

Kate Millet and the Sexual Politics

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*Kate Millet is the first American woman to be awarded a postgraduate degree with first-class honors by St. Hilda's college, Oxford. **Sexual Politics** is a 1969 book by Kate Millet. This book is based on her PhD dissertation and is a classic feminist text. In this book Millet says that sex has a frequently neglected aspect and talks about the role that patriarchy plays in sexual relations. She has attacked the writers such as D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer for the dominance of patriarchy in their writings regarding sex. She says that these writers view and discuss sex in a patriarchal and sexist manner. In contrast she applauds the more nuanced gender politics of homosexual writer Jean Genet. She has also discussed the works of Sigmund Freud, George Meredith, John Ruskin and John Stuart Mill.*

***Sexual Politics** is an important book which influenced the second wave feminism of the 1970s. It was also an extremely controversial book. Norman Mailer, whose work especially his 1965 novel 'An American Dream' had been criticized by Millet, wrote the article, 'The Prisoners of Sex' in Harper's Magazine in response attacking Millet's claims and defending Miller and Lawrence and later extensively attacked her*

writings in his non-fiction book of the same name.

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Can sex be discussed with relation to politics? Maybe. It depends on how one perceives and defines politics. Sex is relationship between two humans and politics is power structured relationship. In the past we have been told that the relationship between the races in the United States is indeed a political one. Groups who rule by birth are disappearing but we still have one ancient and age-old technique of political exploitation of one birth group by another in the area of sex. Feminists are still struggling for women's liberation throughout the world. They are still oppressed in various ways.

The oppression of women is total and it exists in the mind, it is a psychological oppression. From the very childhood women are taught to follow the domination of men in all respects. They must be pretty so as to entertain men. They can marry only if they are pretty. The whole structure of male and female personality is imposed by social conditioning which has taken all the possible traits of human personality. There are two categories of traits, and therefore aggression

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is masculine, passivity-feminine, intelligence-masculine and emotion-feminine.

The book **Sexual Politics** by Kate Millet has thoroughly analyzed the influence of the patriarchal society on arts, literature and culture. She explains that the writers are male-dominated and they have produced the literature which focuses on female domination and establishes male supremacy. **Sexual Politics** is recognized as an important book regarding feminist movement. According to Millet, sexual politics is an age-old and universal arrangement made for the domination of one birth group over another and we can see that it still continues. Sex underlies all political questions and it is quite dangerous so the public should be made aware about it. She has given a cultural and historical background of the feminist movement and has given some guidelines for the feminist agitators. Separate chapters are devoted to the works on D.H Lawrence, Henry Miller and Jean Genet. Millet has attacked Lawrence for his sentimental presentation of macho virility, Miller is attacked for being a misogynist and Mailer is ridiculed as an anxiety-ridden and fearful of losing power to women and homosexuals and Genet is depicted to parody heterosexual love relationships. Millet agrees that all these writers are talented and gifted but knowingly or unknowingly they are practicing male domination over the female. Millet has explained that her purpose of writing this book was to state and establish the fact that patriarchy is controlling political institution which is built on status and temperament. In

the 1970's the American Universities were presenting a canon to the students which was completely from a male point of view. This book pioneered the field of feminist literary criticism through its proper, well-arranged, evidence-based and deep examination of the works of many authors, illustrating through literary and cultural criticism that masculine viewpoints are not unbiased reflections of human nature, but rather help the patriarchal power structure that has existed from the beginnings of the Western Civilization. She has dissected descriptions of sexual intercourse written by men, specifically Henry Miller in his **Sexes** (1949) and Norman Mailer in his **An American Dream** (1965). Millet explains how the language used in describing the sexual act refers to the subjugation of women as human beings, which in turn speaks to the larger issue of a male-dominated power structure. The politics of sexual activity that means sex with whom and under what circumstances women are permitted to engage in sex- is an essential part of patriarchal power. According to Millet, women have no choice for sex, they are mere commodities silenced by the freedom of men to sexually possess them. Men own their bodies and can handle them the way they want to. Constructing on the evidence of sexual politics in literature, Millet describes further a theory of sexual politics, transitioning from an individual, intimate view of the sexual act to the broader scope of political reference. She elucidates the connection between the individual and society at large by outlining several areas in which patriarchy puts its influence. Millet has used the word 'politics'

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when speaking of sexes primarily because such a word is useful in outlining the real nature of their relative status. Patriarchy has God on its side, even God is a male. Kate Millet's **Sexual Politics** has relevance even today because although women have achieved their first economic autonomy in the industrial revolution and now constitute a large paid population throughout the world, but they do not participate directly in technology or production. Traditionally education was banned for women, now they are getting education but not the same as their opposite sixth balance of employment, prestige and reward lie with the men. They rule the industry, government and the military. Emotional response to domestic violence is often ambivalent. Hostility towards women is expressed in a number of ways such as laughter, misogynist literature, sexual abuse, domination etc. Women are still denied freedom under various pretences. Their virginity before marriage is still a sensitive issue. Hence I suppose that we need to start a new wave of feminist movement for the present times, and follow the guidelines given by Kate Millet long back in 1970s.

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