

**A Study on the Paradigm Shift in Functions of Literature Encompassing the  
Significant Contribution by Female Writers to the Field of Literature**

**Dr. K. Subapriya,**

Asst.Professor, PG and Research Department of English,  
Pachaiyappa's College, Chetpet, Chennai, Tamilnadu, India.

E.mail: [dr.subapriyakannan@gmail.com](mailto:dr.subapriyakannan@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

For ages English literature was under the reign of male kingdom. It took immense effort for the female writers to break the boundary and breach the shore of English literature. Women from different parts of the world have made significant contribution to the field of English literature. Individually analysing their contribution is a giant task and it involves vast potential. Therefore, this paper aims to provide a detail study on the female writers' contribution in bringing a significant change in reshaping the notion, role and the functions of literature. Traditionally literature was attributed with some functions but due to the arrival of women's writing and their contribution to the field of literature, the term 'literature' has gained new momentum. This paper ventures to list down some of the leading and significant contribution of female writers in redesigning the functions of literature. The paper further aims to present them as a path breaker who has set a new trend.

Key words: English Literature, Functions of Literature, Feminism, Super women syndrome.

## **A Study on the Paradigm Shift in Functions of Literature Encompassing the Significant Contribution by Female Writers to the Field of Literature**

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

- Maya Angelou

In case of English literature for ages the art of writing laid in the hands of men rather than women. English women remained marginalised, voiceless and subordinated to men especially in the field of literature. Even a Queen like Elizabeth who is well-known for patronizing arts and literature herself has not produced any work of literature. History has not documented any such works of renowned Queen Elizabeth. Such was the case until writers like Aphra Benn, Jane Austen and George Eliot sprouted to sow the seeds of women writers in the field of English literature. The seeds of English literature by women writers were deeply sown in the field of England and due to the colonization when English language spread its winged seeds throughout the world, the art of producing indomitable English literary works by women from different parts of the world was made possible.

The winged seeds of English literary works by women writers began to fly high in the sky with multiple colors. The works with emotions, feelings and subjugated voice began to throng in the field of English literature. A belief exist among the women writers about the expression of women thoughts by men. According to them, a man can never understand and express the thoughts and emotions of a woman. In fact, at times even the language itself is blamed for the lack of words to express the feel of a woman. The insufficiency of language at times is felt and expressed by women writers who strongly believes that as language was designed by men in a patriarchy society, it has never provided space for woman's thought and expression. Surpassing all the barriers, now one could evidence the victory of women in the field of English literature who proudly holds the top positions with most popular acclaimed awards.

No wonder female writing has served both the field of literature and for themselves. On one hand significant works flow in the field of literature and on the other hand writing serves as a therapy for women. It cleanses, purifies, heals and strengthens the women. This therapy kindles the creativity and keeps them afresh and lively. Currently one could observe that female writers in the field of English literature are a melting pot with multi-culture background. Their writings are mosaic in nature as their experiences are different based on the color, culture, creed and nation. At times their literary works are commonly examined for aspects like voicelessness and subjugation but even then it differs according to the cross section of the society. All this multiple diverse nature of suffering, thoughts, emotions and feelings from different parts of the world together has contributed to the strong development of English literature.

Philip Sidney in his work *The Defence for Poesy* stated that the main function of the literature is to 'teach' and 'delight'. This function has been further significantly reconstituted by female writers in the world of literature. More than to teach and delight, literature by women writers have added the following functions,

1. To voice out the voicelessness of the marginalised (women)
2. Creating an identity for women
3. Changing the perspective i.e considering Women as an object only to be gazed.
4. Demanding a social responsibility among the readers to solve the serious issue prevailing among women.
5. Transforming history (his/story) into her story.

To begin with voicing out for women, an attempt to voice for the rights led to the development of movement like Feminism. The outcome of feminism is a drastic step

in approaching the sphere of woman. The forthcoming paragraphs will discuss feminism and its other off-shoot notions.

Feminism:

A major contribution by women writers through literature is the offspring Feminism. It remains popular among all the '-ism'. Feminism has drawn both the optimistic and pessimistic criticism. However, the undercurrent purpose of any feminism is to establish oneself as a woman. Its main idea is not to subordinate men as a few so called feminist thinks and believe. Many waves of feminism arouse with different concepts but all were interconnected with a common theme of empowerment of women. Various kinds of feminism like liberal, radical, Marxist, cultural and Eco-feminism sprouted in shattering the infra-structure built by men's writing in literature.

Man-woman relationship:

Another key factor that became a major source of discussion due to feminism is the man-woman relationships. Woman is no more a second sex. The narration began to evolve from feminist perspective and it presented what she thinks and needs. The attitude of men in treating women was well portrayed in multiple forms of female writings. The patriarchy set up and the norms dictated by society for the behaviour of women was raised question.

The second aspect is the women's venture to create an identity for themselves through literature. The search for the identity of women in writings led to the following impact like breaking the notion of superwoman syndrome and quest for an individual identity.

Superwoman syndrome:

Writing by women broke yet another notion of exhibiting a woman as an angel or a superwoman. Men's writing perpetually presented women as icon of beauty and perfection. All the heroines in fiction and drama are absolutely beautiful and she is the essence of poetry. She is presented as a flawless beauty by men whereas women writing presented a fact that she too is a mere human being who has her own desire follies and foibles. The irony is that in reality though women underwent various distresses it was not completely presented in men's writing. Women's writing threw open a new arena where it added a message that despite all the turmoil, she can shine herself. Superwoman syndrome was totally shattered.

Quest for an individual identity:

Female writing called for an individual identity. A woman is always known by a surname, father's name, husband's name or the mother of a particular child by name. She lacked individuality and there was always a lacuna inside her. Female writing kindled such notion of identity. It raised a strong question regarding her presence in this world. The search for an individual identity led to the notions like her/story and Ethno Gyno centric portrayals.

Her-story:

A key change occurred in the narration/perspective when women started to engrave their stories addressing their key issues like quest for identity, freedom, space and rights. History which was once only his/story transformed into her/story. The history was no more only from an andro-centric perspective. Gyno-centric writings flushed in storming the age old ideologies questioning the authority of one particular gender's domination over the other. It led to the evolving of new ideas like 'Doubly-colonized', 'object of gaze' and stereotypic presentations of women.

Ethno Gyno centric writing:

In the term ethno-centricism ‘ethno’ means ‘nation, people or cultural grouping’ and the Latin word centric means ‘centre’. The writing that centres the ethnic group is called as ethno centric writing. An off-shoot of ethno-centric writing called as Ethno Gyno centric writing evolved in the field of multi-ethnic literature. The Ethnic oral narration documented as testimony by the writers from the narrations of the first nation men and natives was again overcome by the perspective presented through the women of a particular ethnic group. The experience of ethnic men and ethnic women are not one and the same. Therefore the voice of the ethnic women has to be taken into consideration. This resulted in Ethno Gyno centric writing.

Though the genres of women’s writing vary, their key issues are one and the same. As different rivers finally merge into the sea, the different forms of writing by women have brought in a sea change in the functions of literature. The plight of women is immense as Alice Walker in her work “In Search of Mother’s Garden” sums up as follow,

When we have pleaded for understanding, our character has been distorted;  
when we have asked for simple caring, we have been handed empty  
inspirational appellations, then stuck in the farthest corner. When we asked  
for love, we have been given children. (405)

A woman’s writing demands for equality and respect. It passes a strong message that they are not a mere object to be gazed. Further, it also demands a social responsibility among the readers to solve the serious issue prevailing among women. It emphasises men to play a key role in the upliftment of women. Their writing insists on the need for the men’s complimentary role to the women. On the whole, the literature of women calls for an awareness among the cross section of the people in society.

Above all to find an outlet, the writing by women is mandatory. From the above discussion it is vividly clear that through the literature written by women, the functions of literature have been expanded. Literature is no more a work that has to be only read for delight and entertainment. This is one of the most significant contributions to the field of literature by women. One has to analyse and approach the literature comprehending these aspects too. Further their writing may add more functions and new concepts to the field of literature.

**Works Referred:**

Connor, Kate O'. "Feminist Approaches to Literature". Web. 24 Dec, 2019.  
<http://writersinspire.org/content/feminist-approaches-literature>

Sidney, Philip. *The Defence of Poesy*. Poetry Foundation. Web. 24 Dec, 2019.  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69375/the-defence-of-poesy>

Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens". Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.