

## Women's Depiction in Indian English Fiction

Dr.Nirmala Devi M  
Assistant Professor in English  
St.Martin's Engineering College  
Secunderabad  
Telangana

### Abstract

A lady is a daybreak of light that dispels all darkness. She is the sun that illuminates everyone and has the power to dispel any dread that grows in the mind's darkness. Women are fundamentally the source of life. No one can deny the importance of women as the ultimate architects of this universe. As a sister, daughter, wife and mother, she builds the basis of the family by embracing everyone with unconditional love. If given the opportunity to develop their full potential as counsellors, entrepreneurs, writers, painters, scientists and mystics, they may also contribute a better vision to the men's world. This paper focuses on women's evolution from the Vedic era to the present day.

**Keywords:** Fiction, Women, Women Empowerment, Novels

### Introduction

Literature is thought to be the written expression of society's reality. It portrays how people perceive, analyse, and interpret diverse situations and objects in their daily lives. Literature is a medium that shapes society's imagination and vision, resulting in stereotypes and values that are hardwired into the system. When someone starts reading it, they are seeing a reflection of another person's thinking, even if that person is no longer alive. Literature has been transmitting and discussing the scenarios and conditions of the globe for millennia. As a result, it is the greatest of human innovations, uniting people who had never met before. Literature is more than a description of physical existence; it is an addition to it. It improves the necessary skills and information in everyday life. People can travel via literature to learn about the most important and minor parts of human existence.

Human civilizations have tended to designate the separate parts, moral duties, laws about demonstrating a certain behaviour and shares of duty, and even different sentiments to men and women, from the dawn of civilization. They did so by applying the social differentiation of gender to the biological distinction of sex (between male and female) (between masculine and feminine). When considering the Victorian era's conditions for women, the position of women in the Victorian era is frequently regarded as a demonstration of the unusual incongruity between Great Britain's national power and treasures and riches, both then and now, when considering its terrible social conditions.

Women did not have the ability to vote, sue, or possess property during the time when British monarch Queen Victoria was in power. At the same time, increasing numbers of women entered the paid labour force, resulting in the Industrial Revolution. Feminist ideas became common among the educated middle classes, discriminatory laws were repealed, and the women's struggle for the right to vote in political elections reached its pinnacle in the Victorian era's final years. Women were supposed to be associated with domestic activities throughout the Victorian era, and this conventional view required them to keep their homes clean for their husbands, cater food on the table, and nurture their children.

Women's rights were severely curtailed during this time; they were stripped of all of their earnings from employment, all of their tangible possessions and chattels (excluding land property), and all other hard income they created once they entered into a nuptial bond. When a Victorian man and woman married, the woman's rights were legally transferred to her husband. The law recognised the married pair as a one entity represented by the husband, making him superior and the owner of all wages, money and property. In addition to surrendering their assets and physical property to their husbands, Victorian wives became property to their husbands, giving them the right to own their bodies and the products of their labour: sex, children, and domestic work. Marriage took away a woman's freedom to consent to a conjugal contact with her husband and gave him 'exclusive proprietary rights' over her body.

Such gender functions differential, which is influenced by elements such as experience, education, time, and financial support, has influenced how men and women participate in literature as readers, writers, and potentially as characters. In Dorian Gray's "The Picture of Dorian Gray," Oscar Wilde penned: "No woman, my dear boy, is a genius." Women are merely ornamental. They never have much to say, but when they do, it's charming. Men represent the triumph of intellect over morals, while women represent the triumph of matter over mind."

Women are expected to be calm in patriarchal societies in general. They formulate certain specifications to set particular patterns of existence for her long before she enters the world. Furthermore, the association of pessimism with traits such as sentimentalism, puerility, apathy, and insanity harms the woman's character assessment, reputation and advancement. Even within the realm of women, classifications such as wife or seductress, prostitute or ideal lady, femme fatale or wife are used to create division.

Women must fit into particular categories to gain society's respect, such as mother, wife, or an ideal woman who is loyal, unselfish, and sacrificial, such as Draupadi (Mahabharata) and Devi Sita (Ramayana). 'Literature has always been equivocal in its image of women,' says novelist Anita Nair. Women who were good, that is, who followed cultural conventions, were rewarded with a happily ever after. Even fierce heroines, like Elizabeth Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice* or Jane Eyre in *Jane Eyre*, find happiness and meaning in a decent man's embrace (Jane Eyre). Alternatively, they are left to lament their fate with a manufactured bravery, like Scarlett O'Hara did in *Gone with the Wind*, or they must commit suicide, as Anna Karenina or Karuthamma did in *Chemmeen*, or Emma Bovary did in *Madame Bovary*."

### **Women in Indian Literature**

In India, fiction, particularly the novel, is the result of Western dominance. The book, as a literary form, immerses readers in the chasm of poverty and patriarchy, providing a written account of power's unethical or dishonourable deeds and reasons, as well as the misery it unleashes. During the post-colonial period, a slew of novelists emerged who focused on feminism. However, such subject and interest were not mentioned in the writings of novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Anita Desai, before the climax of some prominent and critical writings of feminists like Bharati Mukherjee, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, and others who began publishing their works before independence.

According to them, a woman is unique when she is confident in announcing her own character and leaning positively on her own womanhood rights. This type of 'woman' considers and examines her position as a woman in the grand scheme of things, which includes the moral, social and spiritual worlds. In summary, their writings grapple with more fundamental and basic issues facing women, with the goal of achieving greater ideals of womanhood. 'Every

word a woman writes affects the tale of the world, revises the official version,' author Carolyn See famously said.

'Nectar in a Sieve', Kamala Markandeya's debut novel, was released in 1954 and tells the narrative of a South Indian village where life continues to be as it was in ancient times, but contemporary science, technology, and industry have infiltrated the air. Rukmani, the heroine of the tale, faces hardship after struggle with no indication that her situation would improve. She bears calmly each time her situation deteriorates, hoping that things will soon improve. Mirabai, a young woman from a partially westernised Hindu family in pre-independence India, is the protagonist of her second novel, 'Some Inner Fury,' published in 1957.

The author has also mentioned the terrible pains and tribulations of an Indian woman in this story. Markandeya returns to the same theme in 'A Silence of Desire,' published in 1963, but with a different plot and conclusion. The story is about the misery and affliction of the female heroine Sarojini, who appears to be dealing efficiently but ineffectively with a set of problems in her domestic circle with male control and patriarchal superiority. The work is a mirror of a society that has been twisted for generations by man's flagrant tyrannising mindset, with the patriarchy's powerful support. Maya is introduced as a rebellious female in Anita Desai's novel 'Cry, the Peacock,' published in 1963, who battles three traditional stereotypes in her life: male authority asserted by her husband; female friends who play stereotypical compliant roles of wives; and her religious beliefs in karma and detachment. Maya had difficulties reconciling her husband Gautama's degradation of her with her own emotions of self-worth instilled by her father because traditional Indian norms put on sons were not part of her interaction. Maya's feminist viewpoint criticises a society that devalues women and expects them to recognise that their upbringing was not representative. Maya is struggling to validate her individual ideals and self-worth while pondering the bigger question of what constitutes a balanced environment that respects her values. It explores a woman's inner conflict during a tough period by addressing the issue of marital discord and the resulting estrangement that occurs in the life of a neglected wife. Maya's besotted dreams and amateurish wants disclose the human heart's deepest sanctums.

Maya's clean and pristine heart with a plaintive screech for Gautama's love, who fails to impart the passion she dreams of in her wedded happiness, is meticulously studied throughout this tale. She seems irritated. Maya is unable to achieve this level of consciousness, and she murders her husband before killing herself. Maya blames herself for Gautama's death, despite the fact that there is no proof to support her claim. She falls into the wrong proportion, not literally, like Gautama did, but mentally. She is heartbroken when she passes away.

Desai earned the coveted Sahitya Akademi Award for her work 'Fire on the Mountain,' published in 1977. The story follows Nanda Kaul, an elderly widow who lives in a lonely mansion in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh, known as Carignano. She is one of the protagonists who has endured a lifetime of suffering as a result of her husband's proclivity for adultery. Nanda has lived her entire life in accordance with her husband's expectations and has obediently surrendered to the demands of his social rank. She was, however, never shown the love she deserved.

In the second half of the novel, another character from the plot, Raka, Nanda's granddaughter, arrives in Carignano. Both initially keep their distance from one another. Raka is quiet, reserved, and completely absorbed in her own world. Her unusual and odd behaviour could be explained by the fact that she comes from a broken home. Her father is an alcoholic, and her mother has always been unwell. Nanda tries to communicate with Raka by telling her stories as a result of this behaviour. Nanda's old friend Ila Das pays her a visit in Carignano.

In the narrative, however, she meets a tragic end. She is raped and murdered for speaking out against patriarchal conventions by attempting to prevent a seven-year-old girl from marrying a widower. Through the character of Nanda Kaul and her refusal to live with the memories, the story successfully smashes the stereotype of the altruistic and self-abnegating woman. Finally, *Fire on the Mountain* will always be remembered for its strong and compelling portrayal of female characters that leaves indelible traces on people's minds.

Mulk Raj Anand's work 'The Old Woman and the Cow,' published in 1960, is the only one of his that features a female protagonist. It is also his sole piece that depicts women's problems and difficulties. Gauri is the main character in the novel, who evolves from an obedient, meek, and obedient person to one who stands firm against wrongdoing. In this novel, the author's deep concern for sex that has been subjected to harsh and totalitarian treatment is expressed sympathetically and empathetically. Gauri's despair exacerbates her incapacity to behave properly and her mental distress. She remembers her mother and father, whom she lost early in life, and tears quietly. A girl with a history of emotional humiliation and aggravation clearly desires a partner who can help her forget about her sorrows by lavishing her with love and devotion. Panchi, on the other hand, defies her expectations. This form of marriage, as shown in the story, is a cold and detached action in which love, the strength of marriage, is sunk in the deep sea of dowry settlement. In these types of marriages, parents impose a bride or spouse on their children who are oblivious of their personal preferences. The incompatibility of such couples frequently results in male brutality on the first day. Panchi's anticipation of his wife, even before they marry, reflects the traditional attitude of a husband toward his future wife. Panchi held the orthodox attitude of a husband even before the marriage, believing that a wife should always be under her husband's dominion. Husbands are accustomed to blaming their wives for any disaster or hardship. Panchi wishes for his wife to live a conventional lifestyle. Gauri is forced to submit to his ruthlessness and servitude without protest.

He even convinces Gauri of his point of view by stating that if his wife refuses to comply with his request, the husband must severely chastise her. Since her marriage, Gauri has been unaware of her strong-willed husband's adoration. Panchi finds it impossible to free himself from outdated norms and societal taboos against women that are rife in his community, and as a result, he swings between his love for Gauri and the authoritarian authority of Kesaro (Gauri's mother-in-law). Gauri describes Sita's personality (Ramayana). Gauri's generosity is like to that of a cow, and she maintains the credulous, immaturity, and purity of character that are regarded characteristics of an Indian woman. Her character is sketched with deft strokes, and her gradual acceptance of the established masculine dominance is an act of self-realization. When the situation appears to be uncomfortable, she demonstrates her true power. She leads the local elders and bravely defies societal authorizations and their rigidity. Rather than blindly following the spineless societal conventions, she chose to live in solitude and isolation.

Anand brilliantly portrays a sad truth about Gauri's mistreated existence at the novel's conclusion. Gauri embodies Sita's qualities and is one of the most iconic female characters in Indian literature. Shashi Deshpande's novel 'The Dark Holds No Terror,' published in 1980, tells the narrative of Saritha, a successful doctor. The author attempts to depict feminine sensitivity and refinement in her story. Typically, women seek independence and liberation from control, just as men seek the authority and right to act, speak, and think as they wish. Women, too, demand their identities and rights. In general, Shashi Deshpande's novel is about the pursuit of female identity. For ages, Indian women have been the silent victims of male oppression.

She has never been able to find her own identity, despite playing several roles as a wife, mother, sister, and daughter. The novel by Shashi Deshpande covers a wide range of topics, including

women's illiteracy, conventional indoctrination in patriarchal society institutions, caste barriers, dowry, and socioeconomic status. Saritha is a modern lady who is educated, intelligent, and financially self-sufficient; she could not accept her fate as a result of whatever has happened or is about to happen in her life. The message that the author ultimately wants to convey is that there is no need to flee or imprecate the darkness; women's emancipation rests neither in quietly suffering and believing that results are predetermined and cannot be changed, nor in rebelling against all claims of the family and society. She must believe in her inner power, which has been enhanced by her education and knowledge, and find a way to reconcile tradition and modernity without sacrificing her unique identity.

R.K. Narayan's heroes also emphasise the rise of the new age lady. Narayan's female characters develop robust and iron-willed, whether it's Savitri in 'The Dark Room'(1938), Rosie in 'The Guide' (1958), or Bala in 'Grandmother's Tale' (1992). She has deep roots in ancient Indian traditions and has built a reputation for integrity and worth, honesty that is unique to an Indian woman. The characters of Narayan's stories are self-reliant, egotistical and courageous with assertiveness and dogmatism. She strives for her freedom, wants equality, and asserts her uniqueness. She uplifts not just herself, but also her, parents, husband and children in this way.

Rosie is the key heroine in the novel 'The Guide,' embodying the worth and soul of an ideal woman. Rosie is the daughter of a dancer, indicating that she comes from a lower caste. She didn't love Marco, but she married him for his social standing. She does, however, portray the character of a typical Indian wife who is subservient and considers her husband to be God, although her marriage has been a source of pain for her. Marco is entirely absorbed in his work and is unmistakably detached and unresponsive to her. Though she enjoys dancing, she puts it on hold when she marries him since he despises it. Their marriage is a disgraceful example of marital dysfunction, and Rosie soon develops feelings for Raju. Marco disowns his wife after learning about her involvement in infidelity.

Rosie is a woman with strong opinions and goals. She looks to be a wise artist who avoids direct confrontation at times, but she also has a childlike aspect to her personality at other times. She is a true artist in every sense of the word, a dreamer who is detached from the material world. She resolves to settle their financial commitments and leave Raju after his significant run-in with the law and discovering about his true character. She lives alone, happy and content with her accomplishments. Readers sympathise with her because of her ethical and righteous behaviour. She exemplifies the Feminine ideals of womanhood.

Bharati Mukherjee's work demonstrates a distinct sense of recognition and solitude. In her work 'Jasmine,' released in 1989, the protagonist explores the concept of Indian womanhood and how it evolves as she proceeds from her rural upbringing in Jalandhar area with her Lahori Jaat, poor, agriculturally laboured family. It's about a seventeen-year-old girl who is widowed after her husband is killed in a bombing. The narrative is about Jasmine's dislocation and relocation as she gradually leans into different roles, progressing to a Western country while shedding bits of her past. During her travels to America, she gradually discovers herself by changing names, Jasmine /Jase/Jane/Jyoti/ Jazzy. Throughout her trip from India to Iowa, she is given various titles, each of which represents a significant event in her life. She discovers a new personality in every place she goes and every time she changes her name. The author's own personal experiences of dislocation and relocation aid her in capturing the protagonist's non-native experience in this novel.

## Conclusion

Literature is the only location in this sphere where we can interact with people who can only communicate via printed words from the privacy of our own minds. Literature submits to reality. It is the manifestation of societal thoughts. The background of the cause and effect of social progress is literature. It heightens our innate sensitivity and expands our mental capacity. It keeps track of the experiences we have in our daily lives, bringing the past and present together in a rational whole; and it feeds future generations by providing an account of traditional aspects, views, and values. Literature, being a component of society, rescripts and modifies credibility in accordance with societal progress. However, the fact that women continue to be denied basic and fundamental rights is a sad and dismal reality. The lives and works of some female authors have been influenced by gender differences in education and life.

Jane Austen (1775-1817), for example, spent fewer than two years in a girls' school (while two of her brothers went to Oxford). When she ignored the advice on what books she should write, she was paradoxically playing with the stereotype of the dumb female writer. She was robbed of proper knowledge of 'science and philosophy' as well as the 'quotations and allusions' that were regarded the privilege of masculine knowledge due to her lack of a thorough classical education. Male writers are thought of as 'writers' first and subsequently 'men,' as Elif Shafak wrote in 'Black Milk: On Writing, Motherhood, and the Harem Within.' Female writers are first and foremost 'female,' then 'writers.'

The lower position women have occupied in male-dominated society has resulted in the tradition of women being depicted in literature as meek and docile. The feminism wave of the 1970s and 1980s, on the other hand, inspired a renewed interest in carving out a place for women's history. Writers began to include strong female characters in their writings. Women established presses dedicated to disseminating their rejected manuscripts. In recent years, a greater focus on convergence has spurred research into the relationship between race, gender, religion, and class in order to strengthen the value of marginalised groups' inclusion in literature.

Women are now becoming a source of inspiration for many writers as the times change. As a result, more feminist texts that depict the actual core of womanhood would be interesting to see. 'Women should be honoured as well!' says Anne Frank in 'The Diary of a Young Girl.' Men are generally viewed in high regard around the world, so why shouldn't women receive their fair share? Soldiers and military heroes are honoured and remembered, explorers are immortalised, and martyrs are adored, but how many people consider women to be soldiers as well? ...Women who work and suffer in order to protect the survival of the human race make far more brave and courageous soldiers than all those bigmouthed freedom fighters combined!'

## References

- Kamala Markandaya, A Silence of Desire. Penguin India; (2009).*  
*Anita Desai, Cry, the Peacock. Orient Paperbacks; (1980).*  
*Mulk Raj Anand, The Old Woman and the Cow. Bombay, Kutub-Popular;(1960).*  
*R.K. Narayan, The Dark Room. Indian Thought Pub.; (2004).*  
*Kamala Markandaya, Nectar in a Sieve. Penguin India; (2009).*  
*Kamala Markandaya, Some Inner Fury. Penguin India; (2009).*  
*Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine. Perseus Books Group; (1999).*  
*Anita Desai, Fire on the Mountain. RHI; (2008).*  
*Shashi Deshpande, The Dark Holds No Terror. Penguin India; (2000).*  
*Anne Frank, The Diary of a Young Girl. Fingerprint! Publishing; (2014).*