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Feminism in the Novels of Indian English Writers

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ABSTRACT

Indian English literature has produced an enormous body of work on feminism. In today's India, feminist writers proudly promote their cause of womanhood through their writing. In today's world, there are many men and women writers who have succeeded in projecting existing social or gender inequality through their writings. There is a notable movement linking the domestic and public spheres of work in terms of new-fangled styles, technique, and trends in women's novels. This paper examines how feminism and gender issues have been addressed in Indian English novels.

Key Words: Feminism, womanhood, gender, sex, inequality

Introduction

The concept of Feminism, in general, has been concerned to an analysis of the trend of male domination in the society; the general attitude of male towards female; the exploitation and discrimination faced by females; the need for and ways of improving the condition of women; and, so on. In concern to literature, this movement has concentrated on the role played by literature to support gender discrimination as well as to oppose it; the reasons for lesser significance of the contribution by female writers in the literary tradition than that of the male writers; the difference in the ways in which works of male writers and female writers, respectively, have represented gender discrimination; and, the ways in which social conditions and literary traditions regarding gender discrimination have affected one another.



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Feminism in India

Feminism arose and developed in India as an inextricable part of the colonially mediated modernity of the country. This is not to say that India was devoid of ideas about women's enslavement before the British arrived. Early Indian history research (Taru and Lalitha 1993) shows that Indian women did have 'feminist' urges, and that they also articulated their feelings of exclusion and denial, as well as their desire for freedom and fulfilment. However, Feminism's specific city, as a vision based on the idea of universal and equal citizen rights (to be guaranteed by the state regardless of gender or creed), is unmistakably set in the modern era. Similarly, the British nineteenth-century idea of the need to educate women for national progress, which influenced Indian Feminism, has a historically specific, modern formulation.

Yet, while the discourse of modernity spoke of freedom and equality, progress, and the inalienable right of people to self-rule, the modernity ushered in by colonial rule was based on and operated within deeply unequal and unjust structures. Feminism emerged and took shape in modern India within the inherent contradictions and ambiguity of colonial modernity (Chaudhuri 2011).

While aspiring to western modernity, Indians also desired to distinguish themselves as distinct from, different from, and even superior to the West. Indian women desired to break free from the oppressive structures of tradition while also affirming the ancientness and wisdom of that same tradition. As a result, some have argued that the woman issue, as exemplified by sati in nineteenth-century India, was merely an incidental site for debating issues of tradition and culture, nationalism and modernity (Mani 1989). Furthermore, the liberation of India from colonialism was seen as a necessary prelude to the liberation of women. As a result, many Indian women in both the women's and national movements disavowed being feminists, owing to the close relationship between Feminism and western colonialism (Chaudhuri 2011).

Feminism in twenty-first century India is therefore challenged by two forces: first, from a patriarchy



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that defends honor killing on grounds of cultural rights; second, from a neoliberal vision, which deifies the economy and demonizes collective and emancipative politics. Often both sets of views emerge from the same factions. In cases such as honour killings, the state is asked to follow the writ of patriarchy controlled communities (Chowdhry 2007). At other times, it is asked to shun social welfare measures for poor women and instead to facilitate financial institutions to deal directly with women as creditors (John 2004).

Feminism in Indian English Novels

Since prominent writers such as Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, and Shobha De began to choose women's issues as their themes and focus on the cause of Indian women, the feminist perspective has gained traction. They take the same stance as feminists, who oppose societal customs, norms, and traditions that tend to place women in a position that is inferior to that of men in terms of social, political, physical, and economic status. The female characters in these novels have taken up themes of rebellion against the existing social structure. Women are no longer portrayed as a "puppet" in the traditional sense, with husbands as lords and women as weak, meek, and submissive creatures. These authors have created protagonists who, like their male counterparts, feel and recognize that they, too, have a role to play in family and society. They, too, have preferences and dislikes. They want to raise their voices in order to be heard by society. As a result, a new generation of women has emerged to play a positive role in the world by promoting women's causes and perspectives.

Women in Nayantara Sahgal's novels are liberal and unconventional, capable of fighting injustice and inequality. Saroj in Chandigarh's Stom defies traditional female behaviour by refusing to be meek and sober. She wants to prove to her husband, Inder, that she is more than a wife by establishing herself as an individual with her own identity. The novel portrays the psychology of an ordinary woman yearning for love



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and understanding in a very convincing manner. Her husband continues to interrogate her about her extramarital affair with a boy. Inder wants Saroj to be a faithful and religious traditional wife, but he wants to continue his extramarital affair with Maya, who is already married and claims to be a male privilege.

In another Sahgal's novel *The Day in Shadow*, the women characters are seen revolting against male supremacy. Simrit, the heroine, represents the plight of Indian women who fight to end unhappy marriages in their own unique way. When a woman in India divorces her husband, she faces numerous challenges because society views her in a negative light. She is confronted with numerous issues in almost every aspect of her life, including moral, social, and financial issues. Shonali, the heroine of Sahgal's *Rice Like Us*, holds a high and respectable position as an I.A.S. Officer, but she finds it difficult to avoid marriage. The novelist ironically ridicules the 'inevitability' of marriage in our conservative society, as well as the current tradition of getting married being the ultimate goal of every woman. Male officials tend to disobey her orders, even if she is the boss in the office, due to their ego issues and superiority complex. Nayantara Sahgal's female protagonists are new women who fight for freedom from all social and moral obligations that bind them. They oppose male dominance and demand gender equality. They dare to show that they have the courage of a rebel and refuse to give in to the conventional urge to submit. Sahgal's women are

“strivers and aspirers, towards freedom, toward goodness, toward a compassionate world. Their virtue is a quality of heart and mind and spirit, a kind of untouched innocence and integrity” [1].

The feminist viewpoint is evident in Anita Desai's novels, even if the revolting women are not as bold. The female protagonists appear to be unwilling to accept Indian society's male dominance and female subjugation. Maya and Monisha, the main female characters in *Cry, the Peacock* and *Voices in the City*, rebel against their insensitive and uncaring husbands who never seem to care about their wives' feelings.



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Maya's rebellious woman is the result of Maya's frustration over her wife's unfulfilled dreams. She yearns for her husband to meet her physical and emotional needs, but he is unable to do so. Maya finds it difficult to accept the Gautama's indifference to her as an educated and modern woman. She kills him and herself in a fit of rage and frustration at the film's conclusion.

Desai depicts the tragic life of Monisha, an educated young woman married into a conservative middle-class joint family, in *Voices in the City*. She despises the monotony of traditional housewives whose thoughts are limited to saris, jewelry, and babies, among other things. Jiban, her husband, never returns her love and ignores her suffering. She considers suicide to be the only way out of her pain and sorrow. As a result, Anita Desai's women rebel against the traditional concept of submissive women like Sati-Savitri who accept their fate as oppressed individuals in silence.

Shobha De stands out among other Indian women writers. Her feminist stances, which outright reject male hegemony, have ushered in a new trend. She portrays men's callousness and indifference to women's rights in her novels, which she portrays as unsympathetic and inhuman. Shobha De's female characters make all of their own decisions and appear to be in charge of their own lives. Traditional women are weak and soft, but not these new women. These women live in Mumbai's affluent and sophisticated society. They are self-sufficient, ambitious, self-assured, and assertive. Mallika Hiralal, the protagonist in *Sisters*, confidently takes over Hiralal Industries after her father's death and runs it on her own terms. She doesn't need anyone's advice, not even Ramankaka, who was once a close confidante of her father and is now actively involved in the management of her company. She, on the other hand, respectfully and firmly dismisses the offer. Mallika later marries Binny Malhotra to save her father's failing business, not out of love or desire.

Shoba De mocks the conventional wisdom that once married, a woman is expected to be faithful to her husband, while it is up to the husband to honour, break, or play with the marriage. A man can have several mistresses, whereas a woman must sulk silently at home with all of her miseries and humiliations. Shobha De's women launch a counter-offensive against conservative thinking and moral values, which often



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prevent them from rebelling. Shobha De's women have almost as many boyfriends as their husbands do girlfriends. In *Socialite Evenings*, the protagonist, Karuna, has a physical relationship with her husband's friend, Krish, and rather than keeping it a secret, she declares it openly: "I love this friend of yours, and I want to be with him in vehicle." (page 135)

Among contemporary women writers, Arundhati Roy is a luminary. She was one of the first female writers to write about the plight of the oppressed, as well as the suppression of women in a male-dominated world and the impact of Marxism on the lives of the oppressed. When women writers remained hesitant to offer a critical assessment of Indian politics, Arundhati Roy emerged as a guiding light for Indian women writers. With *The God of Small Things* (1997), she received a resounding response, propelling her to the forefront of all other writers. Her success has already put her on par with Salman Rushdie and others, despite the fact that she has only published one book. She has also outperformed Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. The characters are completely fictional, with no resemblance to real-life people. Arundhati Roy mentions veteran Marxist E.M.S Namboodiripad by name, but then fabricates stories about him, sparking widespread outrage in Kerala, where he led the world's first elected communist government. It's also a full-fledged protest novel, detailing atrocities against the powerless, children, women, and untouchables.

Arundhati Roy is the only novelist who is also an activist and writes about social issues on a regular basis. *The Greater Common Good* (1999), her monograph, reveals the truth about the Narmada Project. Her ability as an essayist and social reformer is also demonstrated in the book. Her previous essay, *The End of Imagination* (1998), advocated for nuclear disarmament. She has won both the Booker Prize and the Sidney Peace Prize. These Feminist authors did the best they could in a male-dominated environment to stamp their authority. It was a difficult road for the women to travel, as they had to overcome years of male dominance, taboos, and beliefs that had heavily imbued society. Furthermore, critics claimed that colonialism treated



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women and men differently. This was due to the fact that women were subjected to both general and specific discrimination as colonial subjects, which was referred to as "double colonization." Women writers from the 1990s such as Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Mehta, Gita Hariharan, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Vasudev, and Arundhati Roy contributed to these perceptions. Without a doubt, they have done a good job of exposing the fallacies of a male-dominated society and alerting the public to the various atrocities perpetrated against women who dared to cross the various rigid boundaries imposed by society. In several colonized societies, the debate over the negative effects of gender or colonial oppression on women's lives continues to be relevant in societal analysis. Feminism, like postcolonial studies, is interested in how representation and language were crucial in identifying the formation and construction of subjectivity. Language was important for both the patriarchal and matriarchal communities in terms of identifying formation and constructing subjectivity. Language subverts patriarchal power and introduces more authentic forms of gender equality negotiation.



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Conclusion

This study reveals that feminism is a fight for women's equality, a push for women to become more like men. Feminism's agonistic meaning considers it to be a fight against all kinds of man-centered and hottest animosity. This study delves into the history of Indian Feminism and how it has progressed. Indian women's scholars have placed Indian women's issues in a broader context and demonstrated their place in the universal literature. Men were in charge of a lot of the early changes for Indian women. However, by the late nineteenth century, their spouses, sisters, relatives, and other legitimately influenced by battles, such as those fought for women's training, had joined them in their endeavours. Women's self-governance became more prominent in the late twentieth century as a result of autonomous women's associations. In autonomous India, women's interest in the fight for opportunity grew, as did their basic attention to their job and rights.



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