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**Women Empowerment in English Literature from Lady Macbeth to Nora Helmer****Madhanala Shaila Prasad**

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**Abstract**

Moving from the pages to pixels traces a wide range of demands and aspirations of women. In literature, the rise of a woman's voice is viewed as a feminist desire covering many needs and wants fulfillment with a couple of feminist movements as first, second and so on. However, tracing these women's enlightenment may be traced ever since Shakespeare. Lady Macbeth's strong desire and ambition reflect women as a powerful driving force. "Come, you spirit that tends to mortal thoughts, unsex me here," to Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* urge for equal fulfillment of needs and wishes to boost women's growth. "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well". In a similar context, women's subjugation is traced from Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*: "I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together" to Henrik Ibsen's *Nora Helmer* from "The Doll's House." The aim of the study is to understand how women emotions (i.e. thirst for identity at all spheres of life) reflected by selected eminent poets in English literature.

**Keywords:** Aspirations of women, feminist movements, women emotions, Virginia Woolf, Nora Helmer

**Introduction**

Feminist movements targets to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experiences. Feminist theorists have developed theories in a variety of disciplines in order to respond to issues concerning gender. Study of literature enhances once understating with human needs (ambitious Lady Macbeth), emotions of empathy (Nora Helmer), historical and cultural context (Virginia Woolf). Tracing from selected characters - Lady Macbeth: *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, often shortened to *Macbeth*, a tragedy written by William Shakespeare. *Duchess: My Last Duchess*, dramatic monologue written by Robert Browning and first appeared in 1842 in Browning's *Dramatic Lyrics*. *Nora Helmer: A Doll's House*, a three-act play written by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), foundational feminist essay. Capturing the women needs and aspiration were always been termed as feminism since 15th century, *The Book of the City of Ladies* written by Christine de Pizan prejudiced and enhanced the importance of women in society, to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. Women characterization from the *My Last Duchess* to *Nora Helmer* witnessed a wide range of emotions in literary works. The resemblance of feminist aspiration ranging from first wave

of feminism to current feminism movements, that of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth to Ibsen's Nora Helmer.

### Discussion

Lady Macbeth, wife of Macbeth was ambitious and wanted her husband to become the king. On the other hand, Macbeth was loyal to his beloved king, Duncan. Macbeth, After the battle, comes upon the weird sisters, three witches who prophesy.

“They met me in the day of success, and I have learned by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it came missives from the king, who all-hailed me ‘Thane of Cawdor,’ that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor, and one day King. Macbeth didn't at first believe the witches, but then learned Duncan had rewarded Macbeth's bravery on the battlefield by making him Thane of Cawdor and Malcolm the eldest son become heir to his throne. Lady Macbeth received a letter from Macbeth about the prophecy of three witches and Duncan's imminent arrival in the castle. She found that it was not Macbeth desired position. She explored her ambitions that her husband deserves to be king. She manipulates and crystallizes the fantasized macbeth's earliest intentions of murdering Duncan and becoming king. She finds her husband is too kind to follow his ambitions and cold blood, but her ambition and her constant questioning of his courage and manhood win him over.

“Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great, Art not without ambition, but without The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly, That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false, And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'ld'st have, great Glamis, That which cries, “Thus thou must do,” if thou have it, And that which rather thou dost fear to do, Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither, That I may pour my spirits in thine ear And chastise with the valor of my tongue” In the process, she urges the three witches to unsex her to kill the Duncan. Finally, in the night, they murder Duncan.

The urge for male characteristic features was on high in Lady Macbeth. She was in thirst of changing her soul and features that found to be helpless to handle as her counterpart in gender significantly. She made clear identification that there exists some gender-based inequalities, either in terms of physical strength or heroic acts significantly associated with the other gender. She made too many choices, in the process of attainment of her ambitions. She wished to attain men's qualities. She found herself as unequal to men as the division of features that were found in her husband's heroic. She wanted to conquer those where her husband was cold enough. She played a vital role of motivating and manipulative to fulfilling her ambitions and aspirations. As women she equipped with self as role of a wife, but her thirst to her heroic was innate. She wanted “weird sisters” that is, withes or supernatural things unsex. "Unsex me here": She desires to be stripped of her femininity, which she associated with weakness and tenderness. She wanted to replace her capacity for nurturing with merciless strength. These lines made a gender stereotype opinion of women as home

maker, raising kids, being a queen or domestic labour i.e. of her innate feature. To suppress the lapses that were bore with her biological aspects, she experienced that her husband's heroic ambition will never let him to attain what he deserves. Even her lapses to attain her husband's made her to step out and look for her own plans to conceive as an ambitious lady. She not just wanted heroic but wanted to conquer the differences by murdering King Duncan. Lady Macbeth calls upon demonic spirits as "direst cruelty". The needed features to be "man up". Her desires stood above the male "be so much more the man".

Her ever dying ambition lets her to forgot the cruelty "make thick my blood" i.e. she wanted to overcome feeling of guilt that are preventing her goal. She didn't hesitate to be assisted by "weird sisters" or witches to use malicious power. The reversal of role or transition of roles urged for rejecting patriarchal constrains that is deemed to be women as weak force: herself into a ambitious relaying of unsex or ruthless role or man up.

Nora Helmer, the character in *A Doll's House*, wife of Torvald Helmer was treated like doll. She was deprived of respect as wife, daughter. The need of her identity as women was always sensed as doll with no self identity, her sacrifices as wife and homemaker were never appreciated. Nora as a caring wife she looked after her husband by illegally borrowing money. In the process, she suffered the pain of Krogstad blackmailing. At last, Torvald acquaints self with the letter about Nora's illegal borrowing of money. He accuses Nora a hypocrite and a liar and complains that she has ruined his happiness and threatens of not be allowed to raise their children. Nora despite their eight years of marriage, walks out, slamming the door behind her.

Nora was forced to live with stereotype of life in her rise by her father as "Doll Child". Later, she was shifted into the hands of Torvald as a wife, wherein she found indifference of herself as a doll in the treatment of her father and her husband's approach to her. They both didn't let her find her identity and potentiality. Moreover, depriving and humiliating her of her children's care by accusing her as hypocrite and liar made her realize her feminist thrust for identity as a woman. Nora's desired identity didn't mean her shedding any association with traditional society, but she wanted to be a part of this society with a new identity as a woman.

"My Last Duchess" a dramatic monologue, reflects how Victorian social norms deprived women the right to be fully independent human beings. Duke of Ferrara objectified and dehumanized the woman's character as Duchess. By controlling Duchess freedom behind the curtain. Victorian society believed that women were objects to be controlled, possessed, and discarded. The duke believed that, being a husband, he owns his wife, and therefore has the right to dictate her feelings if not heard Much

"...This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

As if alive....."

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Duke wanted Duchess as an object and even the new wife he aspires to marry should also fulfill his set of criteria i.e. "...Of mine for dowry will be disallowed; Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed At starting, is my object."

The objectification of women in *My Last Duchess* was sensed as she was punished for being and living the life of noble women that was of thinking, caring, smiling and living with her own freedom of walking in the terrace." She had A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere."

Her life as woman was viewed as helpless by the end of the poem. In contrast to *A Room of One's Own*, women urge women to give a voice in the lines "One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well". The transition of literary works close witnessed feministic aspirations time to time.

### Conclusion

Lady Macbeth to Nora Helmer women characters were deprived of too many aspirations, as women's feministic desires were seen with a notable requirement to fulfill the gaps. From the end of first wave feminists to the third wave of feminists wanted basic access of education to individual empowerment. Looking at each of the aspirations, women always wanted to liberate themselves from the stereotype of approach of women. Characters were burned like beacons to Virginia Woolf's demand for *Room of One's own*, arguing that a woman must have money (£500 a year) and a personal, lockable room to write fiction. Literature never and ever failed to tap women's aspirations either, from Shakespeare to Virginia Woolf reiterating that the language can't live in isolation. Literature always tapped each and every need and wants of feminists.

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