

Gender Violence And Its Representation: The Indian Background

Kaveri V A¹ (Research Scholar) , Dr. Shivani Vashist² (Research Supervisor)

^{1,2}Department Of English Sikkim Professional University, Gangtok, (Sikkim)

Abstract

The article examines the complex issue of gender violence within the realm of Indian feminist literature. It goes beyond mere acknowledgment to delve into how Indian feminist authors have masterfully conveyed and depicted the multifarious facets of gender violence prevalent in the country, encompassing harrowing experiences such as domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and the deeply ingrained societal discrimination against women. The analysis illuminates the vital role that literature plays as a potent tool for shedding light on these deeply-rooted issues, as it not only highlights the harsh realities but also challenges the prevailing societal norms that perpetuate such violence, effectively becoming an advocate for transformative change. This abstract underscores the powerful intersection between gender violence and the narrative of Indian feminism, underscoring that literature is a catalyst for raising awareness, stimulating critical discourse, and ultimately instigating the societal transformation necessary to combat gender-based violence.

Keywords: Indian, Women, Issues, Violence, Representation.

Introduction

Patriarchy is a hierarchical system that oppresses women, relegating them to a subordinate status. Women have historically been defined in relation to men, lacking autonomy and being seen as having natural deficiencies. The traditional roles assigned to women have been those of dutiful wife and mother, with their morality dictated by men. For centuries, women in traditional social systems were considered subservient to men. In patriarchal bourgeois society, matriarchal communities have been socially and

economically silenced and afflicted. Kate Millet noted that patriarchy subordinates women to men and treats them as inferiors. Virginia Woolf, a prominent figure in this context, campaigned for the moral emancipation of women. Her works, such as *A Room of One's Own* and *Mrs. Dalloway* aimed to establish a meaningful place for women in literature. Woolf advocated for formal equality, asserting that women are essentially the same as men and should have equal opportunities. She emphasized the importance of economic independence and having a space of their own for creative writing. Woolf believed that women's work was creative, valuable, and essential to improving the world, recovering the obscure lives that were silenced by social constraints.

With the introduction of Western education and colonialism in India, women's lives began to change. After independence, a new image of women emerged as education instilled a sense of individuality and a commitment to human rights. The feminist trend in Indian literature gained prominence as women became aware of the double standards of social law and the need to find a voice to express their knowledge. Prominent figures like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and Mahatma Gandhi advocated for women's freedom and rights. They fought against practices like Sati, child marriage, and polygamy and promoted widow remarriage and women's education. Gandhi, in particular, emphasized women's moral superiority and their essential role in society. He believed that true independence could only be achieved when women enjoyed the same rights and freedoms as men (Meenakshi, 2004).

Indian literature also saw the emergence of women writers who portrayed the struggles and experiences of women, often dealing with themes like gender issues, female exploitation, and the clash between tradition and modernity. These women writers have raised a fiery voice against traditional norms and gender discrimination, striving for equal rights and freedom.

Women writers have significantly enriched the genre of Indian literature, alongside their male counterparts. Toru Dutt, an early woman novelist, wrote in both English and French. Other notable women novelists from that period include Raj Lakshmi Debi and Krupabai Sattianadhan, who addressed themes such as the role of Hindu wives. Shevanti bai Nikambe, another important female

novelist, wrote to advocate for girls' education. After India gained independence, Indo-Anglian novels often featured modern women as protagonists, with women writers shedding light on the inner struggles faced by female characters as they sought to navigate the complexities of tradition and modernity.

Contemporary female characters in Indian literature are often portrayed as revolutionary, striving for self-sufficiency and autonomy. They articulate their awareness of their social status, seeking to overcome barriers and address women's issues. These novels challenge traditional gender roles, depicting women who reject the conventional image of the docile, silent, and long-suffering woman perpetuated by male-oriented cultures.

In recent years, a new wave of women novelists has made their mark in Indian literature, including Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Rama Mehta, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Arundhati Roy, Dina Mehta, Namita Gokhale, and Sobha De, among others. These writers have explored a wide range of themes, including gender issues, female exploitation, the challenges of being an other in a patriarchal society, the transition from babyhood to maturity, self-discovery, human relationships, sexual autonomy, and various literary styles like realism and magic realism. They have also examined themes such as the new-woman, Indian culture, urbanization, Indian-ness, migration, and east-west encounters.

Indian women writers have offered diverse perspectives, showcasing their multifaceted nature. These writers have highlighted the strength, resilience, and complexity of women. Their voices provide a counterpoint to the dominant male voices in literature, challenging the silence that symbolizes oppression and advocating for self-expression and liberation. With their thematic concerns, early women writers initiated a revolt against prevailing social conditions, setting the stage for an inner revolution in literature. Over the past two decades, the emergence of Indian women writers in English has gained international recognition, resulting in literary awards (Spivak 2010). Their works provide an authentic portrayal of women, their relationships with society, their families, and themselves. Modern Indian women writers in English have focused on gender issues and the struggle for human rights, boldly challenging traditional norms and gender

discrimination. They have brought women's issues to the forefront and sparked an inner revolution against the established social order.

In this post-modern age, women have been able to express their views independently and not solely through the male gaze. The voices of women have gained prominence in literature as they address women's problems and seek equality in human rights. Women characters in contemporary novels often rebel against traditional gender roles, challenging the stereotype of the submissive woman. Indian women writers have used their narratives to demand their rights and raise their voices against the traditional order and gender discrimination. This literary transformation has allowed women to break the silence that symbolizes oppression and find their unique voices of expression. Through these writings, Indian women have embarked on a journey to assert their identity, existence, and independence, creating a meaningful exploration of truth and beauty in literature.

Prominent women authors such as Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande, have offered profound insights into the female psyche. They explore the motivations, conscience, and psychological complexities of their female characters, delving deep into the intricate world of women's minds. Their stories often portray the liberation of women from societal pressures, resulting in the assertion of their individuality and the resolution of identity crises. The works of these authors present a kaleidoscopic image of the profound minds of their female characters, illuminating the intricate workings of the human psyche and the quest for self-awareness and harmony (Asha 2010).

Kamala Markandaya's novel, *The Golden Honeycomb* underscores the universal importance of freedom as a fundamental human right, emphasizing the shared nature of humanity transcending race or class divisions. Contemporary Indian women novelists, like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, have captured the essence of Indian society, showcasing a deep understanding of the language and a genuine portrayal of modern India's diverse regional aspects. They often focus on the urban middle class, reflecting the echelon of the social order with which they are most familiar. Themes explored by these women novelists encompass gender issues, female exploitation, challenges faced in a patriarchal society, the journey

from infancy to adulthood, self-empowerment, human relationships, sexual autonomy, magic realism, realism, fantasy, the concept of the new woman, urbanization, Indian culture, migration, and the east-west encounter (Kamala 2013).

In contemporary literature, women characters have evolved progressively and boldly embraced their quests for liberation. Authors like Shobha De depict urban women who confront the ups and downs of life, mirroring the journey of liberation and self-discovery. Arundhati Roy's remarkable ability to delve into the psyche of her characters is highly acclaimed, revealing the intricate psychological makeup of her characters.

Indian women writers are making a significant impact on the global stage, transcending geographical boundaries. They explore themes such as cultural clashes and the challenges faced by individuals caught between two worlds. Expatriate Indian women writers contribute to this narrative, with themes often revolving around the East-West confrontation, the tension between modernity and tradition, and issues related to post-colonialism, multiculturalism, diaspora, feminism, and globalization. These writers, such as Anita Rau Badami, Meera Syal, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Uma Parameswaran, Shauna Singh Baldwin and others, have received prestigious literary recognition for their diverse and inventive works, offering a poetic craftsmanship that reflects the evolving status of women in society. These women novelists have emerged from a history of suffering and oppression under male chauvinism and patriarchal discrimination, asserting their rights, opportunities, and freedom.

Conclusion

Patriarchy has long oppressed women, relegating them to subordinate roles and defining them in relation to men. The traditional roles assigned to women have restricted their autonomy, and they have been seen as having inherent deficiencies. Throughout history, brave women like Virginia Woolf challenged these norms and campaigned for women's moral emancipation and equal opportunities. Indian women, too, have broken free from oppressive traditions, with leaders like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi advocating for women's rights. Women writers, both historical and contemporary, have enriched literature by shedding light on

diverse themes and empowering female characters. These writers have allowed women's voices to flourish, challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for self-expression and liberation. Indian women writers have not only broken the silence of oppression but have also made a significant impact on the global stage, transcending geographical boundaries to explore various themes, showcasing the evolving status of women in society.

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