GENDER DISPARITY BEYOND THE HORIZON - A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KISHWAR NAHEED'S "I AM NOT THAT WOMAN" AND MAYA ANGELOU'S "WOMEN WORK"

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at providing a comparative study of two distinct poems written by two different women writers. The poem "I am not the Woman" is written by Kishwar Naheed, a Pakistani woman writer and "Women work" written by the African Black woman, Maya Angelou. Though the writers are from two different cultures and countries, the central idea that they focus is 'Gender inequality'. This paper tries to probe into the two different dimensions of Gender Disparities that are faced by women in general. It also focuses on how women are stereotyped as weaker object in the male dominant society of two different cultures.

KEYWORDS: Gender Inequality, Feminist Theory, Kishwar Naheed, Maya Angelou, Male Dominant Society

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FULL PAPER

Feminist theory tries to project the conflicts that arise due to the gender differences in the society. In society, there occurs a social stratification which means the differences in gender based on the status, power and the privilege. In these aspects, women are mainly targeted as the less privileged gender. Feminist theory as an elongation of feminisms, aims to explain the gender inequality in the society. Gender inequality suggests which gender is more powerful and superior; in many dimensions women are reframed and considered as weakest gender. "Developing an operational definition of gender inequality that on compasses all the dimensions of inequality and is valid across all type of societies at all points in time is an extremely difficult task that remains to be accomplishment" (England 71). The particular society often judge women as inferior and thus they degrade the level of women as mere household workers.

Simon de Beauvoir, a notable feminist also expressed that most of the time women are identified and defined in context to men and not in context with her. That is where gender inequality rises, gender inequality as a theory produced by the feminist philosophers aims to bring an end to the oppression of women. Feminists of different continents address on the varied ways by which the women are dominated in the society. Though the feminist writers express and quote the incidents of male domination over women the astral core point over the horizon is 'gender inequality' or women are inferior'.

The diverse problems of Gender inequality is penned down by numerous feminist writers. Two such women writers that are taken for the study are Kishwar Naheed and Maya Angelou. KishwarNaheed is a feminist Urdu poet. She is from Pakistan and she has written many poetry collections. Naheed was born in India and migrated to Lahore, Pakistan after partition. As a young girl she had witnessed the violence of rape and education

denied to women during partition. In such circumstances she had the will to educate herself. She thought that education is her basic right and received education when girls were not allowed to study. KishwarNaheed was stubborn in developing her intellectual thoughts and that brought her B.A. and M.A. degrees in Economics.

KishwarNaheed has written nearly 12 volumes of poetry that are published both in India and Pakistan. She has also written eight books for children. Her books on children won her the most prestigious UNESCO award. As she has witnessed the struggles of women in both India and Pakistan, she started writing about the problem of gender inequality in her poems. One such poem is 'I am not that woman' which talks about the struggle of women in the dominant society.

The next writer taken for this study is a notable Black feminist writer Maya Angelou. Maya Angelou is a proclaimed African American poet, activist, playwright, auto biographer, actress and composer. To mention about her works, her poetry collection lauds about the strength of the women. Her poem "Women Work" talks about how women are meant and shut behind the house hold chores. This poem was published in her third book of poetry collections 'And still I Rise' which was written in early 1970's but the poem is still a continuum, which fits in for many generations.

Kishwar Naheed and Maya Angelou though from two different countries, their poems have common aspects of gender inequality. Both the poets in their work mention or even prove out their agony toward the male dominated society for creating and projecting women weaker. So Naheed and Maya Angelou endorse the difficulties and hardship faced by women in two different cultures. These two feminist writers stand as representatives and voice out for the rest of the women in their countries.

KishwarNaheed's "I am not that woman" talks about the stereotyping of women that is made by the male dominant society. As Naheed had witnessed harassment during partition, her writings mirror the subjugation of women in the society. In the first stanza of the poem "I am not that woman," Naheed painfully utters that women are considered as mere objects in the society.

- I am not that woman
- Selling you socks and shoes!
- Remember me, I am that one you hid
- In your walls of stone, while you roamed
- Free as the breeze (I am not that woman)

Naheed through these lines brings in the act of gender inequality that was prevailing in her country. In the structure of society, women are considered and placed in the lower level as their main task is only household works.

Gender inequality has taken its forms from the feminist perspectives as a variable to provided equal status and dignity for women in the society. Many feminists have stated that gender and sex are different and a human being cannot be differentiated by the classification of gender. "Gender is different from sex. It is the way in which person is recognized by society or by the person herself or himself, as being "Man" or a "Woman". Sex and gender are not congruent" (Newton, 6). As mentioned, gender and sex cannot determine an individual as strong and weak. As women can also with stand and do the work of men.

Maya Angelou also in her poem "Women Work" brings in the same concept of gender inequality. In the poem, she points out the list of works that are meant to be done by women. The society has established a stand that household

works has to be done only by women. In the poem, she also laments about the hardship of the works done by women in all stages of her life as girl, housewife and mother. Maya Angelou starts the poem by mentioning the works that a woman has to do:

I've got the children to tend
The clothes to mend
The floor to mop
The food to shop
Then the chicken to fry
The baby to drape (Woman Work)

The concept of dividing the works is also done based on the gender. The poem line which is a list of works done by the woman indicates that the male dominant society has fixed that women are supposed to do such household works alone. But Maya Angelou and Kishwar Naheed voice out that women are capable for intellectual works too. It is evident through the achievement of these two great feminist poets who are well educated and have excelled in their intellectual work.

Maya Angelou being a black woman and Kishwar Naheed being an immigrant woman experience the gender inequality in two different cultures. Through their experiences they bring into lime light that the culture and country is not the cause for gender inequality but it is men who create gender inequality.

Different continental feminists address this difficulty in different ways, as the ensuring will demonstrate. Many (including Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz) ground their theories in an acknowledgment of sexual difference, claiming that the bodily difference between men and women, although constructed in significantly diverse ways among various cultures and contexts, nevertheless provide a starting point for the articulation of sexual and gender injustice. (Cahill & Hansen 12-13)

Thus concept of gender inequality has been prevailing in almost all the continents. Overall men have stereotyped women as a household worker.

Kishwar Naheed in her poems also brought in the aspects of custom and tradition that puts down the identity of women. In the poem "I am not that woman", Naheed traces that women are underestimated and branded as burden in many countries. Naheed, in connection with her own tradition she mentions that the act of wearing burka is also an act of checking women's chastity. The society tries to label her as mere object but Naheed lashes out that she is a woman born to shine and blossom. Her poetic lines show the power of her agony:

I am the one you married off
To get rid of a burden
Not knowing
That a nation of captive minds
Cannot be free (I am not that woman)

Naheed pin points that men marry women to reduce their physical work and make women as a complete slave for them. Through the concept of marriage also the gender inequality has taken its shape in the society. Naheed also mentions that the men who are enslaved with the dominant mind cannot think women as their equal.

Gender inequality has affected the development of women. Moreover it prevails in most countries. Sandra L. Bem, the feminist writer coined the term 'gender polarization'. She describes the term as " "Gender polarization" to describe how the world is typically divided into male and female and how this distinction is used to organize our understanding of most aspects of our lives" (Kohlman 12). Bem points out that through stereotyping based gender, there comes gender inequality. Bem also suggests that men and women should be seen as two separate and independent paradigms. The social construction in the society has often paved way for the gender inequality. Maya Angelou's "Woman Work" emphasizes the fact that certain list of works is expected to be done only by women.

The main household works are purely meant as women work. So from the aspect of Family it there starts the division of women's work and men's work. As there is a saying that 'Cleanliness starts from home', so the division of work initiates the sign of gender inequality. In the poem "Woman Work", the women work from morning to night, even during the sun shine, storm and rain. The woman does not have time to take any rest. Maya Angelou opines that when women at home have given the space for her own self and when she is treated with dignity, the women would have shined better in their life. Maya Angelou beautifully pens down the pain of women who are fully occupied with her household chores through below lines

Shine on me, sunshine
 Rain on me, rain
 Fall softly, dew drops
 And cool my brow again
 Storm blow me from here
 With your fiercest wind
 Let me float across the sky
 'till I can rest again. (Woman Work)

Maya Angelou's poem portrays the African American woman who is completely engrossed with her domestic works. She also pin points that the women in the poem wants to take rest which was not possible for her just because of being a woman. Through the poem it is well-established that " "Women Work" reinforces the saying that "women's work is never done" " (Hagen 130)

The lamentation of women due to gender inequality is equally seen in Kishwar Naheed's poem "I am not that Woman". Even through the title Naheed wishes to emphasise that women are not meant to do the prescribed work of men. The gender inequality conflict has made the women as weaker object and as insignificant. The women were not given space to move beyond the domestic work. Naheed also figures out that women are not recognized for their work and also they are not respected for playing their role as wife and mother. The poetic lines

I am the commodity you traded in,

My chasity, my motherhood, my loyalty. (I am not that woman)

Gender inequality goes to its peak when men consider women as one among their commodity. As men often degrade woman that women are capable of work that requires less physical labour. Moreover those men fail to think that women can undergo the greatest pain in the world that is labour pain. Women are also not respected for their motherhood and loyalty.

Kishwar Naheed and Maya Angelou use their poetry as a sword to fight against gender inequality that was predominant in many countries. Though coming from different entities they had the similar experience and thoughts. Both the poems "I am not that women" and "Women Work" project the struggle of women who undergo gender inequality in the male dominant society. Both the writers end their poem on a positive note. It shows that as a woman and also as poet they wanted some reformation in the society.

The final notes of both the poems are similar in pointing out for the equal - ness in life.

Sun,rain,curving sky

Mountain, oceans leaf and stone

Star shine, moon glow

You're all that I can call my own (Woman Work)

Now it is time for me to flower- free.

The woman on that poster, half-naked,

Selling socks, and shoes –

No,no, I am not that woman! (I am not that woman)

These final notes express how women are crushed by the thought of gender inequality. Women want to fly free and shout out that they are not the women that are portrayed by men.

The women in both poems experience struggles in their life but they do not want to stay the same. The women try to break the taboo and wish to excel in all ways possible in their life. Both the poems talk about the sufferings of women due to gender inequality. Maya Angelou and Kishwar Naheed had the strong will power to face the struggles they faced in their life.

Maya Angelou and Kishwar Naheed had the strong sense of compassion that made them to survive the pains they underwent. Though the poems talk about the depression of women due to gender inequality, in the end both the writers bring in a positive thought of overcoming the suffering and gender inequality. As all the feminists voice out for the voiceless, Naheed and Maya Angelo also voice out the act of gender inequality that are faced by many voiceless women.

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