

## Chapter 16

# An Ode to Woman: Role and Representation of Women in the World of Literature

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this 21st century, the world, as well as societal norms, changes rapidly due to globalization. The feminist movement is one of the important outcomes of these societal changes. Nowadays the status or position of women becomes progressed as we find them in every pace of the world due to the waves of the feminist movement. This chapter examines how women got their rights to introduce themselves in this patriarchal society, the history of the world of women's literature – how women introduce themselves as writers and the way they are depicted within the world of literature, and the present scenario of women in the society as portrayed in the world of literature through selected literary texts as contexts.*

*Men and women should own the world as a mutual possession.*

*- Pearl S. Buck, Of Men and Women*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the terms 'equality', 'empowerment' and 'emancipation' are widely used words that can be heard in each layer of society. As OED (Oxford English Dictionary) explains these terms: 'equality' is 'the fact of being equal in

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rights, status, advantages'; 'empowerment' means 'the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights'; and 'emancipation' is 'the fact or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions.' All these terms are specifically related to Gender Studies. Now the question arises what is 'gender' basically? Gender is all about the two sexes-masculine and feminine-that denote a range of identities. Therefore, from this point another question arises that Is identity dependent on the basis of sexes? Certainly, or certainly not as identity is an abstract idea that is interpreted from various aspects. From masculinity, the term patriarchy comes which means a belief that women are inferior to men; an inborn belief what is basically called biological essentialism based on biological differences between the sexes.

In literature, gender studies refer to the study of women and the question of masculinity. It is therefore, the successor to Feminist Criticism. Now a question arises if male and female are none but a biological difference, why 'feminist criticism' arises? Or why there is not any criticism called 'masculine criticism? The answer lies in the meaning of patriarchy that is a belief that women are inferior to men. From this point of view feminism comes forth in society. Though the women characters are portrayed as angels, goddesses, obedient lovers, amenable wives, mother figures in literature written by male writers, women were not considered as human beings at all and were not only deprived of education and financial independence but also had to struggle against male ideologies. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women's struggles for political as well as societal rights born feminism or Marxist feminist criticism. Therefore, feminism is a movement that raises a voice on women living on equal terms with that of men. According to Marxist feminist criticism, the private property from which economic inequality, dependency, political confusion and unhealthy relationship between men and women arise is the origin of women's oppressed status in society. Feminist critics don't deny the biological differences, what they deny is that of what is called 'social constructionism' refers to that woman is not born feminine and man is not born masculine rather this classification is introduced by the society that gives birth to psychoanalytic feminist criticism. According to Psychoanalytic feminist criticism that is based on Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, gender inequality is not a biological one rather it comes from that of early childhood experiences that lead man to believe themselves to be masculine and woman to be feminine. This psychological difference considers women as inferior or marginal characters. It's not only the problem of western civilization but also the problem of Eastern civilization. It bridges East and West in a single thread. In this paper, my focus is only on the status and role of women in Indian society, though the position of women is the same all over the world.

In Eastern Civilization, women also were considered as helpless, dependent creatures who were born only to fulfilling male's desires. They were always remained

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