**UNIT V: Feminist Criticism**

**Contemporary Literary Criticism**

**Introduction**

The term feminism has emerged recently as social and political movements across the world. These movements give the voice against women’s oppression in gender differences. Based on gender, women are treated as inferior and discrimination them as secondary and slave. This proclaims as social privilege as superior and inferior. This binary difference claims man as superior as birthrights. Therefore, the birth determinates that one is superior and another as inferior. So, feminism attacks on social privileges as superior and inferior. These social movements turn as political and cultural movement throughout the world. In recently, feminism enters as academic studies in 1970s. It gives voice for equality and equal justification for both genders. So, feminism has emerged as social, political and cultural movement throughout the world.

Women raise their voice against social oppression in the centuries past. Writers like Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill started as predecessor of women’s rights. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her famous book, *A Vindication of Rights of Woman* (1792) and Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869), *A Room of One’s Own* (1929)by Virginia Woolf are important books for women’s rights. These books deal with status of women in economically, culturally, politically and socially. These books are condisered as first Wave women of feminism. It attacks on patriarchal domination which is main concerned with cultural domination against women. The radical feminists reject the patriarchal domination through various institutions such as marriage, family, society and culture as system of domination. These books claim for women’s emancipation in politically and socially. Writers like Elaine Showalter and Simone de Beauvoir made a tremendous contribution for growth of feminism and their rights in their works. Elaine Showalter coins a term gynocriticism, which means that a book is written by female author. It is considered as a radical movement that women as critics and writers.

**The History of feminism**

In the beginning of 20th century, women started to protest against inequality in the social sphere. Women were treated based on gender differences in the Western World. They were considered more privileged than the third world countries. The Western society does not give equal treatment for women in the term of enfranchised and property rights. They fought against social injustice against women. Women started the failure of social system, which treats them as inferior. Women realized the failure of their life lacking from education. So, women entered educational institution to dismantle the institutionalized social hierarchy. The educational institutions across the world encourage to discourse the women’s prolong problem and inequality between genders. Gender becomes main discourse for discussing the value of women’s rights. Women come to play mainstream social dignity as man enjoys.

Until 20th century, women were looked at as commodities and object of man’s satisfaction. It was created certain pattern of social order. This pattern of structural system operated as male supremacy. Women were powerless to encounter male supremacy in every section of society. Even most of thinker of 20th century, they encourage women suppression as social practices and customs of every society. They never look at as social evils. So, women play as homemakers instead of other categories. They preoccupied the kitchen world as world of cooking. This would be proposed by great anthologist, Claude Levi-Strauss. Most of marital pattern suppose to be happed based on the selection of bridegroom instead of bride. This kind of imbalanced social injustice happened in the name of women.

Radical feminists raise question against mythical stories as biased story telling in literature. They attack on most of the Western writers like Hardy, Milton, DH. Lawrence, Sigmund Freud. They claim for these writers write against women and biased. John Milton could not escape from them. They attack on Milton’s *Paradise Lost.*

According to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the world is created by God and every creature created by Him. Similarly, God creates Adam, but God does not create his companion, Eve; but Adam himself creates Eve. The feminists raise the voice against this creation of God. This is considered one-sided and biased interpretation in literature.

Similar kind of theories evolve in the second waves of feminism. Women claim that they are reader and writers. They try to reconstruct certain concept from theological subjects in order to re-telling, re-write and re-interpreting all literature. This curriculum emerges as separate department for women, called ‘Women Studies.’

**Conclusion**

The feminism encourages upholding equality between genders. It raises voice against any kind of oppression suppose to be happened in the name of gender differences, it rejects gender discrimination. A number of writers want to address women’s problems and their rights. They disclaim any kind of domination whether cultural or social discrimination is no longer acceptable in the name of biased social system. They not only speak about equality alone; but also they claim for equal rights of voting, property and sentiment. Therefore, feminism emerges as study of equality and rejects any kind of domination.

References:

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