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Review Of Research



HOW FEMINISM TOOK BIRTH



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ABSTRACT

Indian woman is the focus of this study. How and to what extent she has been given expression by Indian writers in particular and other factors in general, is to be seen through the eyes of Feminism. In this content, it is very important to understand how feminism took birth in different contents.

KEYWORDS :eyes of Feminism , women-specific existentialism , women liberation .

INTRODUCTION

In this respect, let us raise certain issues. To start with, what we mean by feminism when it carries different meaning to different people world over. Feminism in general is a response to patriarchy at a specific stage of human development, yet concretely it is an expression of women-specific existentialism which found favour in condition of America after the Second World War. It took roots there as a movement, termed as 'Women Lib' or women liberation in full form. Later on the thought was taken by women writers as identity crisis leading to feminism.

Apart from understanding feminism with its various facets in course of this study, it is pertinent to delineate what patriarchy signifies at its various stages in history of social relations. Definitely, it carried one conveys one meaning with its root word, Pitri for father, while male-domination signifies another connotation when attached to patriarchy as is common these days. 'Pitri' has a much wider significance than mere being male. When some protagonists describe present day society as male-dominated to paint patriarchy as the root cause of much evil in the lives of women, It is not only off the

mark from reality but tends to shield the real culprit in the game. It is beyond contest that present day society is not male-dominated but property– nay, capital dominated throughout the world, inspite of male-chauvinism here and there is working up in one 'individual's behaviour. These days such aberrations are not rare among women too. But the reality of life is regulated and dominated by capital today rather than this chauvinism. Still male-domination is not one and the same what patriarchy entailed initially in social relations. 'Pitri Satta' and not 'Pati Satta 'or hegemony of husband was opted to convey the new relations in the family based on property. In a society based on inequality and expropriation after the collapse of matriarchy with the advent of stable property as the regulating agent, patriarchy as hegemony of the father in the family as a new institution of changed social structure, could not and did not relegate women to a place of insignificance in common social productions and relations. At that time domination was not the spirit then. Early phase of Indian history testifies it eloquently.

Moreover, patriarchy has not remained the same through out. Broadly it has two distinct phases; one during pre-industrial society where family labour within a community to supervise and control relations, was the dominant feature, while, industrial society with individual labour freely available for hire, was the other. Lately, since when industrial society too has shifted its emphasis from manufacturing stage to 'service' sector with finance capital as the regulating agent for largely speculative and crony business and started sucking exploiting women as easy prey for super-profit in many bloated 'industries' like entertainment and fashion, patriarchy has not remained the same as it had been during its early stage of industrial development in the world. India has a late entrant in the race for industrialization because of its colonial slavery for long, aspired for rapid development on western mode after attaining independence in 1947 and, after a short period, here too the rapacious finance capital has taken over the reigns with tail-spin effect , with its accompanying consequences in social relations and value system. The family and marriage as institutions are the first targets to clear this high-way of robbery, without any viable substitute-models, to keep the social fabric intact.

Since patriarchy represents a fractured society with antagonistic struggle between rulers and the ruled from day one, as a system of it can not and does not have the same significance for both. It is commonly understood that both patriarchy and the state, have a common ancestry. But in the course of development patriarchy has since lost relevance for those who are endowed with capital and/or attributes of state power, while family as the founding block of social relations provides the only dependable security not still, in a community setting for the ruled if we do not forget that the principal of modern society lies in antagonism between an individual in a family and community setting and the state. Now, word about the role of education in general and literature in particular, is also pertinent here for better understanding of the subject. In spite of its liberal democratic atmosphere unleashed by industrial revolution throwing away monarchist absolutism, the state expropriated more and more power unto itself day by day and zealously guarded its dominating interests of property rule throughout, with play of dissenting voice notwithstanding. The dominating trend in education as a powerful tool in the hands of state as also literature, has been to toe the line of thought propounded by the ruling class or classes. Media – even the so-called independent media with very few honourable exceptions, is no departure. There is a reason. The first and foremost field to work for the state is to control the thought process of the people through a cunning manipulation of education and propaganda of channels. An American scholar of international repute in one of his latest treatise 'Power and Prospects', Noam Chomsky quotes David Hume who expounding the First Principle of Government observed that the 'Rulers must ultimately rely on controlling thought.... This maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments as well as to the most free and most

popular.' As if to warn readers to take every writing with a pinch of salt, Noam Chomsky quotes Bakunin who cautioned that "the new class of intellectuals would follow one of the two parallel paths. They might seek to exploit popular struggles to take state power into their own hands, becoming a 'red bureaucracy' that will impose the most cruel and vicious regime of history or they might perceive that power lies elsewhere and offer themselves as its 'brought priesthood', serving the real master either as managers or apologists, who beat the people with the people's stick in the state capitalist democracies."(Power and Prospects-88-).1

There is no mistaking of the fact that the dominating philosophy or idea of the time in every phase of human development has subserved the fundamental interest of the commanding forces at a given point of time in history so far. So, the fact demands that we should be wary while evaluating any piece or any literateur to fathom the truth in its various ramifications. As is understood, an accomplished literateur is a master craftsman of human relations, vision and passions in the effort to mould the course of social movement, subtly exposing the pitfalls, bearing the odds and extolling the cherished values. Beyond fantasies, literature has come to a mature stage of one grappling with realities of social life, diverse in nature. But a fractured society can only reflect fractured reality which only a genius craftsman is capable to depict in its truly comprehensive form, which again is a rare phenomena even in modern literature. What generally is being churned out falls in the category which seems to plead for partial reality and half truths. Barring a sizeable segment of light 'entertainment seekers' duly pampered by market forces and commercial interests through thriller cum sex-crime fiction in the shape of novels available on pavements and platforms, it is universally accepted that art-in-literature has a social bearing – more effective than any other tool to shape the very thought process of society down to depth at a given time leaving its mark on both head and heart. The ability rests with the craftsman as to how far he or she remains steadfast and honest to the belief or conviction so advanced to give credence to ones story woven around factual play of forces in the society and projected through characteristics of players developed therein. However, the craftsman may remain detached himself or herself from active social or political movement of the time his or her creation in the form of literature but cannot remain sterile with mere depiction or projection of perceived 'reality' but simultaneously must carry some social value system to touch the cord of readers.

Women constitute nearly half of global population and in importance, cannot in anyway be under-rated in principle or otherwise, inspite of her relatively weak physical strength in comparison to males. It is in the fitness of things that woman occupies her prominent place in literature. In the earlier of literature, however, she had been replete with glorification as if dutiful woman as a mother, sister or a wife as her virtues. Literature, including the art of novel, then helped to strengthen the virtues of a 'pativrata' as the base of a harmonious family life, inculcating values which were primarily patriarchal in nature and hardly ever forgot depicting woman as the center-piece of entertaining in fine art. It is also for nothing that a good part of literature today is riveting attention to prop crash 'individualism' as the core of feminist campaign.

Having lost the battle against the emerging forces of social development with the advent of stable property in private hands, matriarchy gave a way to the extra-powerful man i.e. patriarchy opening a period of slavery then a long inning to absolute monarchy with husbandry, agriculture and craftsmanship as the main profession dominating the stage. Community, face-to-face community conceded an important part of its responsibilities to family as the basic foundation block of social structure under the new requirements, and woman a secondary place to man in the bargain. Literature of this period helped to inculcate the compatibility of this inequality as natural in the scheme of things which previously sang rhymes for virtues of women under matriarchy. It was through literature that the

battle of mind was won for absolute monarchy with such principles as 'Divine Right of King' to prevail, with such lasting effect as to give credence to autocracy and dynastic rule to this day.

To recount : patriarchy in itself was never sacrosanct, neither ordained absolute; it was the product of a definite historical play of forces in a specific period of development in human relations, in the same way as matriarchy had its day.

As we have noted earlier it was the emergence of stable property and not man, which thrust matriarchy in the dustbin of history and brought patriarchy to the fore; though it came riding on the soldiers of man. Property, with an innocuous face, rode rough-shod on the man to command. On the basis of plunder of India modern England was built up. This fact blasts the myth studiously built around and hammered constantly since then that British rule had opened the flood-gate of civilization to India.

In the process of consolidating their colonial rule after getting strong foothold the British imperialists assiduously had crafted the administrative structure and an education system to serve the imperial objective of smooth blunder and loot, simultaneously demolishing the native social structure and values supplanting these with the British culture of industrial variant.

India celebrated Golden Jubilee of its 'independence'. But how far we have grown independent in terms of language, education, culture and values apart from having our own development model, is a moot question; so much so the whole administrative structure of colonial period as well as the scheme are merely constitution of the same old medicine. Our academic courses carry the same old band of thoughts basically. In the circumstances, then, if our teachers preach and cultivate the same old standards, there is hardly any surprise.

Broadly, with this background if someone English educated writer has consciously freed himself or herself and cultivated an independent value system in tune with native aspirations in the modern world, praises to him or her, on this account is well deserved. However, in this context it is pertinent to delineate what are native values and aspirations which go contrary to European or American values. As victims of worst exploitation and oppression from a colonial past, Indians can not rest their aspirations based on expropriation, in justice, violence and indignity to human beings, disrespect to life and self-rule for a civilized existence to every nation according to its ability. In addition, India can not afford to repeat the fatal experiences of a 'civilization' based on greed and crash individualism. The industrial mode of production and inverted distribution leading to a crises-ridden, iniquitous social set up exemplified by the West can not be a model to copy with its disastrous consequences all around.

In essence, the pace of industrialisation depends on freely available labour on hire at cheaper rates, both male and female. Pre-requisites for fulfilling these requirements are; first, that labour is made surplus by converting agriculture as non-viable through fixing lower entitlements and thus creating a 'reserve army' of unemployed available on cheap rates at demand , infusing self-centralism for their sheer survival and 'liberating' them from emotional attachment with family or particular person, instilling more allegiance to capital and its master, instead. Allegiance to family and community becomes inconsequential in the process. If the institution of marriage is eroded, highlighting its futility to remain tied to one man or woman for life, nothing is better than this to have a dependent and depraved servant ready to act on bidding. Such individualism is the hall mark of industrial mode of life. It needs its own discipline, mores and culture to serve the interests of capital, based on master-servant relationship, while earlier mode under pre-industrial phase of patriarchy was structured on self-sufficient village economy based on common family or community labour which was not available for hire outside. So, freedom in this context have come to mean nothing more than breaking this 'bond of familial relationship' based on emotional attachment and be available on hire with 'master-servant relationship' based on slavery, in its place. Freedom from husband or wife for adopting sex on hire with

ones choice or selection is the new norm of this 'liberty'. Whom it serves best, ruler or ruled, is the moot question, again. It is not surprising that, in step with its logic, the social object of human existence too have come to mean 'development of the individual'; naturally on the strength of capital or property which is a scarce commodity day by day for the majority, as its law of operation ordain.

As pointed out earlier, the present day society is running into the domain of finance capital which is heavily speculative and corny in nature, highly volatile and unscrupulous in expropriation and sweep. This is the global phenomena today with India being no exception. Creation of wealth has become the art of manipulation rather than hard labour. Such new 'professions' are created which can give easy access to more wealth than what was available previously, like tourism with attached sex industry in tow, fashion parades and cosmetics with modeling as a charming vocation, advertisement and film, alcoholics and lotteries alongwith many more such fields are now open for better investment rather than food and clothing, for better lucrative 'industries' to earn super-profit, with no meaningful addition to the wealth of nation, as the manufacturing industry did previously, reducing the status of women to more commodity and her sex as also her charm converted cunningly as object of entertainment and comfort as Japanese Army did during its imperial days of occupation during Second World War, in addition to seller of labour-power alongwith her male companion. Definitely this situation is qualitatively different from the entertainment which a handful of rich or the rulers used to extract from courtesans, keeps and devdasis in feudal times earlier. It hardly had affected the common mass in mores and values. It is a mockery of common intelligence to claim that woman, as a category, has progressed because of western thought while her position is turned more vulberable to exploitation and manipulation to subserve the interest of profit.

It was only at a very large stage of development in property relations that feminism came on the scene. In Europe the cult of romantic love which assumes recognition of woman as individual started the attempt at feminine assertion as amplified in the Book of the City of Ladies by Christine de Pizan in 1405. It offered a defence of woman and demanded right to intellectual life. Christine de Pizan, settled in France was perhaps the first woman to become a professional writer who wrote more than 20 distinguished works on political life in France and the defence of woman. Still the defence of woman by then had not taken the form of movement, neither the concept of feminism took shape. The renaissance period in Europe, though, instilled the urge 'equality' and women too began aspiring who after long struggle got the right to vote in West. Literature of the period duly reflected this dichotomy of relations in the society. But nothing more. Time probably had not come for crass individualism to assert in favour of dissolving the institution of marriage and family which feminism of late variety has come to advocate.

In a word it can be said that today's feminist movement is the outcome of a long struggle which has accompanied the evolution of the western society from feudalism to capitalism of moderate liberal vantage to its present rapacious phase. Since the 'development of the writings is intimately connected with the growth of the bourgeoisie in a modern capitalist system', presentation of women characters in literature, particularly in fiction, can hardly be fully appreciated or even understood without evaluating its socio-economic background. Feminism thus is a concept from western society with highly institutionalized individualism to its account, and our problem is to examine why certain ideas crop up at a particular period in time, to have a better understanding of its ramifications.

The divergence over approach apart, the substance of feminism boils down to a response to harsh social and economic realities. Most of these have focused on problems of sexuality and identity. Sexual freedom, sexual preferences, abortion, figure prominently in public consciousness of the implications of feminism. She pleads that young women must be trained to support themselves,

preferably by work that draws upon their talents and enhances their self respect. All said; liberty, equality, assertion of self and sexual freedom constitute the core of feminism as it grew in West during its grey period of industrial culture to throw away those familial bonds which hamper its quest for atomization of social relations in search of economic gains.

The emergence of English education writers mostly charmed with the ethos of industrial culture of England and later widely of Europe and America now brought significant changes in the middle class life-style and yearnings, like free love and pre-marital and extra-marital sex as the embodiment of liberty from tradition- conservative syndrome. Writers specially women writers with English education full of western ethos as the make-belief symbol of modernism, having experienced different phases of women in different roles in life or evaluated on the borrowed criteria, have reflected the same in their writings including fiction.

Indian patriarchy is a mixed bag, more so because in social structure it is still difficult to find anything 'Indianness' about it. The country has a varied social structure from one ethnic group to another. The extreme opposite of matrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal North Indian joint family co-exist with matrilineal and matrilocal family organization of Garos, Khasis in Assam Nanyars on the Malabar Coast of Kerala.

The social processes that we are taking place in India will remain incomprehensible, if one does not see them in the context of a historical and cultural development. The concept like 'Tradition' is empty and does not convey anything about the manner in which the past operates in present and shapes it. To understand patriarchy in Indian context one has to study objectively the past and present structure and mores of the family placed under its immediate community and intra-family relationships which determine the role performances of man and woman. It is not worthy that exclusion of women from all economic and intellectual activity was a criterion of status for higher castes in India who were the law givers and apostle of Brahmanical codes of social norms; women of lower castes/classes had to contribute to the family's livelihood and nobody ever had the idea of regarding their work in the fields, later in factories, workshops and now in service sectors, as incompatible with their roles as wives, mothers and house-keepers. Social evils like sati, purdah with sex enslavements were pronounced in such twice-born-castes who lived by the labour of others. These castes, specially the Brahmins were also those who profited most from the new opportunities offered by the British colonial regime; from western education and new job opportunities in the colonial administration.

The difficult position of women under patriarchy has attracted attention of Indian writers no less since Renaissance, though it is true that here, in contrast to West, the voice raised was against social evils and prejudices and discrimination relation to women. It pleaded for participation of women in social activities and championed for their education. Almost all protagonists of the cause were males and the absence of strident protest from females against dominant 'patriarch' or male chauvinism with replace model of sexual independence laced by revolt against the institution of family was striking, as we find in England at the end of nineteenth century. The reason seems to be the fact that the movement in Indian was not the product of industrial mode, with its stress of individualism and free-labour as was the case in West. In India the condition was ripening for a movement against colonial rule and the context was for 'unity'. The situation, however, altered after the attainment of independence when it opened the lid on urges for industrial growth with replace model from the West, markedly American paradigm of development with its concurrent social mores as a glaring allurements of self. The continuing education patterned by the erstwhile British rulers provided fertile ground for this paradigm to sprout now serviced by in glee English Educated writers, with few honourable exceptions.

It is by now well recognized by that the West is experiencing a serious disruption in their social

life which is the necessary result of industrialization, fed by colonial loot. This mode is sustained by a hegemonic system of financial oligarchy over rest of the world still with dehumanized structure leading to combative crass individualism in their own society. The question is being raised in many circles here whether it was wise to copy this mode in India after gaining independence or the country should have gone for an indigenous fresh mode taking advantage of the negative experience of the western world, including Soviet Union. Many thinkers admit that the model suggested by Mahatma Gandhi too was not viable. And no effort was made to craft a fresh one in spirit with the genius of India. In this context to emulate the concepts and norms of feminism as propounded in western world and agitate for these through literature is a matter with serious implications, they allude.

During the post – independence era it is Mulk Raj Anand who takes up cudgel on behalf of Indian women whom he describes as the poorest of the poor : Starting from 1935 onwards he has portrayed the evils of British imperialism and depicting the despicable condition of poors like sweepers, coolies and plantation workers and Indian women. “The Old Women and the Cow has an interesting female character, Gauri. This novel is unique among Indian novels in rejecting rather than extolling the time honoured womanly virtues of patience and submission.”² Balachandra Rajan is another important writer whose contribution to the study of women in Indian fiction is significant. He is pioneering in the sense that he took interest in psychological novels for revaluation of values. Together with Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan Raja Rao is the third of the trio who form the group of elder novelists in English. Bhabani Bhattacharya presents the Indian woman as the pure woman in his novels. His each novel is set against the backdrop of some challenging theme, of national importance. Narayan hints to us that liberty carried too far, either on the male or on the female side, tends to be negative and nihilistic. Kamla Markandaya has a varied repertoire of women characters in her fiction, on a quest for autonomy. She has been accused of tailoring her material to fit a western life. Anita Desai depicts through her fiction of radical female resistance against a patriarchally defined concept of norms. She brings fresh insight to the sexist nature of the issue of sanity. She portrays a deeply felt and suffered rebellion against the entire system of relationship, while Ruth Jhabvalamis lauded for being detached ironic standing novelist in English. Her uncanny grasp of human relations and concern for gender oppression with subtle exposure of the repressed position of woman in a male dominated society is remarkable contribution in English fiction. Among her contemporary peers stands Shashi Deshpande.

Feminism draws its strength from ‘individualism’ at its highest peak in existentialism from Jean Paul Sartre of late twentieth century when capital has shifted its focus on financial field of operation from earlier manufacture, in its phase of acute crisis. “Existentialism took shape as a culmination of this trend of thought, in individualist values; “Being and nothingness” being the cardinal word of this latest trend though Sartre himself was compelled to admit later that it was not possible to erect a system of discipline encompassing all the phenomena of the material world only on the basis of the conception of “being and nothingness”.³ Feurbach and Sartre both are influenced by the concept of an ‘absolute independent entity’. With a similar method of thinking Feurbach’s humanism took shape in the early stages of industrial revolution, Sartres existentialism came in the era of acute crisis of capitalism after reaching at the peak. Every one has a separate entity or existence in the society – this, according to existential philosophy is the existence of the independent entity of the individual even though in a relationship with space-time. They believe in the absolute free existence of individuality. According to it, the freedom of choice of the individual should not be interfered with, whatever be the reaction of the individual’s conduct on herself/himself or on the society. In the opinion of Sasrtre ‘individual are condemned to freedom’, in a flash of ultra-conception of individual freedom. Sartre considers that the very question of morality is irrelevant and meaningless.

In India the entire social system is envisaged essentially comprising a number of families. Outside the family it is inter-family relationships rather than inter-personal relationships which are emphasised and provide the binding force. Such a web of relationships is ideal for a stable social system with a balanced set of duties and obligations of members within the family and interfamily relationships outside in an ever widening series of circles comprising the larger social system.

The emotional bond between the wife and the husband which takes shape after marriage as also between other members in the family is a hall-mark of Indian families even in case of arranged marriages.

The human nature is not all negative. If he or she is a social animal the only reliable flora which fashions him or her in this role is the family in its informal structure and none else so faithful. Dr. Amartya Sen, the current Nobel laureate has to say this on the nature of man including woman: "man has the capacity to derive happiness not only from his own consumption, but also from the satisfaction of other people's wants. It is this trait that offers a way out of the impasse that the economics of welfare had reached by proceeding too narrow path. Welfare is not identical with the provision for one's own wants."4

It is a matter of concern for all that there is a rise in the rate of sex-crime with the rise in the rate of education, during the last fifty years of our social endeavour. Is there any amiss somewhere in our system of education or as a nation have we gone more sex-hungry? In this context one question is nagging: what is the object of sex and sexual relation between the genders? If sex is a biological function, as the animal world amply exhibit, then in that case the object of sexual relation between woman and man can be nothing other than procreation – fulfilling the goal of self-renewal. To seek entertainment in sex is nothing short of turning it to commodity. Full-fledged commercialisation is the next corollary of such an ideological flip-flop.

The slogan for the freedom of sex is another slip of the feminist movement. It is like pleading for return to polygamous or polygynist set up in a way the slogan concede to the amorous depravity of some males, when majority of them have habitually adopted a restrained sexual relation confined to the wife. The demand for freedom of sex virtually have restricted the ambit of feminism to a small circle of upper middle class.

Assertion of one's right is very essential for any just cause and assertion even to the extent of rebellion for dignity and equitable entitlement has enjoyed social sanction throughout human history, notwithstanding any edict of law or sermon. Matriarchy proved short of stamina to the call of history and paved way for patriarchy to take reins. Patriarch, in turn, can not now answer the requirements of just and equitable world, in terms of male-female relations. Polygamy, polyandry or bigamy gave way to monogamy for good reasons and not merely to provide 'sons'. It served the society in many ways and everything as a result of monogamy was not evil. Promiscuity either by male or female can not be pleaded in any way as something liberating to either. Neither it can be established that it is man alone who is promiscuous. Nonetheless, taking promiscuity of man as a ground for female promiscuity or vice-versa may at best be an argument of either a lumpen or diseased. The assertion of self or to describe it as such for sexual promiscuity is a proposition with a negative aptitude, which is neither healthy nor liberating in any form. Moreover, the society is to go ahead from the present. It can not recede back for good. Such notions thus can not be base for propositions of a healthy feminist thought. If purdah is bad, nudity can not be a bliss either, assertion for right of one or the other can hardly be described worthy. To fall victims regularly to the requirements of garments industry rather than requirements of our bodies is the tragedy of our times and to assert for exercising such absurdities may hardly qualify for a balanced mind. When emotional bonds are loose and respect for human values is

less between husband and wife, economic independence of both hardly provides a stable cementing factor in their relations to last. Similar is the position with regard to aging parents and their siblings including young daughter-in-laws even in richest families. Well-reasoned social philosophy correctly avers that economic determination is hardly sufficient or efficient to solve human relations. And valueless conduct can not breed social peace and harmony. It applies to both, males and females. To assert otherwise is the doom ultimately for both as social history testify abundantly. Assertion of one-self, cutting directly the assertion of another self, is a cause for perpetual destruction, which hardly is the craving of any one. Assertion for self, then, has to be in respect of the assertion of another citizen in interaction, and the social good.

Patriarchy has done violence to woman, but not necessarily the man. To equate the two is evil or ignorance of history. Some section of men in hierarchy happily became tool of such a violent history. If some woman rose into this hierarchy, she was no less evil to woman. These are the boots of patriarchy which forbade disaster. One writer emphasizes that "male and female are part of a biological continuum and not polar opposites."⁵ The cause which basically gave rise to patriarchy long back, now again, is pushing woman rapidly to the status of a commodity in the market more than her male colleague; first as a relatively cheap labour and then as an object of entertainment for its high spinning sex-industry, advertisements and modelling busily supported by cosmetic and fashion and tourist industries. This is her tragedy. Feminism as a philosophy of women's liberation, can not girdle around these issues any more. And self-assertion of women has to target these enemies rather than 'man' in their quest for human dignity and just entitlements. "Nobody would debate... that a woman should get the opportunity for self actualisation and to work and earn if she feels it necessary. This is, no doubt, necessary but not enough nor so crucial for achieving equality in status with men. By emphasizing women's right to work what we have achieved is recognition of her ability to work like a man, her ability and talent for the same jobs that men have to do."⁶ So far so good. Today the primary feminist concern is women's equality and this concept of equality should demand a status of dignity minus her position as an entertainment commodity. Collective assertion on this point is seriously lacking, more so in feminist literature.

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