



THE VALUES OF WOMEN'S CHARACTER IN LITERATURE OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

Indian literature, from ancient times to the modern period, presents a rich and evolving portrayal of women's character, reflecting the cultural, social, and moral values of Indian society. Women characters in classical texts such as the *Vedas*, *Epics*, and *Puranas* are often depicted as embodiments of virtue, sacrifice, devotion, patience, and moral strength. Figures like Sita, Savitri, and Draupadi symbolize ideals of loyalty, courage, endurance, and righteousness. In medieval devotional literature, women emerge as spiritual seekers and poets, expressing devotion, self-realization, and emotional depth.

Modern Indian literature marks a significant shift in the representation of women, portraying them as individuals struggling against social constraints, patriarchy, and identity crises. Writers highlight values such as self-respect, independence, resilience, and the quest for equality. Contemporary narratives emphasize women's empowerment, education, and agency, redefining traditional virtues in the light of modern social realities. Thus, Indian literature not only preserves traditional moral values associated with women but also reinterprets and expands them, presenting women as dynamic agents of change. This study explores how women's character in Indian literature embodies both continuity and transformation of values across different literary periods.

Keywords: Women, Novels, Character, Society, community, family, literature.

INTRODUCTION:

It is believed that literacy is the written manifestation of social reality. It demonstrates how members of a society consider and analyze the items they come across on a regular basis. Because literature has the power to influence people's ideas and perceptions, it has a significant influence on cultural norms and values. Even if the person has since passed away, the reader will have a window into their mind once they start reading the book. Throughout history, literature has effectively communicated and described situations and environments from all over the world. Because it connects people who could not have otherwise met, it is the greatest human creation ever. Literary works do more than just describe real life; they enhance it. It enhances information and practical abilities that are necessary for daily living. People can examine both the most significant and even the most insignificant aspects of human existence through literature. In the literature, according to Ezra Pound, "is simply language packed with meaning to the maximum possible degree."

In postmodern and current writing, the feminist viewpoint is quite evident. The portrayal of issues like women's cultural roles and achievements, their social and political rights, equal rights for women, inequities, etc. has undergone a revolution since the release of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Feminist novelists of the



modern era focused on women's inner lives, psychological struggles, and the limitations imposed by patriarchal society. Their writings questioned traditional gender roles, marriage, and social expectations while emphasizing women's individuality and emotional freedom. Prominent modern feminist novelists include Virginia Woolf, whose novels like *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* explore female consciousness and the need for intellectual and economic independence. Simone de Beauvoir, through *The Second Sex*, provided a philosophical foundation for feminist thought, influencing feminist fiction worldwide. In Indian English literature, Anita Desai portrayed women's psychological conflicts and isolation, while Kamala Markandaya highlighted women's endurance amid social and economic hardships.

The presence of feminist writing in English is not a recent development. It is a result of both feminist philosophy and western liberalism. The experiences of Indian women who are torn between traditional norms and contemporary demands are central to feminism in Indian literature. A political theory known as feminism aims to eradicate patriarchy and the oppression and exploitation of women that go along with it. Women's economic, social, and political participation and advancement, as well as their legal equality before the law, are all goals of feminism.

Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Githa Hariharan, Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De, Suniti Namjoshi, Arundhati Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Nayantara Sahgal, and other Indian writers who write in English have all written extensively about the subject. These Indian women writers have written honestly on the psychological and physical challenges that women encounter. They disregarded social norms and traditional writing. They were able to present various portrayals of women in society by exploring the thoughts of their characters. They have written about women from a variety of cultural perspectives. While some fictional female characters view life negatively and dismissively, others view it positively, acceptingly, and even compromisingly, which ultimately results in a deep sense of fulfillment. Postmodern Indian women writers open the door for new study because of their audacious attempts to refute the idea of a male-dominated societal structure. They laid a strong foundation for studies of women in Indian literature written in English.

English Indian fiction is frequently attributed to the pre-independence rise of English education and the English language. It is so deeply rooted in Indian culture that it is fundamentally different from English literature. In post-colonial India, a wave of feminist writers appeared, passionately tackling women's issues. These themes and issues were present in the writings of authors such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandya, and Anita Desai, all the way back to before independence, before the more explicit and even controversial works of writers like Shashi Deshpande, Nyantara Sehgal, and Bharati Mukherjee. Through his heroine, Savitri, R. K. Narayan attempts to challenge the idealized image of the homemaker in his 1938 book *The Dark Room*.

Narayan portrays the suffering of a middle-class South Indian housewife in a very sympathetic manner. She is unable to leave the oppressive limits of her house and is stuck in an unhappy marriage that makes her submissive and timid. She walks to the streets and attempts suicide by jumping into the Sarayu River because she is frustrated with her cheating spouse Ramani's erratic and controlling behavior. The hamlet's blacksmith, whose wife Pooni takes her in and assists her in finding employment as a temple caretaker for the local priest, saves her from suicide. Savitri went back home and pouted by herself in the dark since she could not cope with her new environment or live without her kids. The narrative then takes a realistic



turn, set in a time when women were unable to escape their harsh domestic circumstances due to their emotional and physical dependence on men and family. However, Narayan eventually succeeds in assisting the housewife in escaping her miserable marriage in his novel *The Guide*, which was released in 1958 (only two years after the Indian publication of *The Dark Room*). In this urban novel by R. K. Narayan, Rosie, an intelligent and talented woman, is able to discover her own identity and position in the world thanks to her career as a dancer and her friendship with Raju. In Mulk Raj Anand's work *The Old Woman and the Cow or Gauri* (1960), which likewise employs the tragic female protagonist archetype, Gauri, a gentle and subservient woman, suffers at both her parents' and husband's households. Eventually, Gauri meets Colonel Mahindra, a city doctor who empathizes with her and takes up the cause of women like her. Gauri changes from a timid and obedient woman to one who is self-reliant and powerful. She goes back to her husband, but because he now has doubts about her virginity, he throws her out. It's more how Anand manipulates her reaction to the problem than the problem itself. Instead of pleading for forgiveness and crying, Gauri informs her husband, "If I am a plague on you I will move away..." Even more menacingly, she compares her husband's behavior to that of the legendary Ram, who banished Sita from the palace for the sake of public opinion regarding a woman's purity after she left home with another man. If her husband does the same, she threatens to strike him once more.

By providing the so-called ideal lady of society with a forum to voice her demands and ideas, Anand thus manages to refute yet another stereotype about women. In her 1963 book *A Silence of Desire*, Kamala Markandya tackles the same subject with a different focus and conclusion. Sarojini, a female protagonist who endures patriarchal oppression and male control at home, is the main character of the story. Her husband, Dandekar, a government office clerk, has different expectations of his wife and himself. He sees a wife as an asset and an indispensable prop in the house that doesn't provide for her own needs. From Dandekar's point of view, his marriage is ideal: he has a peaceful, submissive, fifteen-year-married wife who is "an amazing chef," and from this tranquility comes the routine that fulfills "the tidy and ordered wants of his personality." Sarojini's secret visits to a swami, a spiritual healer, for assistance with a growth in her womb and to break up the monotony of her existence, upend the stereotype of an Indian family. Dandekar starts seeing prostitutes while neglecting his kids and his career because he thinks she is having an affair and wants to bolster his waning manhood. Sarojini's interaction with the swami provides her a sense of agency that gives her hope again and revitalizes her waning spirit.

Each person in society has a distinct personality that reflects their social rank, professional background, and personal preferences. Until relatively recently, when more women than men started publishing their works, a one-sided representation of women in literature was unavoidable. Women contributed significantly to oral culture through nursery rhymes, folk songs, and storytelling, which in turn affected the evolution of written culture. Women have been portrayed in literature in a number of ways. Authors often use prevalent cultural assumptions about women and their roles or their personal experiences while writing about women. Male writers frequently paint a significantly different picture of society's perception of women than do female writers. In stark contrast to F. Scott Fitzgerald, who portrays his female protagonist in *The Great Gatsby* as a victim, Zora Neale Hurston wrote in the 1930s, ten years later.



Women have been shown negatively in a number of ways, including as wicked, cruel, prostitutes, mothers, wives, sisters, liars, partners, or confidantes. As Sobande (1959) noted in Rigimo Obirin, women are both good and bad. They are regarded as a man's essential companion, and life wouldn't be enjoyable without them. He found support for his position in Yoruba philosophical concepts, particularly those related to women's behavior.

Feminine traits were described by the masculine gender as being more subservient than those of males. However, this wasn't always the case; some women were more macho than men. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, an only girl named Molly Gibson turns out to be a better kid for her father than a son named Osborne Hamley who fails his parents. Maggie Tulliver is characterized in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* as being far more resilient than her husband, who can't match her ingenuity in bringing their five daughters into the world. Spenser's heroine Britomart was a strong, masculine figure who actively fought like a knight and saved lives during her quest, despite her sweetness and beauty.

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.

The best depiction of women's existence in the modern era is found in AM Irvine's *The Probationer*. This book serves as both an early example of Modernism and a platform for contemporary women's rights as its protagonist, a strong and gifted woman, matures both personally and professionally.

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.

The modern lady has recently appeared in the works of Indian contemporary popular fiction author Chetan Bhagat. Chetan portrays his female heroines as agents of progressive social change and equality, particularly in his novel "One Night at the Call Center," where both sexes work night shifts and receive equal pay and respect.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the values of women's character in Indian literature are not static but dynamic and transformative. They move from idealized symbols of virtue to realistic individuals asserting identity, dignity, and independence. By giving voice to women's experiences and struggles, Indian literature contributes to a deeper understanding of gender equality and human values. Thus, the portrayal of women becomes not only a reflection of society but also a powerful force that inspires social awareness, moral reflection, and progressive change.

The literature of India presents women as central figures who embody moral strength, emotional depth, resilience, and ethical consciousness. Across ancient epics, medieval devotional poetry, and modern writings, women characters reflect enduring values such as self-sacrifice, loyalty, compassion, patience, and inner courage. At the same time, Indian literature also portrays women as thinkers, leaders, rebels, and agents of social change who challenge injustice and patriarchal norms. Through these diverse representations, literature mirrors the evolving position of women in Indian society while preserving their cultural and spiritual significance.

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