

MAHADEVI VARMA AND KATE MILLETT: AN ANALYSIS OF COMPARATIVE THEMATIC STUDY

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Abstract: This is a comparative study of Mahadevi Varma, Indian writer and Kate Millett' American writer. This brief study discusses the female consciousness within the writing of Mahadevi Varma in Indian scenario and Kate Millett's writing in American scenario. The present study establish the gender discrimination and gender politics in eastern and western society .The purpose of the work is to make a comparative thematic study between Kate Millett's essays and Mahadevi Varma's essay writing .The discussion exposes the similarities and dissimilarities between both essays on women .The need of women who live in different countries are dissimilar as they are conditioned by several factors -familial ,societal, racial marital, economic, cultural, individual consciousness. In spite of such a diverse context, it is really interesting and innovating to compare Indian feminist poetess with western feminist poetess. Both has presented the various aspect of women's plight in Indian and American society. Kate Millett and Mahadevi Varma respectively are doyens of their fields of writing in their respective countries. These spokeswomen set about the task of theorizing the need of women in society and their inner feelings articulated loud and bold. One of the luminaries of Hindi literature Mahadevi Varma, a social reformer advocates to explore different aspect of sever conditions of Indian women. She observed the deep rooted grieves of women and examines the inequitable situation of the Indian women from various perspectives, covers several parameters of the Indian women's status ranging from the cultural and historical to the economic, Civics, Educational and Legal. Alike Kate Millett, an American feminist, author, artist , influential figure in the women's liberation movement . Millett examines in her book of how thoroughly culture and society are dominated by men. Alike Mahadevi has explored different aspects of women condition in this male dominated society. Millett demonstrates in detail how patriarchal altitudes and system penetrate literature, philosophy and politics. This comparative study puts the act of comparing two different locally felt need of time. Both raised voice against male dominance and believed that gender inequality is the result of the collective efforts of men to dominate, control and exploit women. Mahadevi delves deeper in to the different social and economic aspect of Indian womanhood through her essay and Millett states in her book that one of the most efficient branches of patriarchal government lies in the agency of its economic hold over its female subjects. Both the writers analyze the economic position of women. No refined and focused work has been done comparing both these leading writers. It is an innovative and fresh topic for research work. It will add new dimensions to the understanding of women, their concerns, sufferings problem and challenges in feminist perspective. The outcome would be enthralling as the study may lead to findings of some peculiar similarities between Indian and western feminist perspective.

Keywords: Female Consciousness, Gender Discrimination, Gender Politics, Doyens, Women's Liberation Movement, Patriarchal Attitudes, Male Dominance.

Introduction: This comparative study puts the act of comparing two different locally felt need of time. The brief study discusses the female consciousness within the writing of Mahadevi Varma in Indian scenario and Kate Millett's writing in American scenario. The need of women who live in different countries are dissimilar as they are conditioned by several factors – familial societal, racial, martial, economic, cultural, individual consciousness. It is an attempt to add new dimensions to the understanding of women, their concerns sufferings problem and challenges in feminist perspective. The present study establishes the gender discrimination and gender politics in eastern and western society. Despite such a diverse context, it would be interesting to compare Indian feminism with western feminism which is marked by radical norms, and invokes western feminist critics on the problem that women in India confronts.

Feminism is an important aspect of Indian writing in English Literature. when one think Feminism, it originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. It attempts to analyze the reason far and dimensions of women's oppression and to achieve women's liberation. In western society it is a specific kind of political discourse: a critical and theoretical practice committed to the struggle against patriarchy, sexism, not only a concern for gender in literature. For Indian Society feminism is the belief in the social political right and economic equality of the sexes.

Now this kind of awakening to the sense of self in other word the women's movement of the 1960s has raised the question of women but, of course, it was not a matter of chance, but the natural corollary of centuries of struggle of women for their rights. It was a renewal of an old tradition of thought and action already presented in its classic books which has diagnosed the problem of women's inequality in society and proposed solutions. The names that come to are Virginia wolf, Simone do Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich and Elaine show alter. Thus, the growth of feminism is usually attributed to western influence.

Outburst of this movement of 1960s influenced a number of women writers in India and throughout the world in which Kate Millett in America and Mahadevi Varma in India are the major well known female writers who have given their views on women world. Both have voiced their concern regarding this.

Kate Millett became a spokesperson for the feminism movement following the success of the book *Sexual Politics*. *Sexual Politics* (1970) is first book by Kate Millett, based on her Ph.D. dissertation, it is a classic feminist text, said to be "**the first book academic feminist of literary criticism.**" *Shrinkhla Ki Kadiyan* (*Links in The Chain*) is a collection of eleven incisive and insightful essays on the plight of the Indian women written by Mahadevi Varma which examines the inequitable situation of the Indian women from various perspectives. The series include Hindu Stri ka Patnitva *Wifehood of The Indian Woman*, Ghar Aur Bahar *The Home and the World*, Adhunik Nari *The Modern Woman* and Hamari samasyayen *Our Problems*, She delver deeper in to the different social and economic aspect of Indian womanhood. This collection of essays has been translated by Neera Kuckreja Sohani and published under the title "*Links in the chain*". (Katha 2003) These essays written in 1930. They continue to be relevant in modern context.

The present paper is an attempt to make a thematic study of these two books. This paper will present a thematic interpretation and an analysis of both the theoretical and the practical side of Millett's feminism.

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With the march of time feminism blossomed in to an international movement and several school of feminist thought such s liberal, Marxist, Radical, Psychoanalytic, Socialist, Existentialist and Postmodern come into existence. In this series Kate Millett one of the founder of radical feminism wrote that traditionally patriarchy grants the father nearby ownership over wife and children and misuse of their power as well as including the power of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale.

Mahadevi by nature is intolerant of injustice therefore naturally these essays should reek of radicalism. It is radical feminists to believe that gender inequality is the result of the collective efforts of men to dominate, control and exploit women violence against women, compulsory heterosexuality, and the organization of the traditional family are all viewed as ways to ensure male dominance through female subordination to and dependence upon men.

Radical feminist school is of the view that women's oppression in the deepest form of human oppression and therefore it cannot be eradicable by means of class society. This theory is chiefly concerned with the issues arising out of Kate Millett, one of the first radical feminists, of America insists that the roots of women's oppression are deeply buried in gender system of patriarchy. In her ground-breaking book, *Sexual Politics* Millet argues that women will be liberated only when gender discrimination is eliminated as it is constructed and fostered by patriarchy. Hence it cannot be removed without a complete transformation of society. Both Mahadevi and Kate Millett put questions on gender inequality and Kate insists that the roots of women's oppression are deeply buried in gender system of patriarchy.

This is the irony of fate of all the Indian women that they experience both states in Indian scenario she has been revered as a presiding deity of a temple as well as been made a prisoner in the darkest corner of her home.

Mahadevi talks about only two categories of women are to be found recently in our Indian society. The first includes those who are entirely unaware of the fact that they too are members of the vast human society and passes on independent self. They are unknown that their blossoming or decay can cause society to excel or

decline. The second is made of these women whose ultimate objective in life is to gain parity with men, by viewing the world singularly from the man's eye and copying his virtue & vices.

Dissimilar to this western society women demand complete liberation, this is so because according to Millett western society, like all other historical civilization is a patriarchy. The fact is that if one assesses the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance-in short, every avenue of power within the society including police force is entirely in male hands. So, half of the population of the western women find herself controlled by the half of the population i.e. in male hands. So society is governing by patriarchal institution which appear to be two fold male dominate female and elder male domain younger.

On the questions of political right both opens their similar view but on different ground. Mahadevi openly goes back to history, gives evident from the shastras, the ancient texts that all the kind of legal and judicial rights had been given to women on that base even today she is forced to suffer many hardships.

History bears witness to the fact that even in the democratic ancient civilizations of Rome and Greece, women had not been considered deserving of any right. (Varma, Mahadevi. *Links in The Chain*, 13)

Millett assess women's right on the ground of patriarchal institution which seen so much entrenched as to run through all other political, social, or economic forms-caste, class, feudality and religion. Also pointing the fact that woman have so rarely held power within modern democracies. Assessing level of women's right and patriarchal level of other countries She writes:

Bearing in mind the variation and degree in patriarchy-as say between Saudi Arabia and Sweden, Indonesia and Red China-we also recognize our own form in the U.S. and Europe to be much altered and attenuated by the reforms. (Millett Kate, *Sexual Politics*, 26)

Both the writers analyze the economic position of women. Millett states in her book:

One of the most efficient branches of patriarchal government lies in the agency of its economic hold over its female subjects. (Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*, 39)

She says that in modern reformed patriarchal society, women have certain economic rights yet two thirds of the female population in most developed countries are engaged in work. Unfortunately, of that third women who are employed, their average wages represent only half of the average income enjoyed by men. Traditionally women were not permitted on economic existence, neither did they hold a legal standing. They could neither own nor earn in their own right. Millett writes:

Since women's independence in economic life is viewed with distrust, prescriptive agencies of all kinds (religion, psychology, advertising etc.). Continuously admonish or even inveigh against the employment of middle class women, particularly mothers. (Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*, 40)

Regarding this Mahadevi also found a strange disparity between the right of a men and women in all orders of the society. The social order has taken special care to keep the man's convenience in mind while awarding rights to women. Women's economic status too has not remained free of dependence, and significant change has not been affected in the women's position since the ancient times. The woman merely had the right to spend according to the income of the grihpati, the master of the house in order to manage the house and rear the children. Even Mahadevi questions on the point:

What was the motive behind depriving the woman of her father's wealth... whatever the reason may have been there is no doubt that this rule caused a major decline in the daughter's position in her father's home. (Varma, Mahadevi. *The Issue of Woman's Economic Independence*, 95)

Kate Millett examines in her book of how thoroughly culture and society are dominated by men. Kate Millett states:

This is so because our society, like all other historical civilization is patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industries, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance in short, every avenue of power within the society including the coercive force of the police is entirely in male hands. If one

takes patriarchal government to be the institution whereby that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male. The principles of patriarchy to be fold: male shall dominate female; elder male shall dominate younger. (Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*, 25)

Alike Mahadevi has explored different aspects of women condition in this male dominated society. In her masterpiece essay "Hamari *Shrinkhla Ki Kadiyan*" Mahadevi finds with Indian society's treatment of women and she tried to explore the different aspect of women's severe conditions.

Mahadevi Varma is a social reformer Millett is also the name for women's liberation movement in society. Both are doyens of their fields of writing about relation of society and individual and the need of women in society. If Varma says:

The relationship between the individual and society is one of mutual dependence because one can not exist without the other. (Varma, Mahadevi. *Society and the Individual*, 124)

Here Millett speaks for co-operation between the family and the larger society is essential else both would fall apart and the fate of three patriarchal institutions the family, society, and the state are interrelated. Millett invented word patriarchy and a solid working definition of the term "**Patriarchy**". She is granting the presence of patriarchy on traditionally, classically and on the base of religious support such as Catholic precept that "**the father is the head of family**". Female heads of household tend to be regarded as undesirable.

In the collection *Society and Individual* Mahadevi discusses of the about the mutual dependence between the individual and society and the relationship between men and woman. She thinks Indian society the collective of such individuals that have agreed to be ruled by some common regulations. She also writes:

All social regulations have been invented for all round development of human beings. But when they begin to obstruct the path of human progress, they lose their utility. (Varma, Mahadevi. *The Links in The Chain*, 16)

However noble the purpose may be when it becomes the source of moral decline it must be seen urgently in need of reform. Once the awareness comes, they will themselves break and throw away the chains that imprison him.

Millett questions of the historical origin of patriarchy whether patriarchy originated in male superior strength, or under certain circumstances. There is not sufficient evidence that the present social destruction of patriarchy in terms of status, role and temperament are physical in origin. Patriarchy's biological foundations appear to be so very insecure, as one has to admire the strength of a socialization. Throughout these works on how to improve women's lives, the socialization of gender is hardly considered. She writes:

Because of our social circumstances male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different and this is crucial. Implicit in all the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents', 'the peers', and the culture's nations of what is appropriate to each gender by way to temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture and expression. (Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*, 31)

Mahadevi agreed man's status role and temperament amidst Indian scenario and circumstances. She views that a man's life begins with struggle, a woman with self-sacrifice. The man who proved victorious in the tough struggle for existence was vanquished by woman. Millett takes examples that the culture cherishes about man's gender identity encourage the young male to develop aggressive impulses, and the female to control her own or turn them inward. She further examines the result is that the male tends to have aggression reinforced in his behavior. She boldly says:

Thereupon the cultures consent to believe the possessions of the male is dictator, the testes, penis, and scrotum in itself characterizes the aggressive impulse and even vulgarly celebrates it in such encomiums as "**that guy has balls**". (Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*, 25)

For some extent Millett agrees the reinforcement of the virtue of passivity in feminine. The basic division of men and women temperament is the line of "**aggression is male**" and "**Passivity is female**". Which Varma

names dissimilarity in their natures. The inherent difference in their natures helped Indian man and woman to come closer to each other and get acquainted. Even agreeing physically strength of man Indian women's offering of herself charm the man was reinforced with the coming of children. The women saw that not only had her to rule over a powerful man, but she also wishes to make her children as powerful as him. She placed the child in front of him and said:

To make this child as fine as you, I need a shelter to shield it from the heat and the cold, regular supply of food, and you as a guardian to protect against predators and enemies. (Varma, Mahadevi. *War and Woman*, 25)

Both Millett and Varma found disparity between man and women nature & behavior in eastern and western scene here little differ thing is that Mahadevi insists on the masculine and feminine transforming self and their perspective as the natural need of time and society. But today in the age of materialism, man has become more terrifying than the make of barbaric age. There is no limit to his greed, injustice and cruelty. Then she says to Indian women last time:

Among women belonging to modern war-hungry nations the belief is taking root that unless women are able to acquire brute force like men and destroy the tender feelings of mercy, pity and love, their race is not fit to live. (Varma, Mahadevi. *War and woman*, 28)

With this belief Mahadevi gave a sword to eastern women to behead the offspring of men.

In the collection society and individual Mahadevi says that society is a collective of such individuals that have agreed to be ruled by some common regulations. Because society has been formed to safeguard the individual's rights and for society, the individual is necessary. She dictates:

The relationship between the individual and society is one of mutual dependence because one can not exist without the other. (Varma, Mahadevi. *Society and the individual*, 125)

The mental physical states of all the individuals are not similar nor are they equally fitting to carry out a task but for society they are all equally useful. To measure developed society, it is necessary to measure women's condition in that society. Varma highlights women's contribution and her status has been a measure of the advancement of civilization since long time. In spite of this today even she does not have the status she has in civilized society:

The skies may resound with the proud saga of the Hindu woman of the netherworld tremble at her downfall, yet nothing changes in her life, validating the old saying, "**Na sawan sukhe na badho hare**"- neither heat sucks her dry nor rain turns her lush and green. She has always had to write with tears the history both of her ascent, to such heights as would shame the lofty Himalayas, and her descent, which in its depths would compete with seabed. And probably will have to do so in the future as well (Varma, Mahadevi. *The Course of Womanhood*, 29)

This is how Mahadevi Varma the famous poetess of Allahabad, described the condition of Indian woman in her article of 1933 '*The Curse of Womanhood*'.

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Both the ladies throw light on the condition and place of women in terms of class. Accordingly, whatever might be the class, on the whole womanhood was cursed to live a life without freedom and women were totally ignorant about the reason for such condition of theirs.

But Millett watches status of the female in area of class, Little confused because she observes superficially operation of sexual status within the variable of class.

In a western society where status is dependent upon the economic, social and educational circumstances of class, it is possible for certain women to appear to stand higher than some male. Again Millett draws the literature of the past thirty years through which opens a staggering number of incidents in which the caste of virility triumphs over the social status of wealthy or even educated women. On the strength of his sex rank alone not only male is more likely to claim authority in the lower social class but have patriarchal dominance in the middle and upper classes also. Millett concludes the male sex rank commonly responsible first for the plight of western society women, secondly to enjoy in any case. While Varma concludes that ignorance was common to all the women despite their class status.

Both the writer focused on the freedom in woman's personality. Mahadevi pointed out that lot of freedom is necessary for the overall mental and physical development of woman and it cannot be achieved in narrow oppressive setting. So first and foremost, it was necessary to create a free climate conducive for development. Millett pointed out women's freedom is necessary for the overall mental and physical development of woman and it can not be achieved after associate patriarchy with force. one not ware with in western societies where upper strata males had the same license to seduce lower class women which effects physically and mentally in both way. Even it is estimated in America that between two and five thousand women die each year from this cause. Moreover, patriarchal system so much control on them that they drive their own bodies to illegal abortions. On the other hand, the aspects of patriarchy according to Millett have each an effect upon the psychology of both the sexes. She points out that patriarchy has for reaching effects on the social and psychological behavior of both sexes, because she views patriarchy, is not only male domination of females but also a militaristic hierarchy among males.

After all assessment the fact come out that both the ladies put questions on woman but give answer in different way. On the one hand Millett tense to find solutions in to woman's liberation movement whether in society on literature, her feminist voice launched the second wave of the women's movement, and on the other hand Mahadevi offered no solutions to the 'Woman question'. However, in the preface of her book '*Shrinkhala Ki Kadiyan*' Mahadevi finds:

The solution to a problem lies in the knowledge of that problem. And the knowledge expects a seeker. It follows therefore that one desirous of attaining rights should also possess them. Generally, it is this particular characteristic that will be found lacking in the Indian woman. (Varma, Mahadevi. *Links in the Chain*, 48)

At last Varma appeals to the Indian women around the globe to uplift their selves with these words:

If we can fix our goal after committing to heart the significance of our duty, these is no doubt that our iron fetters will melt like wax in the blaze of our dignity. (Varma, Mahadevi. *Links in the Chain*, 22)

Along with Mahadevi Varma & Kate Millett I would like to step out with my research, to make the lives of such educated women more useful and their duties more pleasurable, we will have to give them the liberty to do something outside the home as well. For them a resolution of the question of home and beyond is not merely essential but mandatory, otherwise their restless spirit will destroy both domestic peace and society's wholesome atmosphere. There is no doubt that we have as much need for their support outside the home as inside it.

This paper work will also include the burning issue of women's life like feminism, male dominated society, exploitation and disregard of women, sexist point of view, the Indian women's status ranging from the cultural and historical to the economic, civic, educational and legal. It is hoped that this research work will prove very helpful and valuable for those who want to study the position of women in India society and the position of women in the world society.

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