
Exploring Feminism as a Literary Movement in Indian English Literature

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ABSTRACT

The feminism is a movement that in favor of giving women the same access to political, social, and economic opportunities as men. A patriarchal system has deprived women of their fundamental socio-legal rights all around the world. Within the context of male-dominated society, the woman is a social construct, a platform for the expression of masculine meanings and the enactment of masculine wants. Contrary to popular belief, feminism in Indian literature is a highly exquisite and extravagant idea that is addressed most carefully in specific situations. But as time has gone on, feminism has gained traction in India, partially overthrowing the patriarchal system. In addition to political and social activists and crusaders, it is conceivable that Indian literature also plays a significant role in the pursuit of feminism. Following the introduction of Western education, colonialism, revolution, promotion of women's organizations, freedom movement, etc., Particularly from the British rule in India. As a result, life began to change. After independence, women's education began in India and new women began to emerge. Education instilled in women a sense of self and created an appreciation for human rights. Modern Indian authors are currently addressing the wider audience through their literature, focusing on the topic of feminism. This not only captivates readers, but also has a profound impact on them.

Introduction

A social theory or political movement which argues that legal and social restrictions on women must be removed in order to bring about equality of the sexes in all aspects of public and private life. Around the world, patriarchal order denies women's social-legal rights. In patriarchal culture, women are a social structure and a part of life. Man's meaning is spoken and man's desire is known. After all, what turns a girl into a woman is not her body, but social processes that influence and shape her emotions, comply with cultural norms and promote the role of women. To alter the orthodox of conventional perception of women, we must abandon the practice of categorizing them solely based on biological factors, and instead recognize their meaning as shaped by humans. The twentieth century, women began to recognize their own wants, sexual identity, self-expression, ability to survive, and destiny. Women seek freedom and individuality led analysts and critics to call it a worldwide "feminism" revolution. During the initial phase of the revolution, feminists and suffragists were criticized by a male-dominated society for introducing and advocating for concepts of freedom from subjugation in the minds of women. Do not blindly obey established dogma. However, it soon became the collection of many countries. Their descriptive and creative writings are very encouraging is like a feminist struggle to empower women and help them overcome their illegal rights. Writers of all ages brought women's issues to the agenda by describing and analyzing the current social conditions of women. They contributed positively to social change by highlighting and reporting on issues related to the oppression of women in their work. In recent feminist literature, there has been a change towards focusing on women's struggles instead of solely portraying them as victims. While feminists have been successfully fought for women's legal rights, there is still much work to be done on a societal level. Various nations with diverse religious beliefs and cultural traditions are now sharing a new tale about the struggles of women in modern society. These women face dilemmas and conflicts as they strive to establish their own sense of self and gain independence. Contemporary writers continue to push for the liberation of women from oppressive cultural norms and myths in their respective countries.

Discussion and Results

As many people think, feminism in Indian literature is a very lofty and exaggerated concept, and on rare occasions it is handled with utmost subtlety. However, over time, feminism was accepted in India

and patriarchy was left behind to some extent. Perhaps more study of feminism among political and social activists and activists has also been done by Indian literature. However, before understanding Indian feminist literature further, the concept of “feminism” needs to be understood in the context of the country since its inception. The history of feminism in India can be viewed mainly as an “experiment.” There is an interesting story about the creation of women by the Supreme creator Brahma from the beginning of the universe. Sure, come on Brahma Himself, feminist ideas began to establish them in the Indian spoken and written language, although not like today. It is said that Brahma first created humans and gave humans as friends out of his free will. But by then, he had all the materials needed for the creation of man, so he created woman by borrowing countless materials from the beauty of creation. It makes Lord Brahma introduced the woman to the man he had created earlier and said: “She will serve you all your life, and if you cannot be with her, neither can you will live without her.” Literature is not a subject to be left behind, it has gained momentum over time and thus started to create a new way of showing women in Indian literature. Ironically, the first representative of “women’s rights” in India was not a woman but a man.

It gained importance with the advent of colonialism in India following the introduction of Western education. Changes in the British Empire in, the development of women’s organizations, the freedom movement, etc. Life started to change again with women’s education was high in India after independence began and new women began to appear. Education instilled in women a sense of self and created an appreciation for human rights. That’s when feminism was created in Indian literature and women came into conflict with two models. Social laws, and moral standards of all times. The concept of feminism in Indian literature was first brought to India by Western influences and the women’s liberation movement, but it has not been widely accepted in the country. This is because advocating for women’s rights has often been misunderstood as a challenge to traditional Indian femininity. In both ancient and modern societies, as well as in Indian literature, women are usually portrayed in a certain way. However, there is a newer representation emerging that depicts women as more relatable and realistic.

Throughout the various forms of Indian literature, there have been numerous depictions of the evolution of womanhood. These depictions have often taken on the form of feminism, a prominent theme in both Indian and English languages. However, due to limitations in space, it is difficult to fully explore this topic in one article. It is worth noting that Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan’s work on Indian literature, which covers twenty-two regional languages and various dialects, highlights not only a common culture

and way of life but also the portrayal of Indian women across all literatures, with unique regional influences. Women have heavily influenced literature and the female perspective has been a crucial aspect as well. In fact, women themselves are creators of literature and their presence is evident throughout Indian literature. Indian literature encompasses a diverse range of themes, including the shift from traditional to modern portrayals of women, reflecting the societal changes. Post-Independence Indian literature and feminism highlight these evolving trends, capturing women's voices for a more equitable existence. The traditional image of women is gradually transforming into a new, more progressive representation.

In the literary field, the boldest expressions of feminism in Indian literature come from authors like Amrita Pritam (Punjabi) and Kusum Ansari (Hindi). They are among the most respected writers for establishing and writing about the connections between sexuality and feminism. "Women's body, women's rights" in Indian languages. Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan, Leela Kasturi, Sharmila Rege and Vidyut Bhagat are also part of a group of essayists and critics passionate about feminism in Indian English literature. However, in India, feminist literature has existed not only in modern times or during the British colonial period, but also since the Vedic period, and it has changed little by little with each era, and the faces of women with these characteristics have emerged.

During the 1930s, Indian literature in English experienced a significant increase with the emergence of prominent writers like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao. Their literary works drew attention to the growing field of Indo-English literature. Narayan and Bhattacharya introduced modern female protagonists in their novels such as 'Rosie' in *Guide* and 'Kajoli' in *So Many Hungers*, while Anand and Rao also portrayed sensitive female characters in their writings. In Narayan's stories, there were two categories of women - one who followed traditional customs and the other who rebelled against societal norms. The former group was represented by devoted mothers, aunts, grandmothers, and wives like Margayya's spouse in *The Financial Expert*, Srinivas and Sampath's wives in *Mr. Sampath*, and Natraj's wife in *The Man Eater of Malgudi*. However, Narayan's portrayal of women is not always equal to that of men. In contrast, Bhattacharya's novels feature well-rounded female characters who play crucial roles in advancing the plot. Despite being somewhat dominated by patriarchal traditions and male figures, these women are full of vitality and hope for a better future. Kajoli in *So Many Hungers*, Meera in *A Goddess Named Gold*, and Sumita in *Shadow from Ladakh* are examples of optimistic female characters in Bhattacharya's writing. He views women as a source of strength whose

contributions are essential not only to their families but also to their country. Unlike Anand and Rao, Bhattacharya's novels do not solely focus on feminist issues but also address socio-economic concerns of their time by exposing harsh realities of life. However, Anand's character Gauri in *The Old Man and the Cow* exemplifies his idea of an emancipated woman.

After gaining independence, the government implemented various changes to promote progress in the country. This led to the emergence of a new genre of literature, where authors focused on themes related to the struggles and complexities of human lives, with a particular emphasis on personal challenges. The period of the mid-1950s and 1960s is considered a crucial phase in Indian English writing, as it saw the rise of influential writers such as Arun Joshi, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Shobha De, and Nayantara Sahgal. Their works had a significant impact on Indian English novels and explored new dimensions of human nature and relationships. The issues addressed in their novels were more individualistic than universal in nature. These writers delved into the inner psychological turmoil of individuals from different sections of society. For instance, Anita Desai's works shed light on the oppression and violence faced by women in Indian society. She portrayed women as neurotic due to their troubled psyche caused by their restrictive environment. Her female characters often struggle with depression and helplessness without finding any optimism or resolution for their traumas or fears. For example, Maya in "Cry, the Peacock" fails to understand her husband's practical outlook on life while Raka in "Fire on the Mountain" is a product of a broken marriage and has experienced her father's violent behavior towards her mother. The cruelty she witnessed has left her devoid of any empathy or humanity and she takes pleasure in committing destructive acts like setting fire to mountains. Similarly, Sita in "Where Shall We Go This Summer" leads a comfortable life with her understanding husband but faces psychological disturbances during her fifth pregnancy. In an attempt to escape from reality, she takes refuge on Manori Island with hopes of receiving blessings from her deceased father who was believed to have healing powers among the locals. However, this not only disrupts her marital life but also exposes her children to the darkness of the island. Monisha in "Voices in the City" ultimately chooses to end her life as she sees no way out of the tedious monotony of her existence. Through characters like Mira Masi in "Clear Light of the Day", Anita Desai also sheds light on the pitiable state of Indian widows. As one of the most prominent contemporary writers, Desai's writing often revolves around themes related to the female world. The female characters in her work lack strength, vitality, courage, and optimism, often unable to adopt a positive outlook on life. They are weak and consumed by their suffering, leading them to have a deceptive mindset that prevents them from making meaningful

changes in their lives. Many of them lack the ability to analyze their dire situation and struggle to overcome their neurotic state. Her writing often explores the fragile mental state of widowed women and their exhaustion from living in oppressive environments. However, her stories do not focus on the empowerment of women intellectually or morally. Instead, they center on individual women and their emotional and psychological turmoil. In contrast, contemporary Indo-English novelist Ruth Praver Jhabwala portrays strong female characters in her novels, which depict the post-independence Indian society that included both Indians and Britishers. While Jhabwala's novels paint a vivid picture of British culture and lifestyle, they lack the warmth and cultural essence of India. She also delves into themes of human relationships but within a backdrop of sophisticated Britishers and educated Indians. Furthermore, she highlights how Indians' adoption of British culture and vice versa leads to alienation for women. Jhabwala's works also touch upon the growing materialistic influence of Britishers on Indians. She portrays Indian women as both traditional housewives and modern, educated individuals in her writing about Indian families. However, she also sheds light on how societal norms force Indian women to submit unquestioningly to men who hold the dominant role in relationships. Additionally, Jhabwala focuses on a particular section of Indian society during a specific time after India gained independence. The themes she covers do not have a widespread appeal. Her works also do not qualify as feminist literature, as they solely focus on women and their struggles without attempting to improve their unfortunate situation.

Kamala Markandaya is a modern writer who has attempted to portray the dire circumstances faced by Indian women by shedding light on feminist issues. She delves into the plight of impoverished women, such as Rukmani in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Nalini in *A Handful of Rice*, while also exploring the lives of wealthy women in *The Golden Honeycomb*. Unlike Anita Desai and Ruth Praver Jhabwala, she emphasizes that the root cause of women's problems is their financial dependence. Her female characters, including Premala, Sarojini, Vasantha, and Meera, embody the idea that economic independence for women could alleviate many of their struggles. These qualities set Kamala Markandaya's female protagonists apart from those in other contemporary Indian-English literature. They reject the notion of men as all-knowing figures and instead present a new image of strong and self-sufficient women. Through her novels, Markandaya tackles feminist issues and presents a powerful and independent portrayal of women.

Shobha De's literary works revolve around the experiences of affluent, city-dwelling women. For these women, marriage is primarily a means of gaining financial stability, social status and physical pleasure,

rather than a source of emotional or psychological connection. De's portrayals show how these women, in their pursuit of self-discovery, often compromise their morals. Her female characters are modern, educated, glamorous and ambitious, with a strong desire for material wealth and physical gratification. They constantly seek out new partners instead of addressing the issues within their marriages, driven by a romanticized view of love. These characters lack the traditional moral and ethical values that are typically associated with marriage in Indian society. Infidelity is not seen as a wrongdoing by them; rather, it is a routine part of their lifestyle that they feel no guilt about. De's novels depict the upper-class elites who have sacrificed traditional values for superficial desires such as money, physical pleasure and success. However, her feminist ideas do not align with traditional Indian values. Her themes often promote the idea of women sacrificing family ties in order to gain higher social standing. While De does bring attention to some issues faced by women, she does not offer any concrete solutions to these problems.

Anita Nair is one of the modern female authors from India who writes in English. Her novels are known for their captivating language and vivid descriptions. She is widely recognized as a skilled writer in the genre of fiction, showcasing a deep understanding of South Indian culture and a talent for depicting intricate details. Her works often revolve around romantic relationships and explore a range of emotions, from gentle tenderness to passionate sensuality to intense hatred, making her a masterful storyteller.

Shashi Deshpande's literature serves as a breath of fresh air in this entire situation, not only promoting feminist beliefs, but also encouraging women to embrace their true selves. Deshpande's fiction emphasizes the need for women to acknowledge their flaws, overcome them, and utilize their strengths to establish their uniqueness. As an author, she reflects the changing sociocultural landscape and presents a realistic portrayal of Indian society. Her novels also reevaluate and reinterpret the role of women, aiding them in rediscovering their identity and societal roles, norms, and values. The themes explored by Deshpande in her works are universal in nature, not limited to any specific woman or group but rather representing Indian womanhood as a whole.

Conclusion

Feminism encompasses cultural, economic, and political movements aimed at achieving legal protection and full equality for women. Indian literature has utilized feminism as a means of examining the true social climate for women. Numerous works in English literature from India accurately depict the status of women in Indian society. However, modern women have come to recognize their equal capabilities to

men and are no longer dependent as they were in the past when men were viewed as the sole bread earners. In today's age women now play an active role in generating income for their households. Contemporary Indian English authors are incorporating feminist themes into their writing, appealing to a wide audience and making a significant impact on readers.

Feminism is not solely focused on the equal treatment and rights of women, but rather emphasizes the need for compassion, respect, and understanding from men. The root cause of women's discontent in present-day society is the prevalent superiority complex among men, leading to silent suffering. This is precisely what feminism addresses, as evident in works by Indian English writers such as Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and Kamala Markandya who explicitly depict the various facets of a male-dominated society as their central theme.

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