

SIGNIFYING THE FEMALE'S CHARACTER IN INDIAN FICTION

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ABSTRACT

The changing status of women over the ages has been documented in literary history. The path that women of yesteryear have trodden has been fraught with critical, contemptuous, and censures, yet they have persevered through it with grace and dignity. Women have ignored the naysayers and continued on their dangerous path. The strong sisterhood of today's women is the product of a long journey. Women are the primal creators. Women are without a doubt the most important contributors to the development of our universe. A woman's unwavering devotion to her family in all her roles as mother, daughter, sister, and wife is a cornerstone of her community. Women's potential as authors, businesswomen, mystics, artists, counselors, and scientists, if allowed to flourish, benefits not only women but also males. The following study examines the representation of women in fiction.

Keywords: Women, Novels, Fiction, Character, Society

I. INTRODUCTION

Literacy is seen as the written expression of social reality. It shows how people in a society think about and interpret the things they encounter on a daily basis. Literature is a powerful force in shaping cultural norms and values because of its ability to shape people's thoughts and perceptions. Once a reader begins the book, he or she will have a window into the mind of another person, even if that person has since passed away. Through the ages, literature has been communicating and describing clearly about scenarios and settings all around the world. So it's the greatest human invention ever, since it brings people together who otherwise wouldn't have met. Literary works enrich real life rather than merely describing it. It improves practical skills and information that are essential in everyday life. Literature is a means through which individuals may explore the most important and even the most trivial facets of human existence. Great literature, according to Ezra Pound, "is simply language packed with meaning to the maximum possible degree."

The feminist perspective is highly visible in contemporary and postmodern writing. Since the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), there has been a revolution in the treatment of such topics as women's cultural roles and accomplishments, their social and political rights, equal rights for women, injustices, etc. Novelists who identified as feminists in the modern and postmodern periods. It is not a new phenomenon for English to be home to feminist writing. It's a by-product of both western

liberalism and feminist ideology. In Indian literature, feminism revolves around the experiences of Indian women who are stuck between two worlds: traditional values and modern expectations. Feminism is a political philosophy that seeks to end patriarchy and its associated oppression and exploitation of women. Feminism seeks to guarantee and protect women's legal equality before the law, as well as their economic, social, and political participation and advancement.

Indian authors writing in English have addressed the topic at length, including Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Githa Hariharan, Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De, Suniti Namjoshi, Arundhati Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Nayantara Sahgal, and others. These Indian female authors have written truthfully about the emotional and physical struggles that women face. They defied conventional writing and societal mores. By delving inside the minds of their characters, they were able to provide contrasting depictions of women in society. They've written about women from a number of different cultural vantage points. Some fictional female characters have a negative and dismissive outlook on life, while others have a positive, accepting, and even compromising outlook on life, which ultimately leads to a profound feeling of satisfaction. As a result of their bold efforts to dispel the notion of a male-dominated social structure, postmodern Indian women authors pave the way for fresh research. They established a solid groundwork for research on women in English-language Indian literature.

II. ROLE OF FEMINISM IN INDIAN FICTION

The emergence of English education and the English language in the pre-independence era are sometimes cited as the genesis of English Indian fiction. Since it has such a deep foundation in Indian culture, it differs significantly from English literature in many fundamental ways. An influx of feminist-minded writers emerged in post-colonial India, addressing women's concerns with fervour. Prior to the more overt and even contentious writings of authors like Shashi Deshpande, Nyantara Sehgal, and Bharati Mukherjee, these themes and issues were evident in the works of authors like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandya, and Anita Desai, all the way back to before independence. In his 1938 novel *The Dark Room*, R. K. Narayan aims to subvert the idealised portrayal of the housewife through his heroine, Savitri.

Narayan depicts the plight of a middle-class South Indian housewife rather compassionately. She is trapped in a miserable marriage that forces her to be meek and obedient, and she is unable to escape the stifling confines of her home. Out of frustration with her cheating spouse Ramani's capricious and domineering behaviour, she takes to the streets and attempts suicide by jumping into the Sarayu River. She is spared from her suicide attempt by the blacksmith of the hamlet, whose wife, Pooni, takes her in and helps her acquire a work as a temple caretaker for the local priest. Savitri was unable to adjust to her new surroundings or to live without her children, so she returned home and sulked alone in the dark. The story then takes a realistic turn, taking place at an era when women's emotional and physical reliance on men and family prevented them from breaking free of their oppressive household situations. However, in his novel *The Guide*, published in 1958 (only two years after the Indian publication of *The Dark Room*), Narayan ultimately succeeds in helping the housewife break

free of her hopeless marriage. Rosie, a well-educated and gifted lady, is able to find her own identity and place in the world because to her work as a dancer and her relationship with Raju in this urban-based novel by R. K. Narayan.

Gauri, a mild and submissive woman, suffers in both her parents' and husband's homes in Mulk Raj Anand's novel *The Old Woman and the Cow or Gauri* (1960), which also features the tragic female protagonist archetype. Gauri eventually meets a city doctor named Colonel Mahindra who sympathises with her and becomes a voice for the plight of women like her. Gauri transforms from a shy and submissive lady to an independent and empowered one. She returns to her husband, but he throws her out since he now has reservations about her virginity. Not so much the issue itself, but more how Anand manipulates her response to it. Gauri tells her husband, "If I am a plague on you I will move away....," rather than begging for forgiveness and sobbing. Even more threateningly, she compares her husband's actions to those of the fabled Ram, who sent Sita out of the palace for the sake of public opinion regarding the purity of a woman after she left home in the company of another man, and she threatens to attack him again if he does so.

Therefore, Anand succeeds in challenging yet another cliché about women by giving the so-called perfect lady of society a platform from which to express her opinions and needs. The same topic is addressed by Kamala Markandya, but with a different emphasis and resolution, in her 1963 novel, *A Silence of Desire*. The narrative focuses on Sarojini, a female heroine who suffers from male authority at home and patriarchal oppression. Dandekar, her government-office-clerk husband, has conflicting standards for himself and for his wife. He views a wife as an asset and an unavoidable prop in the home, providing nothing in the way of her own needs. From Dandekar's perspective, his marriage is picture perfect: he has a tranquil, fifteen-year-married wife who is docile and "an amazing chef," and from this peace and quiet comes the routine that satisfies "the tidy and ordered wants of his personality." The stereotypical portrayal of an Indian family is shattered by Sarojini's covert trips to a swami, a spiritual healer, for help with a growth in her womb and to break up the monotony of her life. Dandekar believes she is having an affair and, in an effort to shore up his eroding manhood, he begins frequenting prostitutes while ignoring his children and his job. As a result of her conversation with the swami, Sarojini gains a sense of agency that revives her dwindling spirit and gives her reason to hope again.

III. FEMALE CHARACTERS IN LITERATURE

Every member of society has a unique character that reflects his or her personal taste, social status, and professional standing. A one-sided depiction of women in literature was inevitable until very recently, when more women than men began publishing their work. In folk songs, storytelling, and nursery rhymes, women made a significant contribution to oral culture, which in turn influenced the development of written culture.

There has been a wide variety of portrayals of women in literature. When authors write about women, they frequently draw on either their own experiences or common cultural stereotypes about women and their roles. When writing about women, male authors often present a very different picture of how society sees them than female writers do. Zora Neale Hurston,

writing a decade later in the 1930s, contrasts sharply with F. Scott Fitzgerald, who depicts his female protagonist as a victim in *The Great Gatsby*.

Females have been portrayed in several negative ways, such as being evil, cruel, a prostitute, a mother, a wife, a sister, a liar, a partner, or a confidante. To a fault and a credit, women are both excellent and evil, as Sobande (1959) pointed out in *Rigimo Obirin*. They're thought of as a man's necessary friend, and without them, life isn't pleasant. Yoruba philosophical concept, especially as it relates to women's behavior, provided him with support for his position.

The Masculine gender defined feminine characteristics as those that were submissive in compared to those of men. It wasn't always the case, though; some women actually had more masculine traits than their male counterparts. An only daughter, Molly Gibson, proves to be a better child to her father than a son, Osborne Hamley, who fails his parents, in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*. In George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver is portrayed as a far stout than her husband, who is unable to match her resourcefulness in settling their five daughters into life. Despite her sweetness and beauty, Spenser's heroine Britomart was a powerful, masculine character who actively battled as a knight and rescued lives throughout her quest.

The female protagonists of *Pride and Prejudice* are depicted in a favorable light. Additionally, since these expressions either come from the novel's female characters' dialogue or the author's description. We can infer that females, like Jane Austen the novelist, prefer to employ positive and neutral phrases rather than pejorative ones. Coates attributes this linguistic propensity to the politeness principle (1993). Women tend to use more upbeat language to avoid being offensive and to demonstrate harmony. The fact that women in the eighteenth century held a lesser social rank than males did not equate to their being given a less potent language. Women's polite speech is taken as evidence of their conformity to societal norms of proper behavior, and it is a feature of their upbringing to speak in this manner. In addition, our author falls into the category of middle-class women who, according to Coates, are the most vulnerable to prestige forms. Since Jane Austen is of the middle class, she does everything she can to conform to societal norms in order to enhance her reputation. Because of this, you'll notice that the bulk of the table's words are their conventional versions. When discussing the representation of women in Indian poetry, the name Mahadevi Varma, a liberation warrior and activist, has come to symbolize the concerns of women as reflected in Hindi poetry. Additionally, she wrote on the empowerment of women. She found inspiration for her characters in the Hindu canon, which often celebrates individuality. It was Kamala Das who laid the path for a depressing vein of women's confessional poetry in which the male-female dynamic was examined. Later, other women poets like Gauri Deshpande and Chitra Narendran adopted her approach.

IV. PROTRAYAL OF FEMALE CHARACTERS BY MODERN WOMEN WRITERS

AM Irvine's *The Probationer* is the greatest representation of women's lives in the modern period. As the protagonist of this novel, a strong and talented woman, comes of age professionally and personally, the work not only serves as an early example of Modernism but also as a showcase for modern women's rights.

Shobha De, one of the most radical modern Indian novelists, is able to express her thoughts in a clear, cutting-edge manner through her work. Her depiction of female characters is unique and unconventional. Her stories combine elements of romance with those of passion, hate, and extramarital affair, but in a flamboyant fashion. She makes an effort to depict metropolitan and cosmopolitan culture as it really is. The ladies she depicts in her fiction are thoroughly contemporary, westernized examples of the species that place little stock in either philosophy or mythology. The ladies in Shobha De's work frequently defy social norms and express an unorthodox sense of self. Her books bring attention to an important topic and raise consciousness about the plight of women in a world dominated by males.

Chetan Bhagat, a contemporary popular fiction writer from India, has recently included the modern lady in his works. Especially in his novel "One Night at the Call Center," where both sexes work night shifts and enjoy equal pay and respect, Chetan presents his female protagonists as agents of progressive social change and equality.

V. CONCLUSION

Women's historically subordinate status in male-dominated civilizations explains why they are typically represented in literature as passive and compliant. A renaissance in making room for women of a certain age was spurred, however, by the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Authors started focusing on the independent women in their stories. Many independent publishing houses were started by women who wanted to have their own books published after having them turned down by mainstream publishers.

Female literary characters have evolved throughout literary history. Due to the fact that males dominated society and the publishing industry up until recently, it's not surprising that their biased views crept into their depictions of women. As a result, the theme of women being marginalized and subjugated throughout literature is not a new one. Everything about her is significant, from the fact that she exists to her personality to her function to her significance. Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, women's literary responsibilities were minimal, reflecting their marginalization and insignificance in society. The protagonist evolved more when the status of women improved. By analyzing these shifts, it becomes clear that the protagonists not only evolve into the new role models that women want to be, but also personify the feminine identity.

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