



## A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON FEMINISM THOUGHTS IN MODERN LITERACY WORKS

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### ABSTRACT:

Inequality between men and women, which is founded on feminist principles, is one of the most divisive and pervasive societal issues in the modern day. Given literature's capacity to depict human life and ambitions, this research will explore and analyze how feminism and gender inequality are portrayed in different literary works, with a focus on women's problems. Because feminism and gender inequality are so prevalent in cross-cultural literature, it is critical to do a comparative literature research that is centre on feminist ideas. This study examined four distinct genres of literature: theatre, prose (short story), film, and poetry. For this study, it was chosen to use feminist theory as a sociological technique in conjunction with comparative critique and content analysis. This study examined how feminism's ideas gained popularity and support throughout the course of the twentieth century.

**Key words:** -feminism; literature; comparative literature; gender inequality; comparative study

### INTRODUCTION:

Ideas, beliefs, and experiences that a person has will have a significant effect on his or her mental and physical well-being are plentiful in the human experience. Individuals need time to reflect on their lives from time to time, and one of the most effective methods to do so is via reading. Culture is defined as a kind of knowledge about human existence that clearly shows the presence of human beings. The depiction of human life in literary works is straightforward, yet the definition of human existence is complex (Taum, 1997).

It is consistent with Wellek and Warren's (1977) claim that literature reflects and portrays the variety of different aspects of life that Taum (1997) makes the observation about literature. Their point of view emphasizes the importance of literature as a mirror and expression of human life. Briefly stated, this concept argues that literature is derived from real-world events. In

literature, the author communicates ideas to the reader via the use of a certain style of writing.

According to Taum (1997) and Wellek and Warren (1977), literary ideas are representations of real-world human life. To be clear, human life is characterized by values and beliefs, which should not be overlooked. Moreover, this is in keeping with the idea that culture instills values and beliefs in us and has a significant impact on our lives. Ideals such as those listed above serve as guidance in daily life, justifying and carrying out actions (Knafo and Schwartz, 2003).

There must be some evidence that literature is capable of portraying human life as a totality, complete with its real values, before it can be considered. Values are created by the collective awareness of human civilizations in a specific geographical place and historical era, and they are not universal. As a result, literary works may be used to examine social events, societal

ideals, and even the thoughts of individuals within a certain historical time or century.

Inequality between men and women is one of the most controversial and apparent social problems, and it is based on the ideas of feminism. This study will examine and analyze how feminism and gender inequality are shown in various literary works, including prose, poetry, theatre, and cinema, taking into consideration how literature may represent human life and aspirations.

Gender inequality has been entrenched in society for hundreds of years, primarily because it often results in the subjugation of women. Gender inequality is a social phenomenon characterized by the idea that men are inherently superior to women in every way. This notion is a component of the hegemonic construct known as the 'gender-paradigm,' which refers to the way in which men and women are seen to be different. Many cultures throughout the world actively promote inequality between men and women on a conscious or unconscious level. As a consequence of these purposeful or accidental factors, gender inequality is being more recognized as a major social issue that must be addressed.

Gender, according to Hollander (2002), is a social construct rather than a consequence of biological differences or disparities between people. According to the vast majority of academics, gender is a product of social constructs. Men and women are both members of a social institution, which implies they are both responsible for the establishment of, maintenance of, and imposition of their respective gender roles. In other words, people have come to an agreement on a set of norms that regulate how they see one another. To allude to individuals who are members of the subdominant group and who never dictate what the majority of the population should behave or be like, Hollander uses the word "others."

As Hollander (2002) points out, when the subdominant group recognizes gender inequality, feminist ideas begin to emerge. Feminism, according to Eagleton (1983), is intimately connected to a variety of other issues. It is not seen as a specific "social movement" with specific political goals; rather, it is regarded as a dimension that has impacted and questioned every aspect of personal, social, and political life at various times throughout history. The message of the women's movement, according to some observers, is not only that women should have equal power and position with men, but also that women should conduct an inquiry of their own power and status. While it is not directly stated that the world would be a better place with more feminist thought, it is implied that without the 'feminization' of human history, the world would live in brutality. Mackinnon (1982) argues that feminism is a universal activity that has been socially produced but that has been historically specific. Feminism is a combination of social problems and intellectual thought processes. Bressler (2003) quotes Stanton as saying, "Because man and woman are complimentary, we need women's thought on national problems in order to create a safe and stable government" (Bressler, 2003).

According to Hollander's notion that gender is a social construction, there is an interesting argument in postmodern feminism to support this claim (2002). This is according to Judith Butler (1999). Identifying as a gender signifies something we do, and like other signifying practices, it is dependent on repetition and behaviors that make the topic culturally comprehensible, according to her theory. As a result, not only are identity categories such as femininity recognized as varied and contested (rather than fixed), but also the possibility of identity subversion is recognized. "Performativity," as defined by Butler, is a more

limited popular idea that shows how gender is created or "contoured" via "repetition and recitation," and that this subversive "re-signification" of normative identities is the subversive "re-signification" of normative identities (Butler, 1999).

In light of the above arguments and concepts, it is essential to conduct a comparative study of feminist ideals and gender disparity reality in the workplace. Feminism and gender inequality are both regarded to be social realities, and as a result, both may be found in literary works on the subject. Considering that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are considered the pinnacle of change and the beginning of globalization, the purpose of this study is to analyze the characteristics of feminist thought and gender inequality in literary works from both periods. Globalization has the capacity to have an impact on almost all social phenomena, including feminist thought and action. Because of this, the study's goal is to uncover the concepts of feminism that can be found in a range of literary works from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

#### **METHOD :**

This research examined four genres of literature: theatre, prose (short story), film, and poetry. All of the literary works cited are by distinct writers. There are four literary works, which are as follows:

- The Conduct of Life (drama) by Maria Irene Fornes (1985),
- Interpreter of Maladies (short story) by Jhumpa Lahiri (1999),
- How to be Single directed (movie) by Christian Ditter (2016),

This research is feminist in nature. The subject of feminism and gender inequality is addressed via comparative critique, while feminist theory is utilized to build the approach. Complementary criticism is a literary approach that crosses

national, regional, and linguistic borders, seeing literature as a global phenomenon infused with human nature (Justi, 2002).

Comparative critique is significant because it helps in the development of human consciousness or ethnic orientation by detecting cultural values and contemporary values in each literary work via its first encounter with global literature. The most important aspect of comparative literature is the recognition of human thought's unity. This synthesis of ideas is only possible in a limited geographic region of the globe. Science, academia, and literature all transmit ideas that are comparable to those expressed by other scientists, academics, and writers in other parts of the globe (Akbari, 2007).

Along with comparative critique, this research employs a qualitative analytic approach called content analysis, which is an inferential tool for drawing findings. According to Hsieh and Shannon, content analysis is a frequently used qualitative research method (2005). Traditional content analysis techniques are used to generate coding categories from input text data. When a directed method is used, analysis begins with a theory (feminism) that serves as a guide for comprehending the investigation's findings.

For this endeavor, a selection of text from the scripts of literary classics was chosen. The selection process was influenced by two main factors: feminism and gender inequality. The information for this research was gathered via non-participant observation. Non-participant researchers have a more detached attitude and do not engage with study materials. The research objects for this project are a collection of literature that reflects feminism and gender injustice. The chosen book was collected, read carefully, and then analyzed using the comparative critical technique in the context of feminism, concluding with a conclusion.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION :**

Gender inequality, feminist theory asserts, may result in female oppression. According to Katz et al. (2005), inequality may be thought of as a multidimensional notion. Gender, race, ethnic background, and age are all linked with the condition. Woman oppression is thus intimately connected to gender inequality and feminism as a consequence of this. These three social processes may be intimately connected, requiring the investigation of them from a variety of angles. A comprehensive explanation and critique of feminist ideas, gender inequality, and female oppression in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary works is provided in this study, which makes use of comparative criticism.

### **FEMINISM THOUGHTS OF APPRECIATION IN “THE CONDUCT OF LIFE” (FORNES, 1985)**

Fornes's 1985 work 'The Conduct of Life' depicts married life as impacted by domestic violence, female domination, and gender inequity. The Conduct of Life (1985) depicts female oppression and feminism through the perspective of married people. The play's main subject is the protagonist's spouse, Orlando's, abusive behavior. Orlando is a lieutenant in the play who has a history of physical and sexual abuse directed against him. Leticia, his wife, and Nena, the little girl he abducts, are the victims of his violent behavior.

Leticia's quest for more recognition as a wife is depicted in the drama. Leticia wishes to finish her studies despite her husband's continuous violence in order to get more respect. She expresses her unhappiness with her husband's harsh behavior and her desire to be recognized in Scene 2. "He is hard of hearing. He is a creature that exists in this planet. Nothing, save sensuality, has any effect on him. I am unable to sway his decision. I'd want to do research. I'm in need of information. I'm tired of being ignored. I'd have to put in a lot of work in terms of

studying in university. I want to be a woman who can talk in public and be treated seriously." Leticia's viewpoints and ambitions epitomize twentieth-century feminism. While feminist ideas were well-known throughout the twentieth century, they did not get widespread acceptance. Women are more driven to continue their education as a result of increasing awareness of gender discrimination in order to guarantee that they are not neglected by the community. Leticia, the protagonist, is an exemplary example of a woman inspired by feminist ideals. "No, there is nothing I can do," Leticia said. Despite the widespread acceptance of feminist ideals during the twentieth century, I am helpless to intervene. The above scenario demonstrates how women experience inferiority and powerlessness in relationships. Both spouses' sexuality has an effect on the marriage. Morgan (1975) asserted that gender, as a social construct, incorporates sexuality, not the other way around, as had previously been assumed. Women and men are separated by gender as a consequence of heterosexual social restrictions that institutionalize male sexual supremacy and female sexual subordination. Control is the main issue in feminist thought (Morgan, 1975).

### **FEMINISM THOUGHTS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION IN “INTERPRETER OF MALADIES” (LAHIRI, 1999)**

Numerous writers place a greater premium on certain elements of their work. Both feminism and gender inequality are addressed in a range of literary works. The brief biography of Amitav Ghosh The Interpreter of Maladies is focused with the housewife's indirect domestic despotism, who acts as the narrative's central female character. Mrs. Das, the protagonist, is not shy about expressing her wishes to her husband, her children, and even a total stranger, such as Mr. Kapasi, who serves as a tour guide for her family during their vacation. Mrs. Das faced indirect persecution from both

her husband and family, but she did not face open persecution. Given her comments regarding marriage, it seems as if she has been living in an ignorant atmosphere that is sufficiently unaware of her desire for social interaction.

Mrs. Das tells her life story to her tour guide, who is fascinated by it. She explained to Mr. Kapasi how she obtains a marriage license. "We married when we were still in college," she lovingly remembered. Despite the fact that our parents lived in separate locations, they were close friends and shared an apartment in the same city. I believe that it was all staged to some extent" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 26). Her case demonstrates that she did not choose to marry at such a young age, as her complaint implies. Following her marriage, she is obligated to fulfil all of her wifely duties; yet, her husband is unaware that she is influenced by her family's decisions and her position as a housewife.

In this story, the main female character is exposed to indirect tyranny as a result of her uneducated husband and family's decisions. As a consequence, it falls within the criminal category of family or domestic tyranny. Inequality expresses itself in a number of ways, as Katz (2005) points out. Inequality, and the subsequent tyranny, may exist everywhere and at any time.

Mrs. Das also talks throughout the story about her tough childhood, which is a wonderful touch. She described herself as overwhelmed by the thought of having a kid so soon after marrying at such a young age and nursing while her husband worked. Even though her husband was never angry or hurried with the first child, as she had been with the second, she is perpetually exhausted and left alone with the infant throughout the day (Lahiri, 1999 p.26)

Mrs. Das, despite her extremely restricted home life, clearly needs more social contact, as shown by the story. The story depicts her loneliness

and social isolation as follows: "As a consequence of spending the most of her time at college with Raj, she did not make many close friends." She had no one with whom to express a fleeting thought or worry at the end of a tough day. She declined lunch and shopping invites from one or two of her college pals. After a time, her friends ceased to call, leaving her alone with the baby for the remainder of the day" (Lahiri, 1999, p. 26).

Lahiri (1999) depicts a female character who is constrained by a variety of factors. Women have been forced to live in these restricted circumstances, and it is claimed (Qasim et al., 2015) that the most heinous aspect is when women accept tyranny as their natural state. That is, when a woman has been used to oppressions that have marginalized her to the point of being unable to seek new possibilities based on her own desires and skills, the phrase implies that this is the worst possible outcome. This little story demonstrates how important it is for a woman's individual growth to have her family's perspective on gender inequity. Throughout a woman's life, her family and immediate circle may have a significant influence on her growth. Depending on how they are reared, women's family values may either drive them into more restricted marriages or expose them to the ideals and concepts of feminism and equality.

#### **FEMINISM THOUGHTS OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN "HOW TO BE SINGLE" (DITTER, 2016)**

As previously said, literature serves as a means of expressing many facets of human and social life. Qasim et al. (2005) argue that literature may serve as a mirror for events occurring in society during a certain era or period of time. Because literature may function as a mirror for society, feminism and gender inequality can be seen in the representation of female characters, just as they can be seen in the portrayal of male

characters. Feminism and gender inequality can only be understood in the context of how society sees women and how women identify as individuals.

How to Be Single (2016) has a diverse cast of female characters. Almost every female character, including the protagonist Alice, is in a relationship. This video explores how female characters manage their own lives while being lonely, confused, and sometimes unhappy. Alice initially has a partner, but eventually chooses to remain alone in order to have more room for personal growth. The lady said that she had often told her husband that she would do things but had never followed through. In this instance, I intend to learn to cook, to take a self-defence class, and to climb the Grand Canyon, but I have no intention of really accomplishing any of those things. While I am alone, I need a sense of self-awareness. At the very least, we need to understand what it's like to be alone."

Alice's remark in the above paragraph demonstrates that, as a woman, she, too, wants to know who she really is, as shown by her inquiry. She wants to discover herself by temporarily distancing herself from any and all connections. A contemporary woman is legally entitled to live her life free of influence from her spouse or family members. Thus, Alice wants to remain unattached for a length of time in order to discover herself via the experience of lonely living. Her desire to be recognized as an independent thinker with her own objectives, aspirations, and way of life demonstrates that she wants to be recognized as such. Women in earlier eras may have found it difficult to achieve this degree of freedom due to family custom and marriage. According to current trends, women today clearly view themselves as self-sufficient individuals who are not bound by family or relationship responsibilities as long as they are not married.

Despite her loneliness and insecurity during her single period, Alice views her experience as a watershed point in her life at the end of the story. In the film's last scene, the narrator delivers Alice's viewpoint on her lonely experience, stating, "But, how adept at being alone do we really want to be?" Consider the potential that you may become so adept at being alone, and your habits will get so ingrained in them, that you will lose out on the opportunity to be with someone really wonderful. At times, individuals make little attempts toward establishing stability. Certain individuals are passionate about never settling. And, in certain instances, the termination of a relationship does not necessarily imply the end of love. What's wonderful about being single is that it's a treasure in and of itself. Why? Because you may have just one minute per week, or maybe one minute per lifetime, to oneself. Occasionally, when you are not bound to any one connection. Role models may include a parent, a companion animal, a sibling, or a friend. There is a little moment during which you are alone. I am really and totally alone. Following that, everything just vanishes."

As a consequence, Alice's goal as the protagonist is to establish herself as a role model for successful single women who forge their own identities. Alice discovers that she is capable of a great lot on her own after many therapies and innumerable social encounters. Although she is the protagonist, she puts a premium on relationships, particularly those with her closest friend. Alice's mission is to serve as a role model for independent women who make their own decisions and act regardless of their marital status. Clearly, the most important feminist concept in this film is a woman's choice to marry or live alone, since this thought runs against the hegemonic patriarchy's beliefs.

According to this view, Alice is trying to depict the many challenges and solutions that a single

woman must confront throughout her life. Throughout the film, the role of the lead female character is consistent with Butler's postmodern feminism thesis (1999), which asserts that gender is created via repeated acts and that femininity varies by individual. According to Butler (1999), women's and men's identities may be altered and challenged simultaneously, since gender is a matter of action repetition.

As Butler (1999) notes, the behavior of isolated women in this image effectively illustrates the evolution of feminism through time. Despite the fact that each of the film's main female protagonists is a single woman with a professional career and their femininity is unique, they all prioritize their own personal growth above their partnership. Gender is clearly shown in this instance to be a social construction based on exposure to certain recurring behaviors. The repeated behaviors may have an effect on professional careers, sexual relationships, and even online dating. Individual notions about how women should live their lives in the face of patriarchal repressive conceptions, as well as a societal paradigm about how women should live their lives, are created as a consequence of these repeated acts.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Feminism, female oppression, and gender inequality are multifaceted social problems that impact people's personal, family, societal, and cultural beliefs, among other facets of their life. All of the literary works included in this research demonstrate the close connection between feminism, gender injustice, and female subjugation. Numerous consequences have already been explored, including the following: Due to the fact that both feminism and gender inequality are binary oppositions in literary works, (a) feminism thoughts have grown stronger over time; (b) feminism thoughts always oppose gender inequality; (c) both feminism and

gender inequality exist as a result of personal and familial values; and (d) personal and familial values are critical for developing feminism thoughts. According to Banerjee, socialisation has a major effect on individuals' views of their own gender roles, as well as the extent to which they believe they exhibit traits linked with conventional gender stereotypes (2005). (1993, Bem). Finally, this study demonstrates that literary works, when seen as portraits of society, may represent all of the aforementioned components, as well as human values and behavior influenced by feminism and gender inequality.

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