

CHAPTER II

**FEMINIST LITERARY
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As has been discussed in the previous Chapter, today's women novelists are trying to protest against the traditional perceptions of gender relations in the society. In this context of tradition of women's writings, I intend to examine the kind of feminist consciousness, reflected in the novel *Come Rain* by Jai Nimbkar, an Indian English novelist. I hope this may throw some light on the concerns of the feminist writing that is being produced in Indian writing in English. To do this, it is essential to understand what exactly is meant by feminist criticism.

The present study belongs to the tradition of gynocriticism, which according to Elaine Showalter tries to analyse women's writing from women's perspective even if they do so from within a patriarchal culture. Elaine Showalter coined the phrase 'gynocritics' to describe what is commonly known as women-centred criticism.¹ She identifies the need for a form of criticism that is women-centred,

independent of men and which tries to find answers to the questions that come from women's experiences. Before proceeding with the critical enquiry of the feminist consciousness of the text, it is essential to discuss the issues and the concerns of feminist literary criticism. This review will also be useful for evolving a method of analysis of the novel to explore into the thematic issues regarding gender relations that the novel raises. This discussion will therefore be useful for clarifying the notion of feminist consciousness.

Various definitions of feminism and feminist criticism are attempted by scholars. Still, there is no one certain definition of feminism. Maggie Humm states that feminist criticism is the analysis of universal sexual representation and ideology in literature from the point of view of women.² As a critical tool, feminism should aim at providing us with an altogether new awareness of woman's role in the modern complex world.³

According to Ruth Brandwein, "Feminism is a perspective - a thought structure, a value-belief system that is an alternative way of viewing the world".⁴

The concept of 'alternative vision of the world' thus lies at the root of any feminist consciousness. To do so, it is essential to distinguish the 'feminist' vision from 'feminine' vision. Feminism cannot be equated with feminineness. In fact, the^{se} are very different concepts. Feminine refers to the stereotyped gender assumptions about women, which are linked with the words 'soft', 'gentle', 'passive', 'nurturing', 'instinctive' rather than 'rational'. Feminism, in contrast, connotes an

androgynous inclusion of both traditionally male and female characteristics. At its ("simplest level, feminism frees woman to choose whatever roles they wish without being hampered by artificial gender linked assumptions of what is, or is not, appropriate") It can help to understand woman's condition in the society and male domination. It attempts to analyse the reasons for and dimensions of women's oppression and challenges conventional critical value judgements. As the historian Linda Gordon says, feminism is "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it".⁶ Thus, the feminist consciousness represents a critical view of existing practices of women's subordination as well as the alternative plans for changing that situation.

The recent tremendous development in the feminist criticism and critical theories on the international literary scene ^{has} have thrown much light upon the place of women in the society. It has created a lot of awareness among women writers. To be more precise, "Feminism also incorporates various methods of analysis and theory; if feminism is taken to be the theory of woman's point of view. Consciousness raising is the quintessential method of feminism and since feminism means a knowledge of existing things in a new light, it needs a distinctive account of relation of method of theory".⁷

Thus, feminist criticism is concerned with questioning the place of women and women's writing in the existing system of values. Feminists question the situation of women in society generally. They have gone to literature to examine and deconstruct restrictive images which males have created of females. To

counter the patriarchally dominated tradition of representing women in literature, feminist theory has used the concept of consciousness raising.

Feminist consciousness is the central concept of feminist theory. It constitutes woman's awareness about patriarchal norms practised in every field of society. It is an attempt to make society aware about injustice and oppression women have to undergo, their secondary status, perception of processes of gender construction and woman's subordination in the family and the society. For example, in the patriarchal family, woman is under the control of mother-in-law, husband and other elder members. Woman has to undergo severe oppression. It constitutes her awareness about her economic status and inequality of sexes also. Various approaches have been evolved towards the analysis of women's oppression and its representation in literature. A brief review of these is presented below.

BRANCHES OF FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Feminist literary criticism deals with literature as literature is an important ideological construct and repository of images which ^{have} considerable impact on our perception of the world. Feminist literary criticism draws on discursive strategies like Marxist Feminist Criticism and Radical Feminist Criticism. These perspectives have been used for understanding woman's subordinate status for evolving strategies to establish women's equality. The Radical feminist's main contention is that the roots of subordination lie in the biological family, the hierarchical sexual division of society and sex roles. For them, patriarchy is the problem. While Marxist or Socialist feminism believes that women's inferior status is rooted in private

property and class-divided society. According to socialists' view, "if male-female relations are constructed in terms, for instance, men are always the ruling class".⁸

Many feminist critical theories have been developing over the years - among them the prominent ones are Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Virginia Woolf's *A Room Of One's Own*, Mary Ellman's *Thinking About Women*, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Michele Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today*. Several of these books and the various views of these feminist critics have influenced the Indian women novelists.

RADICAL FEMINISTS

Many radical feminists were influenced greatly by the French feminist Simone de Beauvoir. Her book *The Second Sex* (1964) is a pioneering work in the study of feminist criticism. She discusses the concept of womanhood and femininity in detail in her book. She establishes with great clarity the fundamental questions of modern feminism. According to her, a woman's consciousness gets defined by the reference to man. For example, when a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying "I am a woman". No man would do so. The fact reveals the basic asymmetry between the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Man defines the human, not woman. But Beauvoir argues that "Every concrete human being is always singular and separate individual".⁹ This humanity is male and the woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man. He is the subject and she is the 'other'.¹⁰ This otherness of woman is revealed through the literature. She is always treated as the lack, absence and the 'other' in the society. Throughout history, woman

has been construed as man's 'other'. Aristotle declared that "the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities" and Saint Thomas Aquinas believed that woman is an "imperfect man". Some believe that "woman is a womb". All these views and opinions affect human behaviour and mentality.

Simone de Beauvoir explains how woman's independence be recovered. She discusses it in the light in which woman is viewed by biology, psychology and historical materialism.

It is assumed that biological considerations of woman constitute an essential element in her situation in the society. They are one of the keys to the understanding of woman.¹¹ Simone de Beauvoir argues that biologically woman is considered weak and man superior. So otherness gives subordinate place to woman in patriarchal society.

From the psychological point of view, it is not nature that defines woman; it is the culture around her that creates certain characters, traits in her, which then, are perceived as natural.¹² Therefore, Beauvoir argues that a woman "is not born as woman; one becomes one".¹³

For the continuation of society, certain social institutions like marriage are considered very important. After marriage, woman is expected to play a role of wife submitting her entire being at the feet of her husband in the traditional society.

Simone de Beauvoir's observation about marriage is that "marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society".¹⁴ Marriage is thus considered a great ambition of a girl. Simone de Beauvoir observes that marriage has always been a very different thing for man and for woman. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has not brought about a condition of reciprocity between them.¹⁵ After marriage, the husband is the head of the joint enterprise. She takes his name. She loses her past in becoming attached to her husband's universe, she gives him her person. Marriage enslaves her to a man and find that it makes her mistress of a home. Simone de Beauvoir applies these views to the analysis of literature. She studies several myths, philosophical underpinnings, languages, images, symbols, man-woman relationship in the novels of several writers and shows how the biases against women are reflected in the literary texts.

Kate Millett is one of the most important radical feminists. She is known to have founded the "images of women in literature" type of studies. In her book *Sexual Politics* she presents a framework of beliefs on which the patriarchal system is based. According to her, sexual politics is the method by which one sex (male) seeks to maintain and extend its power over the other (female) sex. She uses the term 'patriarchy' for the domination of males over females. According to her, our whole life, personal and social, is organized by patriarchy which results in asymmetrical relations of power.

In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett shows how the patriarchal bias operates in culture and is reflected in literature. According to her, the term 'politics' refers to

power structural relationship between males and females. This relationship is between the power of man and woman. She argues that it is the *Sexual Politics*, which is ideological, biological, sociological and anthropological in nature.

The patriarchal system rules all over the world. It has established the norms of behaviour for the women. In terms of activity, sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female, the rest of human achievement, interest and ambition to the male and this limited role allotted female tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience.¹⁶ so it has determined the roles of woman in the family and has given the subordinate position.

Patriarchy has given all the rights to man in his family. He has authority on his wife and children. This relationship is like ruler and the subject. "Family is a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole".¹⁷

Traditionally, patriarchy granted class-like status to the female, where status is defined in relation to the economic, social and educational circumstances.

From anthropological view, women's sexual functions are considered as impure. It is reflected in myths and literature. Women have been realising the codes of behaviour that are prescribed by patriarchal ideology and started revolting against it.

The function of the family in patriarchy is the socialisation of the young.

Patriarchy prescribes certain attitudes towards role, temperament and status in which socialisation of the young is done. In this connection, Kate Millett observes that patriarchy decrees the status of both child and mother is primarily or ultimately dependent upon the male.

According to radical feminists, family stands midway between individual and society. Its role in socialisation of man is crucial.

The most striking aspect of Kate Millett's critical studies is the boldness with which she reads the literary texts. Her approach to Miller and Mailer is devoid of any conventional respect for the authority and intentions of the author. She stresses the reader's right to posit her own viewpoint and to reject the hierarchy of the text and reader.

In her analysis of literary texts, Kate Millett has attacked the concept of patriarchal dominion. She demonstrates, through the analysis of the language, imagery and themes in several literary texts, the principle that patriarchy subordinates the female and treats her as an inferior. How the images and the language used by male writers represent power to rule over women and inferior males is the core of her criticism of the literary texts.

The tradition of Kate Millett was further strengthened through the feminist critics like Elaine Showalter, Gilbert and Gubar, Patricia Meyer Spacks, etc., who contributed their views to the feminist literary criticism. They studied the thematic

organization of narratives and critiqued the literary conventions used by authors. They studied woman's language and women's writings.

In the earlier years, feminist critics concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice, the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in popular male literature. The second phase of feminists criticism was the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic coherence as well as artistic importance had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate our culture.¹⁸ So, there is focus on women's writing as a specific field of inquiry. Feminist criticism gives a new way of reading and thinking about literature.

We notice that literary criticism and literary theory have traditionally been guarded male dominated areas. Gilbert and Gubar in the Madwoman in the Attic claimed that since creativity has been defined as 'male' activity - the writer fathers his text - there are enormous problems for female creativity.¹⁹ For this, they claim for the feminine language. There was tradition of andro-centric modes of representation in literature, which are male-centred.²⁰ So, there was a need of gynocentric mode of representation, which centred on woman in literature.

Patricia Meyer Spacks in her book *The Female Imagination* (1973) attempted to assess the feminine essence of women's writing. She offered "the female imagination" as the only possible outlet for women's true aspirations and argued that it is the means by which they can affirm in far-reaching ways the

significance of their inner freedom. So we have different opinions of different feminist critics about women's writing and woman's language. They claim that women themselves can write more effectively than the men about their own experiences. Because only women have undergone those specifically female life experiences (ovulation, menstruation), only they can speak of a woman's life. One life situation can be understood by man and woman differently.

Ellen Mores, in her readings of women writers from the 18th century onwards, identified common factors in their works. In these works, she examines those common factors in relation to women writer's experience, their social setting and their mutual influence upon one another.

Women writers have always had to face more criticism than men. This is so because of certain notions that literary creativity does not go with biological creativity. Normal female creativity in other words was expected to find its outlet in childbirth and maternity. The creativity that gave birth to a poem or a painting was regarded as unnatural in a woman. But feminist criticism has given a new direction for studies of women's writing. One significant development in this direction was brought about by Showalter.

Elaine Showalter, in her book *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) calls women's writing a subculture. She traces the evolution of this 'subculture' from the times of the Brontes to the present day. The development is outlined by her in three stages. The study of these stages will clarify the nature of women's writing.

1. **Feminine:** This is the phase of imitation of the prevailing modes of dominant male traditions;
2. **Feminist:** This is the phase of protest against the standards and values in favour of autonomy;
3. **Female:** This is the phase of self-discovery of the woman's search for identity.²¹

So during the feminine phase, English women writers wrote in an effort to equal the intellectual achievements of male culture and internalised its assumptions about the female nature. The feminist phase could be termed as the phase of protest. In the female phase, woman reject both imitation and protest.

Some feminists aim to seek out a feminine aesthetic. That feminine aesthetic is often identified with language; a language specific to woman's writing, whose difference is guaranteed by femaleness of the author.²² French feminists have proposed the theory about woman's language. They examined how language structures sexual division between men and women and creates gender biases.

Feminists claim that the creation of a feminine language will involve creating a language system whose first allegiance will be the natural rhythms of the female body. They observe that since language has been made by man, it presents women in a negative way. Hence they argue that women need to craft their own language.

The question arises why there is need of woman's language? It is observed

that men in general write about woman, touching only the exterior "not penetrating into their fine emotions, their fears and hopes".²³ And it is found that literary tradition predominates men's language. The feminist critic considers it as the oppressor's language.

According to Saussurean principle of linguistics, language is not a representation of reality, but a system of signification, words are not things, but merely signs for the things. Linguistically, 'woman' is a sign, not an essence and hence, whatever meaning that word happens to have, does not inherent in it naturally but is conferred upon it by the society which uses. The meaning of the word 'woman' is determined by customs or conventions. According to the feminists, the key to woman is, therefore, not biology but semiotics.²⁴

Traditionally, women's lives have been imagined in relation to men's lives as the daughters, mothers, mistresses, wives of men. But feminists argue that a literary work should provide role-models, self-actualising, whose identities are not dependent on men.

And seeing that language and literature are part of that culture, which defines woman as other, feminist critics are de-centering androcentrism. For this they consider gender as the principal criterion for assessing those male dominating conventions reflected in literature. They study woman as the producer of textual meaning.

These views of the radical feminists opened new ways for analysing literary texts. But while they concentrated on language, images, and textual strategies reflecting patriarchal domination, they failed to perceive how ideologies of gender division are created and perpetuated in society. It was the Marxist critics like Michele Barrett who suggested new ways of approaching the problem of literature and women's oppression

MARXIST LITERARY FEMINISM

Michele Barrett is one of the important Marxist feminist critics, who has linked the theories of historical materialism with representation of gender relations in literature. She provides crucial insight into the relation, in particular between the class position of woman and system of literary values.

According to Marxist or Socialist feminists, the powerlessness of women in society is rooted in the basic structures of production, reproduction, sexuality and socialisation of children. Family as the radical feminists believe is one of the prime social institutions which oppress women most. Family and economy are not viewed as separate systems but interacting systems. The unequal and hierarchical gender roles operate in both the domains of family and economy. Marxist feminists have raised the debate of domestic work. They argue that women's oppression is based on unpaid housework, childbearing, childcare and housework are material activities which restrict women's access to an equal status.

According to the traditional views, a woman should care for her husband

and her children only. It is taken for granted that child care and domestic work are the responsibilities of woman and the social milieu in which she lives forces her to accept it as her duty. Marxist thinker Delphy's argument is true in this context. He argues that "Women's class position should be understood in terms of the institution of marriage which she conceptualises as a labour contract in which the husband's appropriation of unpaid labour from his wife constitutes a domestic mode of exploitation".²⁵ So this marriage contract is a labour contract for the woman. Her domestic work is never rewarded. The sociocultural rigidity that marriage imposes on the individual is intolerable to woman. Marxist feminists try to tackle this problem in terms of class values.

The analysis of patriarchal family and oppressive practices generated by it has the echoes of J.S. Mill, who was one of the first and foremost spokesman for the theory that the subjugation of women is akin to other oppressive political systems such as slavery and feudalism. He considered marriage as a legal bondage that a woman is forced to seek because the society has systematically deprived her of any attractive and dignified alternative.²⁶

The terms 'ideology' and 'gender' are crucial for Marxist feminism.

The concept of ideology plays a major role in the analysis of literature. According to Michele Barrett, "'Ideology' is a generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, transformed. Since meaning is negotiated primarily through means of communication and signification, it is

possible to suggest that cultural production provides an important site for the construction of ideological processes. Thus, ... literature can usefully be analysed as a paradigm case of ideology, in particular social formations".²⁷ Thus, the analysis of literature emerges as an important ground for Marxist feminists to see how ideologies and gender construction operate.

The distinction between sex and gender is an important step in the understanding of women's position. Gender construction is important for Marxists. A central element in this argument is recognition of the distinction between the physical characteristics of males and females and the personality and behavioural characteristics deemed masculine and feminine in specific cultural and historical situations. So 'gender' is a culturally shaped group of attributes and behaviours given to the female or to the male. Sex is biological and gender behaviour is a social construction. And it is important to discuss how gender is presented in literature.²⁸ Because feminists give stress on gender construction presented in literature to analyse the dominant literary conventions.

According to Marxist feminists, literature reflects not only the social reality but also shapes the complex ways in which men and women organize themselves, their interpersonal relationship and their perception of socio-cultural reality. The attitude of the author towards man-woman relationship and attitudes of characters to one another highlight the gender perspective. Thus feminist literary study has profoundly revolutionary implications for literary study as a whole.

The survey of feminism shows that the current feminism constitutes different activities. K.K.Ruthven gives different categories of feminism, which are used by feminists to analyse literature. According to Ruthven, there are sociofeminists whose interest in the roles assigned to women in our society prompt studies of the ways in which women are represented in literary texts. There are semiofeminists whose point of departure is semiotics, the science of signs, and who study the signifying practices by means of which females are coded and classified as women in order to be assigned their social roles; there are psycho feminists who forage in Freud and Lacan for a theory of feminine sexuality unconstrained by male norms and categories and who examine literary texts for unconscious articulation of feminine desires or traces of where it has been repressed, there are Marxist feminists more interested in oppression and repression.²⁹

Thus, feminism is advancing on several fronts with various aims and practices at once. The function of criticism is to show the strategies of gender construction in the literary work. Michele Barrett has given the four processes by which the work of reproducing gender ideology is done. In a rough and preliminary way, we can identify processes of stereotyping, compensation, collusion and recuperation across a range of cultural practices.³⁰

Through the process of 'stereotyping' restricted images of women are presented. This notion is all pervasive in literature. Role of women in home from dutiful and glamorous hostess to caring mother are portrayed in literature. Domestication of women and glorification of that domesticity is done through this process.

The strategy of 'compensation' refers to the representation of ideas to elevate the 'moral value of femininity'. To conceal women's oppression, they are honoured sometimes. The best example of this is Manu's ideas about women. On the one hand, Manu criticises women; on the other, he highly glorifies the state of motherhood.

The process of 'collusion' may be taken to refer to the following two processes. On the one hand, we cannot note the attempts made to manipulate and parade women's consent to their subordination and objectification. In our country, the evils like 'Sati', 'dowry' exist in the society. However, an argument is made that women give their willing consent to such evils. 'Recuperation' is the strategy used for subverting the challenges by the established powers.

Some Marxist feminists have attempted to examine these processes of gender construction in literature. These processes are important for constructing the meaning of the text.

Apart from these approaches, there have also been attempts made by Indian feminists to study literary texts in the light of the ideologies of class, caste, race and religion. It is not possible to attempt a survey of all of them for want of space. Hence, I have tried to show very briefly how Indian feminist literary critics have approached the challenge and analysis of literature from women's perspective.

Most of the Indian feminists, it is true, reflect the concerns of Western feminists. Some of them have attempted to apply the categories of Western

feminism to the analysis of feminist criticism (e.g. Sushila Singh, *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English*, 1991). This is in the form of delineating how images of women in literature reflect the patriarchal biases. However, in recent times, Indian feminists have tried to establish the tradition of women's writing in India in order to arrive at a continuity in women's writing (e.g. Susie Tharu, *Women Writing in India : 600 B.C. to the Present*, 1991). The third tendency is to re-read old texts in order to expose the conventional ideology regarding women and there have also been several attempts to link the study of literature with the study of cultural processes. This last approach views literature as a cultural production and examines the relationship between cultural strategies and a question of gender perception as reflected in the works such as *Recasting Women*.

Thus, we may conclude that feminists are concerned with issues like marriage, family, man-woman relationship, father-child relationship, clashes of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and parental authority. They also confront issues of economic system, class struggle between dominated and the dominant and its resultant impact on women.

As the very brief review above indicates, feminist literary critics have studied literature with a view to expose the gender biases, asymmetrical representation of men and women in literature. There is no one particular method of analysis that they have followed. For example, Simone de Beauvoir studies men and women characters and myths and author's perception of gender roles. Kate Millett, Gilbert and Gubar, Ellen Mores, Patricia Meyor Spack, etc., have studied images of

women, biases about women as reflected in language. They have also critically examined the relationship between patriarchy and language as reflected in literature. Michele Barrett suggests analysis of ideology as reflected in the processes of 'stereotyping', 'compensation', 'collusion' and 'recuperation'.

For the purpose of analysis of feminist consciousness in this novel, I have tried to evolve an eclectic method of analysis. I have tried to explore into the nature of feminist consciousness in this novel through the analysis of:

1. familial and social relationships of the protagonist in the novel;
2. ideological conflicts and struggles that the protagonist has to go through;
3. the representation of patriarchy; and
4. the alternative feminist values that emerge out of the novel.

This method of analysis draws on traditional methodology of analysis as well as the feminist perspective.

My next two Chapters present the analysis of the novel. My hypothesis is that the novel makes a critical statement on the patriarchal practice as reflected in Indian society and then goes on to present an alternative vision of human relations from a feminist perspective. I have attempted to analyse the feminist consciousness of Ann as reflected in her relations with her family members, namely, her mother, mother-in-law, husband and others. The feminist alternative is suggested through her criticism of existing structure of family and her relations with other men and women in her life. Through this, I have tried to show that the

protagonist of this novel is a structural device used by the writer for a critical and objective examination of patriarchy as existing in the Indian set up and for offering an impressive alternative image of a woman who can serve as a role model.

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