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Postmodern Feminism And Ms. Draupadi Kuru

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Abstract

The postmodern feminism revolves around the ideas of inclusivity and individual experiences; breaking the gender norms, rejecting the conventional roles, and redefining social standards set for women. The novel, Mrs. Draupadi Kuru portrays the similar themes by bringing in the female characters from Mahabharata to the present day world. Their journey and exploration in the modern world make them to redefine their identity by self reflecting their trauma and experiences of their past life in the present day life. This paper explores the postmodern feminist ideals in the novel by identifying the progress and change in the characters and how they redefined their identity and their life's based on their choice. Foucault's perception about power, role of media, discourse and the social construction helps to analyse the text to highlight how power is operated by the means of discourse and how femininity is socially constructed. Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler and Helen Cixous focuses on the identity, patriarchy, discourse and culture and this paper reflects their key concepts by analysing the text.

Key Words: Feminism, Identity, Redefine, Inclusivity, Gender.

Introduction

Feminism in literature has been ground for discussing and showcasing the gender inequalities and acting as a critique of women's rights. Postmodern feminism emerged as a branch of feminism influenced by poststructuralist and postmodernist thoughts. It focuses on the women's perspectives and challenges the patriarchal norms and stereotypes. It encourages to embrace the differences while finding the commonalities. It strives to question the universal female identity or experiences and states how gender can be fluid and shaped by society, culture, language, discourse and power relations. The elements of postmodernism like fragmentation, self-reflection, rejecting the conventional norms, and believing that "identity and behaviour is socially constructed" are reflected in the feminist movement during the 1970's.

The novel, Ms. Draupadi Kuru has women redefining their identity and embracing their uniqueness while overcoming challenges posed by society set the stage for the studying the postfeminist features. This paper reflects upon the progress of characters throughout the novel in the postmodern society and about the challenges they face. In literature, postmodern feminism portrays the fragmented narratives, multiple viewpoints, performance, experimental forms, and breaking down the traditional gender norms.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism movement started as a reaction against the modernism in the late 20th century. While modernism is based on finding reason, universal truths, grieving over current reality and hoping for better future. The term first appeared in the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by Jean Francois Lyotard in 1979. The movement focused on the skepticism, fragmentation of society, rejection and suspension of general truth, questioning the conventional order. The works of postmodernism have unreliable narrators, irony, intertextuality, pastiche, metafiction, and unstable reality. It rejected the notion of single objective reality and grand narrative. It promotes the diversity, inclusivity, and the notion that reality is constructed through language, culture and power. Theorists like Jean Lyotard, Roland Barthes, Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard played a major role in defining the elements of postmodern theory.

Feminism

Feminism as a movement started in the 19th century to fight against gender based inequalities. Feminism in literature refers to the representation, exploration and experiences of women in the literary works which reflects the practical world. It examines the historical significance of role of women in society and how they faced the challenges. It also highlights the gender stereotypes and women's voices and perspectives, and fights for equality. Before 19th century women were marginalized and considered secondary. The publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstencraft, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf and *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir revolutionised the movement and many more female writers are added to the list to provoke the reader to realise the disparities posed by society.

Elaine Showalter, an American critic who became famous for her concept of gynocriticism, broke down the 'female literary tradition' through three phases. The first phase as "feminine" is about imitation of dominant traditions and female writers using pseudonyms to publish their works. The second phase as "feminist" where women protested against inequalities and the third phase as "female" where women became self-aware.

Postmodern feminism calls attention to diversity, inclusivity and encourages multiple voices and perspectives from different race, class and sexuality. Luce Irigaray, a French feminist and cultural theorist states that language pattern is gendered where the dominance of men and subjectivity of women is showcased. ~~she encourages acknowledging the sexual differences and allow women to represent themselves to create their own identity.~~ Judith Butler, an American philosopher states that "gender is performative" which means gender is not static but keeps changing over time based on the circumstances. Butler asserts that power shapes our perception of gender and urges feminists to stop defining 'women' and focus on the power structure. Helen Cixous, a French Writer explored the sexual differences. She reinterpreted myths and analysed the portrayal of women.

Literature Review

There are several notable books on reinterpretation of Draupadi's story which explore the life of Draupadi in different perspectives. *The Palace of Illusion* by Chitra Banerjee, *The Story of Draupadi* by Pratibha Ray, *Draupadi: The Tale of an Empress* by Saiswaroopa Iyer, *Draupadi: The Sati Series* by Koral Dasgupta, *Draupadi: The Queen of Fire* by Arun Maji, *The Cult of Draupadi* by Alf Hiltebeitel, *Yuganta: The End of an Epoch* by Irawati Karve, *The Book of Yudhisthir* by Buddhadeva, *Draupadi: The Fire-Born Princess* by Saraswathi Nagpal, and *Krishna and Draupadi: The Unending Boon* edited by Rohit Bhatia are notable works which revolve about Draupadi and her role in Mahabharata.

They explore the challenges she faced and questions the rationality of society. The conventional norms and rigid cultural roles made women vulnerable to protest and voice out their opinions and emotions. Understanding the mythical women and their problems from a postmodern perspective brings out new dimensions to identify the root cause for gender based discrimination.

Ms. Draupadi Kuru

The novel presents the female characters of Mahabharata seeking the permission of Krishna to visit the modern world. So, Draupadi, Amba, Kunti and Gandhari comes to the present day world and encounters an interreligious family and comes across a lot of things which changes their perspectives about life.

Draupadi takes up a talk show, Kunti wants to make it up for Karma and serves at an orphanage, Amba finds love and Gandhari doesn't want to adapt to the modern world. While they find certain things mesmerising, few things remained unchanged. On one hand there are progressive women like Sania and Angela and on the other hand there are women like Shanta who are vulnerable and needs help. At the end of the novel Draupadi, Kunti, and Amba decides to live in the modern world and adapt their new life while Gandhari decides to go back to heaven.

Breaking Gender Stereotypes

Contemporary Literature challenges the conventional gender norms and portrays women as an equal to men. "De Beauvoir explores the construction of femininity, emphasizing the societal relegation of women to the "other" and the impact of such categorization on their roles." The women in the epic were constrained to societal roles and faced impediments when they wanted to go against them. Draupadi is always described as fearless and unpredictable. She is an exceptional character who has no traits at par with the other women of her period. She doesn't hesitate to speak her mind under any circumstances and she remained true to her character even in the modern world. When Amba, Kunti and Gandhari were harassed on the road, she did not think twice to fight with them. She became voice for Shanta to question the injustice.

"Butler challenges the binary view of gender, introducing the concept of performativity and arguing that gender is a social construct performed through repeated actions." The role of women has changed and evolved. Women started stepping out and taking up job opportunities equal to men. Women like Sania and Angela doesn't hesitate to speak their mind and follow their dreams. Angela even broke the glass ceiling and lead a team in the media.

Redefining Social Standards for Women

The traditional roles of women such as being a caregiving, naïve, selfless and obedience were imposed on women from a very long time. The contemporary world is witnessing a change in the social expectations and norms to a great extent. We witness that Sania and Angela are not judged by the society for their choice. But Sania's mother tries to holdback her freedom and stick to the social standards meant for women. Draupadi, Amba and Kunti are facing the impediments of society along with enjoying the newly gained freedom. Draupadi is always portrayed as a victim but here we see her a woman with lot of potent and strength to stand up for herself and also for others. We also see that Kunti does not care about how society treats for having a child outside marriage. She only cares for her son, Karan and want to give him the best to make it up for what she could not do earlier.

Inclusivity

The experiences of women vary based on various characteristics. So, considering the different identities based on gender, class, race, and color, fostering the sense of empathy and solidarity is essential. Creating an environment of respect and freedom for women to be their true self without being judged or discriminated boosts their confidence. The women in the novel are supportive for each other and stand for each other to fight against the society. When Kunti wanted to do whatever possible to give better life to Karan and when Amba wanted to marry and lead a normal life, they were not supported initially. But gradually, all the women in the novel came together to support their decisions.

Embracing Femininity

The feminine energy spreads throughout the novel with all kinds of women embracing their femininity. We see that Draupadi and Amba adored the modern costumes and make up and enjoy the party. Amba was glorified for her beauty but did not find the need to showcase it by becoming a model. Amba finally feels what it means to be loved and explores her sexuality. Kunti embraces her motherly love for her son. They propagated a sense of sisterhood by caring for each other. With all these women nurturing themselves and others forgetting all the society's expectations and judgements, truly stands for feminism.

Conclusion

The postmodern feminism focuses on accepting that the experiences of women define them. The urge to break the social expectations and standards is presented by the writers and theorists. The novel, Ms. Draupadi Kuru strives to present the women and their struggles in the modern world and how they battle their own problems. The traditional roles of women are no more imposed. The patriarchal social norms are slowly disappearing and they are replaced by empathy and solidarity. Discrimination and injustice are still prevalent but the attempt to achieve an egalitarian society is carried out by everyone in the novel. The women in the novel are not scared or worried about being judged by others and embrace their true self. Finally, the women from the epic could find love, support and freedom in the modern world.

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