

Indian Scenario Feminism in Sujata Parashar's *In Pursuit of Infidelity*

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Abstract

The word 'Feminism', but understanding of it remains vague and there is a general rejection of its relevance to the Indian context. 'Indian feminism' should lie in the spread of education, economic self-sufficiency, preservation of human rights, self respect and in the awareness of the desire for liberation from all restriction made by patriarchal society. Sujata Parashar's protagonist is a typical Indian woman, she has accepted everything without questioning. Sometimes she introspects and thinks of her marriage, she is trying to forgive herself and she feels if she forgives him, she may be able to forgive herself as well as with this realization, she goes back to her husband Gaurav.

Keywords: Indian Feminism, Personal Happiness, Liberation from Mythical and Social Restrictions, Dilemma, Consciousness, Typical Woman

Most urban English-speaking Indians are familiar with the word 'Feminism', but their understanding of it remains vague and there is a general rejection of its relevance to the Indian context. Patriarchal-religious traditions of India and overt or covert conservative super-structures have kept it from becoming a widely apprehended phenomenon. Women who imitate foreign or western trends may still be perceived as the result of 'moral corruption', due to their unrestrained freedom, they engage in promiscuous sexual behavior. But in India, Women are very different from the westernized feminism, Indian women are close connect with their family, society with traditional way of living may be they want to emerge from their stumpy position, but never deviate from traditional ethics.

But the aims of 'Indian feminism' should lie in the spread of education, economic self-sufficiency, preservation of human rights, self respect and in the awareness of the desire for liberation from mythical and social values which constrain women as well as men: socially, psychologically and physically. Such ideas of emancipation called as 'feminism' is tentatively prevalent only in the elitist masses who have had the privilege of education. According to Judith Butler, a Western critic, for an Indian issue will not be out of place: "Do the exclusionary practices that ground feminist theory in a notion of 'women' as subject, paradoxically undercut feminist goals to extend its claims to representation?" (3-4)

The Indian context 'representational feminism' is the need of the hour to liberate women from their enclosed space which means their society and family so that they can redefine their secular identity and realize their claims and rights. This representational politics ultimately seeks to protect human rights, and in the long term, such a representational feminism may be self-destructive.

Sujata Parashar is a trendy Indian Novelist, poet, short story writer and a psychosocial instructor. She has written seven books so far including a poetry series and a short-story collection. Sujata had a Master's degree in Human Rights. Her debut novel, *In Pursuit of Infidelity* published in 2009, was a bestselling novel. The second in the series, *In Pursuit of Ecstasy* published in 2011 was long listed for the Economist Crossword Book Award 2012. Her latest novel in the 'pursuit' series, *In Pursuit of a Lesser Offence* has received a favourable response. Her first short story, 'Wake me only when the Sun is high', and her first book of poems in the series, 'Poetry Out and Loud' have won awards. In 2016 she was presented the prestigious Karamaveer Chakra Award-instituted by iCongo (instituted with UN) conferred to individuals who bring about positive social impact in the lives of people and planet.

In Pursuit of Infidelity is the story of a busy professional, Sheena's life, who is living with her husband Gaurav and one-year son Krish. Like a typical Indian wife, she leads her life by fulfilling her duties towards her family, without questioning anything. She doesn't even think about her personal happiness and her desire because she knows that being an Indian woman she doesn't have the rights to arise voice and think about it. One of the common characteristics shared by the female characters is that most of them have forgotten to be women. Some of them are wives, mothers, widows, spinsters but hot women. They tend to repress their womanliness because of social or personal pressure. *In Pursuit of Infidelity*, Sujata Parashar writes:

she is a good daughter ... the good daughter has an arranged marriage... becomes a dutiful wife . . . then the wife becomes a responsible mother ... and then the rest of her life remain a good daughter, dutiful wife and responsible mother who keeps struggling with life for something or other. (6)

Before marriage Sheena considers herself the exact opposite of the 'conventional Indian girl,' outspoken, who only prayed during emergency but after marriage, she faced many psychological conflict and try to control her felling, waiting for time to expose her emotions, we knows this in the words of Sheena, "In fact staying with Gaurav I have also changed so much that I hardly smile or laugh now-a-days." (4) Like a classic Indian woman, she has accepted everything without any emotional questioning. Sometimes she introspects and thinks of her marriage which was designed by society, and Sujata Parashar expressed own thoughts and feelings: "I married him because marriage is a necessity to be counted as a respectable member of this society and feel secure, and settled in life." (4) Novelist portrays the realistic image of an Indian married woman equivalent to of Sheena. Though Sheena is well-educated and self-dependant but yet she doesn't have liberty of chose anything and restrictions made by family. Sheena says, "I can't be written off! She remembered laughing wildly long ago, of dancing, of being called pretty, of a young man who still comes in her dreams." (5)

A lot of things have been said and written about in favour of woman freedom but they all are "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." The ultimate goal of feminism should be to enable woman to achieve self-realisation, self-definition, self-actualisation, self-emancipation, self-fulfilment and self-control, Sheena's life takes a turn when the classmate of her college life Nikhil comes in her life. He discloses that he was in love with Sheena when they were in the college and that he is still in love with her, Suddenly Sheena's life is totally changed and everything becomes so beautiful for her. All the time there is a huge smile on her face.

Sheena is motivated to continue by her dedication to marriage and family even though she doesn't truly feel love for Gaurav. That is, until the voice of temptation calls. When Nikhil, her

long-lost crush, also proclaims his love for her, She is faced with the never-ending conflict between her conscience and her emotions. She starts caring about herself, “I must do my Yoga tomorrow. Gitanjali is right; it won’t help me if I do it half-heartedly.” (17) She starts questioning her married life, “Why did I marry Gaurav? I am only human and like to enjoy myself. He hardly takes me out except for the movies and that only because he likes to watch them too.” (20)

In actuality, feminism is a product of the way males built society and its institutions to serve their own interests. Because of their physical weakness and tenderness, women who are pregnant, have children to take care of, and are men’s dependents, are unable to work hard every day. All the social rules and regulations are made only for women. So-called care-takers of the society never bother for woman’s basic needs and happiness. Even literature showed such a trend. Great literature focuses on the male protagonists providing secondary role to females. According to the French existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, “One is born, but rather becomes a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature.” (295)

In this context, Ellen Morgan draws our attention to a new type of feminism which she names neo-feminism which considers woman as a person. Sheena’s suppressed feelings pop up when she meets Nikhil. Being an Indian woman, the feeling of loyalty and self aware for her husband is deeply rooted in her and the sacred vows are strong enough against the carnal pull. Thus, She is contemplating a difficult to take decision., “Do I have the strength to face other people and tell them I want to break away from my stable marriage just because an old friend has walked back into my life saying he loves me.” (52) Her better sense always keeps telling her that this is wrong but she finds herself unable to stop the nagging voice. Thus caught between the temptations of infidelity and the need for loyalty, Sheena is torn within and from here her psychological self probing begins:

My heart wants something and my conscience says the opposite. Eve must have felt the same way about the forbidden apple and then, unable to control herself, must have finally given in to her strong desire. But | am not Eve and my predicament is not as simple as whether to eat an apple or not. (52)

Sheena is portrayed by Sujata Parashar as being extremely real—almost too real—in her life. Sheena begs Nikhil because her conscience forbids her from acting on her heart’s desire for him. Sheena’s heart says that she loves Nikhil but her conscience stops her and she pleads to Nikhil, “it would be completely dishonesty and sheer selfishness on my part if I continue this” (80) but heart wins over the conscience and Sheena surrenders herself to Nikhil tentatively not in permanently because of Indian feminism which means she is too much take care of her family and society behaviour in the that concept she can’t stand this decision towards end of this novel.

In India, marriage is considered the most important thing in a woman’s life. A girl is groomed from childhood to think that her husband is her God. A true woman knows nothing but her master. This deep-seated faith cannot be easily erased. Sheena does not want to get out of her marriage. Nikhil expressed his love numerous ways. She has a lot of questions in her mind. These questions disturb her mind and lead to her Indian mentality of respect for family and society:

... What if the experiment goes horribly wrong? Will I be able to take it? What about Gaurav and Krish? Will they be able to forgive me ever? Do | really love Nikhil? Does he really love me? (71).

As she goes through this mental struggle, her life takes a turn for the worse. She has to deal with the fact that her husband is having an affair with another woman Anita. It is a woman’s prerogative not to allow another woman to be a part of her husband’s life; no matter if she is also doing the same. She knows this and asks her husband many questions. Parashar writes thus:

Inside her mind all sorts of thoughts were mocking her at the turn of events; she could not believe that instead of Gaurav, it was she asking all these questions. She was the culprit. . . .

She was having an affair. And ironically it was she who was accusing her husband of the same. What a turn of fate. (146)

Now Sheena has a valid reason to leave her husband's house though it sounds worse than before. She goes to her mother's house and tells only partial truth; she cannot share her affection on Nikhil. Her mother, like a Indian traditional all typical old mother starts giving her advice every day thus, "The wife needs to keep patience and be there for him always. If she leaves him alone or shows she does not care much for her man, then the straying man will go away and leave her for sure." (153) Sheena does not want to be a burden on her parents and comes back to Delhi but not to her husband's house and hires another house for living with Krish. Now she realizes that Gaurav has done the same with her what she has done to him, "God had punished her. Punished her well and proper. She had committed a grave crime by falling in love outside her marsilage and he had given her back tit for tat." (158)

At this stage, she can understand that her love for Nikhil is momentary and infatuation; it is just an attraction. She realizes that dissatisfaction is not a license to be unfaithful. She realizes that Gaurav has been a good husband and friend to her and an extremely loving father. She realizes that what he has done is unforgivable and painful, yet she feels like forgiving him as she is trying to forgive herself and she feels if she forgives him, she may be able to forgive herself as well. With this realization, she goes back to her husband Gaurav. Parashar writes thus:

But, on the whole, things were calmer and happier. Gaurav left no stone unturned to make her feel wanted and loved. The efforts bore fruit and Sheena slowly but surely grew close to her husband again. They had gone through an extremely painful time, which also made them more mature and more understanding towards each other. (176)

Many modern day couples life is captured by Parashar in her novel *In the Pursuit of Infidelity*. It's a story that's often swept under the rug and forgotten. But it's also a story that you'll never forget. A story about the human heart, about the need for forgiveness from ourselves and others, and about the healing powers of love. Indian Feminism is not about westernized, sexually liberated women with-with-no-respect for tradition. We need a new type of feminism, one that brings about change from within, change that sustains us with dignity and not just a violent conflict.

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