started to meet and talk each other. Later these three characters explained their life story and told that how they confined to the walls of asylum.

Darn ford tells that he used to lead a corrupt life and one morning after awaking he found himself in the asylum. He tried to convince doctors that he was not mad but could not. Jemima told that she was an illegitimate child, her mother died when she was just an infant. After her mother's death she worked as a servant in her father's house then she was forced work as an apprentice. Her master ill treated her in every way he beat her, did not give any food to eat her and above all he raped her due to which she becomes pregnant with his child. But master's wife on discovery threw her out of the house and Jemima devoid of any resource and support was forced to abort her child then she becomes a prostitute and later a kept woman to a wealthy man after whom death she becomes attendant of the current asylum.

Maria tells that how she fall in love with George Venables and got married to him with the help of her rich uncle . But he was a libertine, when she came to know about the true character of her husband she tried to ignore him and make herself busy in literature and arts. As an outcome George started to gamble, visit prostitutes. Maria becomes pregnant, now she wanted to leave her husband. At this point separation and divorce are discussed in the novel. She tried to leave England and live with the women who were wronged by their husbands but George found her, took her child away from her and imprisoned her in the asylum. At this point the story is left unfinished by the novelist. Present novel shows the condition of women after their marriage. Marriage described in the novel is not able to bring prosperity and happiness to women. Here, marriage is symbolized as the slavery for women.

Mary Astell's book 'A Serious Proposal to the Ladies' said that the largest hurdle in the way of women emancipation is women's own emotional outlook. She argues that women lack autonomy, they lack self governing attitude and internal freedom also. Astell says that women are suffering due to their own emotional outlook towards society and her and not just because of patriarchal society or that they lack rights. They believe that material things such as their bodily beauty or wealth are important, rather than their immaterial and immortal soul. Women often appreciate themselves when men appreciate them. They value themselves in accordance with what they do for men and not for their own selves. This is the reason they are not able to enjoy their own rights. In this way they excite feminine vices. But it does not mean that Mary Astell think that women are inferior by nature. What may be the reason behind this kind of psychology of women which is keeping women far a pace from empowerment? Lack of education, poor customs are the most highlighted causes for this psychology of women, as stated by Astell.

Astell links women's ignorance with their vices. As they are not taught how to think, they lack judgement to differentiate between reality and pretence. Apart from lack of education in general and proper education in particular is considered the primary debarring factor in women empowerment. Prevailing customs and habits are also playing significant and vigorous role in making women fickle minded. Then Astell talks about the cure for this problem and states that best possible cures for women emancipation is education for women. Society should help her in gaining knowledge and education. They should not be burdened under the burden of customs and traditions. In this way, women can be empowered in real manners.

Part II of A Serious Proposal to the Ladies sets out the method for self improvement. It involves meditation, reading and emotional self control.

Philosophical reflection will make women able to understand that immortal soul is more important than the world and their physical beauty. This method cannot bring any societal change for women but can bring an internal change in women that would make them empowered. She maintains that "Men therefore may still enjoy their prerogative for us, we mean not to entrench on any of their Lawful Privileges, [...] our only endeavor shall be to be absolute Monarchs in our own Bosoms"

CONCLUSION

Ours is a male dominated society, where a woman has to struggle most to prove her caliber and to establish her own identity. Her struggle to prove herself requires more affords than male. She

has to break the stone of social disapproval while making the way of success out of difficult situations. These stones of social disapproval are sometimes so hard to break that women lose their own existence and found themselves fail in getting rid from the mentality full of male dominance in society. This is the reason writers from different times and genres have tried to empower women socially, economically and emotionally through their writings.

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