



Gender Inequality in Literature: A Significant Contemporary Issue

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ABSTRACT

Throughout generations, literature has been regarded as an intellectual reflection of life, serving as a medium to give voice to the silent. In recently times, literary works from the modern and post-modern ages movements have revolutionized the literary landscape, addressing contemporary issues such as gender inequality. Writers globally have fearlessly tackled pressing societal issues, shedding light on the injustices faced by various marginalized groups. Gender inequality, a pervasive issue, has been a focal point for many writers who have personally experienced its ramifications. These writers have intricately woven themes of gender disparity into their works, illuminating the illusions perpetuated by both family and society. Their writings serve as a poignant critique of the societal norms that perpetuate gender discrimination. By actively advocating for social change, these writers have assumed the role of reformists, striving to uplift the marginalized segments of society. This research paper delves into the multifaceted aspects of gender inequality, delving into the profound agony and suffering endured by individuals worldwide, as portrayed by the lens of fictional works.

Introduction

Most societies are male dominated and women are only expected to be mothers, good wives and housewives and play many roles in the family. Sacrifice, forgiveness and obedience are what she needs to be a wife and mother. Moreover, her well-adjusted behavior led her to live a righteous and obedient

life. However, Women's self-identity is less self-sufficient and less recognized in the patriarchal society, making her withdrawn into herself. Women are an important part of society and play a significant role not only in the upbringing but also in all aspects of life, including raising the next generation of humans. Although they play important roles in the family and outside, they are always considered the "weaker sex" compared to men. Women all over the world face common problems that are of gender discrimination from time to time. Regardless of their culture or background, they are often called "weak" and have less status rather than their male partner. In this paper, the research-scholar will sincerely attempt to investigate the pain of gender discrimination that women endure globally in this study. No matter a Woman's ethnicity, religion, or geographic location, she frequently experiences discrimination and must endure the same suffering as the victim of discrimination.

Throughout history, women across different societal classes have consistently faced subjugation and exploitation. Men in every class and in every society have enslaved women. Across Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, woman has generally lacked influence in the political, religious, and cultural spheres of her society. They have not been granted ownership or inheritance rights, often being treated as possessions themselves. In ancient societies, harsh penalties were imposed on women for the crimes committed against her, such as being handed over to her rapist's husband as punishment. For instance, in ancient Greece, women were deprived of political rights and property ownership, with restrictions on even leaving the house after dark. This lack of participation in social and political events continues to be a reality for many women worldwide.

Literature Review

Feminism started by two important philosophers, John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Equality of rights for women is the essence of feminism. Feminism is a social theory or political movement which argues that legal and social restrictions on women must be removed in order to bring about equality of the sexes in all aspects of public and private life. Women have fought for autonomy, suffrage, and equality. International Women's Day is observed even on March 8th. Prominent feminist authors include Frederica Beemer (*The President's Daughter*), Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*), Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*), Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*), and others. However, the true origins of feminism can be found in Christine de Pizan's *Epitre au Dieud Amour* (*Epistle to the God of Love*), which was written in the fifteenth century, and of which Simone de Beauvoir said "for the first time we see a woman take up her

pen to protect her sexuality.” So that, in a sense, women’s struggle started long ago, consciously or unconsciously. Doris Lessing also fought against gender inequality.

American feminist Elaine Showalter divides the history of feminism into three stages. According to her, the three levels are: feminine, feminist and female. The first stage is the silent period, during which female writers frequently publish under pen names and merely aim to equal the abilities of male writers. The struggle phase refers to the second phase, during which women fought for the right to vote. The stage of self-discovery is the final stage that is present. Women want to independent. Showalter first used the word “Gynocriticism” to refer to writing by women.

As stated by Showalter in her essay, “Towards a Feminist Poetics” Such language is inherently oriented towards the male perspective, exemplified by the use of ‘Man’ to represent both males and females in universal contexts. She advocates for the use of ‘Human’ to be more inclusive. She therefore believes that everything was made by men to subjugate women. History is even turned against her. For example, she says that there have been two different forms of Cleopatra throughout history. In the same way that Shakespeare portrays her as Caesar’s adoptive daughter in Julius Caesar, G.B. Shaw refers to her as Caesar’s concubine. Showalter, for this reason, is against this inaccurate portrayal of women. She also discusses the role that women play in pop culture and how, despite women's wishes, they are nonetheless very visible and naked. Showalter said it is not just men’s fault, but women’s fault as well, for allowing men to use them just for money.

Throughout history, feminism has predominantly revolved around white feminism, resulting in neglect and oversight of Third World women. Recently, these women have recognized the absence of their voices in mainstream feminism and have felt compelled to portray their experiences accurately. It has become evident that the perspectives presented by white women do not encapsulate the struggles faced by Third World women. Therefore, there is a collective effort among Third World women to share their own stories and express the unique challenges they endure.

Concerning African or black feminism, it can be stated that this movement directs its attention not only to black women but for women all over the world. Black writer Alice Walker first used the word “Womanism” to describe all women in the world. Later, African-American author Barbara Smith used the term “Sisterhood” Her intention was to demonstrate that her writing was meant to represent not only herself but all women globally.

India has also embraced this wave of feminism, prompting many Indian writers to share their experiences and perspectives through writing on their struggles and experiences. However, this feminism has not yet spread throughout India. Indian women have to go through many struggles. During the period of colonial rule in India, women were the easy targets women. As Gayatri Spivak says, “As a woman, the shadow of the underclass is even deeper.”

Indian women who have taken such good steps for women’s freedom have not yet achieved equality. Women’s education continues to be a significant issue much of India. Despite the fact that female infanticide is considered a crime in India, it still continues not only by the illiterates, but also the so-called literate are excluded from the scope. If we talk about the works of Indian women writers, they write with free will. Whoever writes boldly and harshly will be condemned. The best example is Kamala Das. She tried to write about everything that was going on in her life, but because she wrote naked, she was considered a prostitute. Moreover, in India, we have writers such as Kamini Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Anita Desai, and many more.

Objectives

The main objectives of this research work are:

1. To investigate how individuals engage in discriminatory behavior based on gender.
2. To promote awareness of sexuality by examining the unique characteristics found in various regions around the world.
3. To examine the theological context of gender discrimination to achieve a deeper comprehension of the cultural origins influencing societal attitudes, and to gain insight into the theological underpinnings or misinterpretations pertaining to gender discrimination.

Methods

Two methods have been chosen for the current study: the Comparative and Analytical Approach. This paper integrates various feminist theories to analyze the psychology of the characters in the selected works. These methods are considered suitable for this study.

Discussion and Results

Throughout various societies worldwide, all class structures have historically subjected women to low status, resulting in poverty, exploitation, oppression, and limited self-determination. Even among the upper class, women often found themselves in servitude to men throughout their lives. Until relatively recently, in regions such as Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, women were deprived of political, religious, and cultural influence on their lives. They had no property, land, or wealth; they were just treated fairly. Regarding property, in ancient Assyria, the punishment for rape involved giving the rapist's wife to the victim's husband for his discretion. The wife would bear the consequences of her husband's actions without any consultation. This practice known as the ritual of widow murder, in which women in certain cultures were expected to be killed or commit suicide after their husbands' deaths, existed in places like India and China until the twentieth century, referred to as the sati system in India.

Within what has been referred to as an "enlightened" society, the origins of democracy are said to date back to ancient Greece. However, during that time, women were devoid of property or political rights and were prohibited from leaving their homes after sunset. Similarly, in ancient Rome, women were restricted from engaging in social interactions and could only venture out of their homes accompanied by their husbands or male relatives. Although there have been advancements in the status of women over the past few decades, instances of male dominance and oppression persist in various regions worldwide. Women are often deprived of the autonomy to make decisions regarding their own lives, being treated as mere possessions within a household that are under the control of the male figure in the family - who holds the authority to dictate choices on their behalf. Furthermore, their male counterparts are granted the entitlement to engage in sexual activities with them at their discretion.

In Egypt, the prevalent belief among a significant number of men and women is that it is deemed acceptable for a man to maintain ownership over his wife who declines sexual intercourse. The systemic oppression experienced by women in this context can be primarily attributed to men's quest for dominance and authority. This dynamic results in men asserting power and control over women, driven by their desire to attain maximum levels of dominion. They do not recognize women's right to decide on marriage it is possible to create things for women that they cannot handle privacy, that is, take their lives. They made decisions on education, life, marriage and other life-related issues. Subjugation extends beyond the current husband to encompass the ex-husband and other family members, including parents, brothers, and sisters. This suppression of women is pervasive globally, transcending cultures, religions, classes, and races. Nevertheless, despite its widespread occurrence, this form of violence is not universally acknowledged and remains largely unknown due to the social and economic dependency of

most women on men. Incidents of violence against family members, including women and children, have been rationalized as a form of disciplinary action, especially in upholding authority within the family structure.

Gender based discrimination towards women is prevalent worldwide, spanning across developing and developed nations. This discrimination manifests in various forms such as emotional, social, economic, and physical abuse. Unfortunately, this issue is often downplayed, justified, or ignored. Perpetrators utilize diverse tactics to forcefully establish and maintain authority over their victims, leading to instances of sexual assault, physical violence, and or stalking. Victims may exhibit symptoms like fear, safety concerns, Post-traumatic stress disorder is a mental health condition that can develop after a person experiences a traumatic event, the need for healthcare, injuries, crisis management, housing assistance, victim advocacy, legal aid, and absenteeism from work or school due to experiencing these violent behaviors in a relationship. The primary factors contributing to the oppression of women include lack of education and male domination. Recognizing and acknowledging the indicators of an abusive relationship are crucial initial steps in putting an end to it. Nobody ought to be afraid of the person they love.

The reality is that there is a dearth of information on the experiences that women have when they are in submissive relationships. Subjugation has several consequences, such as physical harm, mental health issues, social isolation, diminished self-esteem, and negative the result on both the women and on the children's self-esteem.

On the other hand, women are also trying to avoid being labeled as negligent men because in traditional life, women should stay quiet, stay quiet, they are more loyal. Moreover, multiple feminist studies have underscored four prevalent themes that women reference in their narratives, particularly regarding critical topics such as women's necessities and familial reinforcement of female subordination. This narrative of women leveraging these themes is further accentuated for women residing in rural regions. These individuals are raised in a milieu wherein their primary focus revolves around catering to familial needs pre or post marriage. The pervasive indoctrination since childhood instills in these women the notion of their inferiority to men in terms of both physically and socially attributes. Thus, it can be claimed that women are enslaved from the moment of their birth.

British author Doris Lessing uses the theme of breakdown as the theme of her novel "The Golden Notebook." The psychological breakdown is ultimately caused by this social and political interaction.

Doris Lessing used a writer named Anna Wolfe as a mouthpiece to express her innermost feelings. It is the outcome of disparities in the political, social, gender, religious, and professional spheres. Author Anna Wulf, who is a single mother, received financial support after her first book, *The Frontiers of War*, came out. However, she ran into a writing block and was unable of writing any another novel.

However, I am unable to write a story that excite my interest: a book with morality or knowledge strong enough to establish order and offer a fresh outlook on life. due to my extreme diffuseness. I've made the decision to stop writing novels.

The novel is divided into six sections, the first deals with free women; the other five are titled "Golden Notebook" and are divided into four different color categories. In these sections, the character Anna Wulf writes about all that has happened to her. Anna has four separate books and notes because she feels that her life is breakdown and inconsistent, she keeps four different books to avoid the conflict.

"I have four books to write," Wulf described to herself. "A black book about author Anna Wulf, a red notebook focusing on politics, a yellow book based on my own experiences making stories, and a blue book trying to be a diary."

It's commonly believed that because domestic violence against women is often prevalent in urban than in rural areas, due to the increased pressure on women in rural areas widely underreported. Rural women are often illiterate or have low education and are unable to support themselves.

Women are busy taking care of the home works and endure all the abuse. As a result, no one hears about or reports their difficulties. Each woman in a committed relationship will have her own reasons. Her abuser will pose a threat to her or her children and will suffer if they leave has been out of the workforce for years and lacks the skills and experience required for the job. She may have contacted the police or other authorities in the past but thought they were useless. She might be so focus on surviving day-by-day rather than running away. She can feel terrible about her life partner or ashamed of what transpired. In addition to the fact that there are individual causes for women to remain in violent relationships, social abuse can also stem from a variety of factors that make it more difficult than "just leaving."

Throughout her literary career, Kamala Das, an Indian writer, has been an advocate for women's rights. In a research article titled "Kamala Das: The Voice of Indian Woman's Quest for Liberation," Tawhida Akhter discusses the significance of Kamala Das in today's society. Das has personally experienced

suppression and aims to instigate societal transformation by utilizing literature as a tool to combat this affliction.

The poetess voices her opposition to male dominance and the subsequent marginalization of women. Women are often confined to traditional roles without consideration for their own desires and ambitions. The passionate protest, expressed in a conversational style and rhythmic language, serves as a symbol for all women standing up against male egotism.

Based on information from national surveys in both industrialized and developing countries, figures from around the world indicate that roughly one in three women have experienced violence in an intimate relationship at some point in their life.

Fiction as a medium to comprehensively portray destinies, emotions, and interpersonal relationships appears significantly appropriate. This is because adeptly crafted fiction does not simply narrate, portray, explain, or elucidate but ultimately engages and enthralls the reader. Consequently, it fosters a form of emotional closeness between the reader and the fictional characters, enabling the reader to perceive things differently and draw diverse conclusions. Nonetheless, this effectiveness is primarily evident when fiction asserts itself as realistic in some manner, such as being historically precise, politically pertinent, or an important. In her work “Language as A Means to Break the Gender Inequality in Doris Lessing’s African Works,” Tawhida Akhter discusses the important influence society has on a person's mentality. “The society plays a vital role in shaping the social and personal life of its citizens,” the author notes. Because, in the words of Virginia Woolf, “if a woman is to write she must have her own money and her own room,” women did not write in the same way as they do today. Money is a sign of strength and freedom; create a space for introspection in your own home. Women used to love these activities to improve their emotional intelligence, creativity, and sense of freedom.

Conclusion

Thus, we can say that one of the main concerns of today’s literature around the world is to show the victims, the suffering of women, and their physical, emotional and psychological problems within the family by exploiting them within the family. Men’s domination over women’s lives is a phenomenon seen in patriarchal societies, and as a result of women’s oppression seems to have caused women authors around the world to become interested in men. These writers focus on the image of the two women so that their fathers can always be present, rather than the identities of their husbands and

children. In tradition, it is known that women have important responsibilities regarding family health. However, they face discrimination and are denied access to resources such as education, health and employment.

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