

THE RISING STATUS OF WOMEN IN KIRA COCHRANE'S MODERN WOMEN: 52 PIONEERS

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Abstract

*Since feminism is a social and political movement, it is still a subject of debate and discussion around the world. Throughout the ages, women try to express their position and identity in various ways. The contemporary feminist movement has a great shift from the traditional concepts of feminism. The perception of the empowerment women pinpoints to locate its concentration to enlarge the space of the modern women in the contemporary society. Through the modern women writing, the women writers share the struggles and issues, which women undergo in different life situations. It provides the image of women who break the barriers and the traditional concepts of the patriarchal society and creates a world where women with utmost potential and glittering victories. Kira Cochrane in her *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers* (2017) discloses the figures of 52 women characters those who enrich the world with their potential and excellence. This paper tries to explain how the excellence and nobility of women leads to the empowerment of women in the contemporary society. It is one of the major contributions in the contemporary literature, which joints together the short history of women with extra ordinary achievements where women are reluctant to come forward.*

Keywords: *Feminism, Modern womanhood, patriarchal society, Self-expression, Women empowerment*

Introduction

In the human society, the existence of the inequality between men and women is prominent and the inferior status is assigned to women. Women are considered as the objected to be dominated and to be ruled by the male centred society and the physical, social and political status of women are regarded as the topics to be debated. The history of humanity unveils the fact that the welfare of the society has a parallel relationship with the welfare and the empowerment of women. The role of women is confined to the domestic duties and responsibilities and their role in the public sphere is limited by the dominant male society. The empowerment of women questions the racial discrimination, sexual harassment, and the gender inequality of women. The focus of the women empowerment is mainly equated with the emancipation of women from the control of the patriarchal society.

Feminist writings have a long history to raise the status of women in the patriarchal society. Women writers select various writing methods to lift the condition of women to the mainstream of society. The feminist writers challenge the patriarchal culture by creating strong literary writings. The contemporary feminist writings have a vital role to develop a strong and independent world of women by portraying their great contribution to the society. Women writers have a constant challenge to reinforce their social status in the human world. Literature has a pivotal role to bring forth the struggles and the problems of the women world in front of the readers. The success of the present literary writings related to the empowerment of women is pinpointed as, "The agenda of feminism, therefore, is to understand the social and psychic mechanism that constructs and perpetuates gender inequality, and change it, as much as possible" (Nagarajan, 2006, p. 206).

The Voice for Empowerment in the Modern Feminism

The contemporary writers inspire the modern women to fight against the psychological trauma which they undergo and to break the shackles of inequality which are given by the male dominated society. They give an invitation to challenge the bondages of the male dominated society and to attain physical, emotional and financial freedom in the human world. The venture for attaining the equality and the empowerment of women is a challenging topic throughout literature. The enquiry of women to attain self assertion guides them to fight against the inequalities of the modern society. Schneiders in *With Oil in their Lamps: Faith, Feminism, and the Future* (2000) supports the concepts of liberation of the third wave feminism, "This movement is concerned not simply with the social, political, and economic equality of women with men but with a fundamental

reimagination of the whole of humanity in relation to whole of reality, including non-human creation” (p. 98).

The emancipation of women from social, economical and political realm and the sexual oppression is the focus of the modern women writers. Dr. S. K. Paul in “Feminism: A General Introduction” declares, “As a social movement, feminism largely focuses on limiting or eradicating gender inequality and promoting women’s rights, interests and issues in society” (2006, p. 1). Literature reflects the emerging nature of the human conditions and social situations throughout the history. The contemporary literature paves way to the emergence of a new era for women’s writings. In the early period of the feminist movement, the fight of women is to uphold their rights and they raise their voice against the educational, marital and social discrimination of the male centred society. According to Agrawal and Dutta, in *Feminism in Modern English Literature*, “Liberal feminism seeks individualistic equality of men and women through political and legal reform without altering the structure of society” (2013, p. 8). They explain their view point about the feminist writings of the present era, “The widespread interest in women’s writing is related to a general reassessment and expansion of the literary canon” (2013, p. 16)

Modern women writings have a significant role to increase the holistic progress of women in the mainstream of the society. The key concept of the liberal feminism is the equality of women which fights against the subjugation of women in the male centred society. Modern feminism embraces the thirst of women to come forward to the front row of the society. It tries to wipe away the concept of the differences between men and women but to introduce the equality between them. The division between the domestic and the public realms is challenged by the modern point of view of feminism which always separates the roles of men and women from the early history of humanity. The division of duties and labour mainly based on the sex is questioned and eradicated by the contemporary social concept. The women’s writing takes place a major role to construct an exact perception of the humanity and to examine the existing standpoint of the contemporary male dominated society. Modern feminism reflects the trend of the women writers and activists to sophisticate the identity of women in all the dimensions of the society where they place a hidden role for the welfare of the human world.

Women in the modern society have unique ways to protest against the control of the society and to mark their contribution in the history of human society. Though there are ample of opportunities to flourish themselves in the society, they are mastered by the sovereignty of the patriarchal society. In *Feminism: Theory, Criticism, Analysis*, Sushila Singh reveals, “Feminism is neither a fad nor a logical extension of the civil rights movement. The inequities against which the feminist protest- legal, economic, and social

restrictions on the basic rights of women have existed throughout history and in all civilizations”(2009, p. 13). The traditional fight for the freedom of women is encouraged by the modern feminist writers, “the liberal principles of justice, liberty, and equality to women without questioning male power” (Boonsue, 1992, p. 15).

The Emerging Strong Womanhood in Kira Cochrane’s *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers*

Kira Cochrane’s *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers* (2017) is an attempt to draw the contribution of women for the empowerment of women in the modern society. This literary piece is treated as the modern guide to support and to prompt the modern young generation to fix their identity in the society. She puts forward her concepts and ideas through *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers* to make clear that it illustrates the capacities of women to govern their way of life and their social situations. Through this literary piece, the writer tries to educate and inspire the readers, especially the contemporary women to expand their dreams and their roles in the society.

Cochrane uses her brilliant skills to bring together the historical and the biographical aspects of women who contribute their role to ensure the equality and the empowerment of women. She illustrates the cultural background and the barriers of women to express their talents and to celebrate their victory in the male dominated society. As Susan Hekman says, “Underlying the approach of liberal feminism is the assumption that the inferiority of women is solely a function of their political and legal status. Liberalism rests on the presupposition that equal participation and equality before the law are sufficient to secure freedom. Once this equality has been achieved, freedom should be the inevitable result” (2006, p. 192).

Cochrane dispels the notion regarding the fragility of the womanhood and convinces the fact that the empowerment of women leads to the total change of the human world. Each woman in this book tries to build up her own realm apart from the obstacles which they have to overcome. The author dismantles the traditional images of the patriarchal concepts and designs a world where woman has a complete freedom and choice to prove their excellence. The women in this book undergo various struggles to conquer the battles which take place in the world of women. Sunita Sinha gives the goal of feminism in *Rethinking Gender: Masculinity, Femininity and Queerity in Postcolonial Indian Fiction*, “An elementary goal of feminist theory is to comprehend women’s oppression in terms of race, sex, class and sexual preference and how to revolutionize it” (2016, p. 98).

The history of women which the author mentions in this book reveals the struggle of the female world to promote their individuality and the pressure which they have to

face in the society. Stephanie Hodgson-Wright says, "One of the crucial features in feminist activity is that women come together as women in order to provide mutual support against patriarchal oppression" (2001, p. 12). Kira Cochrane enhances the spontaneity of women to draw the picture of their imagination and thirst and also challenges women to exhibit their capacities and talents to change the face of the world. *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers* is regarded as the showcase which displays the intelligence, strength, creativity and the thirst for the independence of women. It is an exhortation to make clear women to stand up for their advantage and freedom which are sometimes denied by the society. The book is announcement to mould strong women society where gender equality has a prominent place to demolish the discriminations. It is a response to the gender discrimination where women are underestimated as inferiors by the male dominated concepts.

The book unveils the lives of women who overcame the issues such as discrimination, marginalization, sexual harassment and other injustices and came into the front row of the human history. Andrea Dworkin's book, *Right-Wing Women: The Politics of Domesticated Females* (1978) clears her idea that "rape, wife beating, forced child bearing, medical butchering, sex-motivated murder, sadistic psychological abuse" (1983, p. 20) are the patriarchal approaches to make women passive in the society. As a circus woman, Katie Sandwina is praised "her size and strength publically venerated" (2017, p. 28). Junko Tabie, the first woman who reached the summit of Mount Everest is appreciated through the words of the writer,

In doing so, she defied the men who refused to climb with her when she first took up mountaineering; defied those who suggested she should stay at home to look after her daughter; and braved perils including a near-fatal avalanche, and a journey along an icy ridge where a single misstep would have meant falling thousands of metres. (2017, p. 78)

The book is a question against the patriarchal concept that woman is the synonym of weakness. The pictures of the 52 women which are displayed in the book modify and elaborate the images and the impressions of the womanhood before the readers. *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers* has a significant role among the contemporary women readers because of the reality it reveals about various dimensions of powerful female figures among the male dominated society. Women writers such as Kira Cochrane use their writings as a vehicle for the expression of the modern women society. They try to create an image of the strength of women which is completely different from the traditional way of representation. Human world has witnessed the contribution of women characters that changed the history of mankind through literature.

The emancipation of women world through women writers is delineated through the successive contribution of Kira Cochrane. Her *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers* has a crucial role for the strong representation of the popular women who are the leading figures such as artists, musician, documentary photographer, activists, writers and computer scientist. The frank depiction of the raising of women from the sexual harassment, racial discrimination and the lack of freedom of women empowers the modern womanhood to conquer the inequities of the contemporary society. Cochrane speaks about Oprah Winfrey, the popular female television icon, “She was blindfolded, left in the wilderness, and verbally abused with racial taunts and sexual threats when she finally reached a human contact” (2017, p. 98).

The power of women is one of the leading forces of womanhood to mark their identity and the position in their society where women are considered as the symbol of weakness and fragility. Modern feminism conveys the fact that women are the real agents to change the shape of the situation of their family and society. Kira Cochrane presents women who are strong enough to cope with their problems and to overcome their hurdles with powerful minds. The author makes awareness about the position of women in the male dominated society and gives an outline of the rights of women in the present era. Through the analysis of the history women Cochrane makes a differentiation between the condition of women in the past and the present, “to identify shifts in the nature of patriarchy and the changing ways in which it is experienced by different groups of women” (Bryson, 2007, p. 106). Bryson (2007) expresses the clear vision about the mission and the responsibilities of women to create a complete new world for modern women,

Feminist history should aim at balancing awareness of the continuing impact of past oppressions with the recognition of opportunities, and should seek to go beyond seeing history as either a record of progress or one of constant oppression, while acknowledging that it is not entirely random. Such history can contribute to a sense of agency by demonstrating the ability of some women to act in the most adverse circumstances, and by investigating the circumstances of past feminist gains and defeats it can inform the exploration of policy alternatives today .
(2007, p. 108)

Kira Cochrane has a major role in the modern literature to explore the voices and cries of women community through her writings. As a contemporary woman writer she addresses the issues of the modern women. As a woman writer she presents a list of strong women to convince the young modern women to escape from the act of silencing to the act of raising their voice against the mistreatment of women in the society. The book is an introduction to the real women characters whose contributions lead to a

complete change in the world history where are considered as the predominant figures of the society. The book mainly focuses on the capacities and the responsibilities of women to liberate the human world. Carol Gilligan supports the female qualities which support women to work for the humanity in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, "Sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view" (1982, p. 16).

Conclusion

Kira Cochrane is a notable figure in the modern literature who exhibits a serious approach to the reputation of women in the human world. Her book examines the social status of women in the present society by explaining the victories of women who are the models of the humanity. Kira Cochrane has a talent to portray the individualistic perspectives of womanhood. In *Modern Women: 52 Pioneers*, she perfectly ties together the history of the eminent women who changed the concepts of the patriarchal society through their achievements and contributions. She changes the modern women society to achieve the dream of equality with men and to raise their voice for the empowerment of women. It is also an exhortation to construct a female space in the modern human world.

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