



# THE FEMALE IN SELECTED LITERARY PIECES: A SOCIAL CRITICISM

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## ABSTRACT

*In the previous two decisive decades, feminism's enquirers have imprinted a vital rebuke to the way social science has etched out men, women, and society. Arguments regarding epistemology, method, and methodology have been entwined with confabulations about how to effectively modify skewed and partial accounts in the setting of traditional analyses from the dawn. To grasp the comprehensiveness of the social sciences' metamorphosis, to distinguish women and gender practices, one required to observe the most visible approaches to alter the classic analyses' andro-centrism. Feminists have attempted to 'include women' in these discussions. We find three types of women who emerged as undisputable candidates for this framework: women who contributed to public life and were already being studied by social scientists, women social scientists, and women who have been victims of the most abhorrent and blatant forms of male pre-eminence. This research article is an endeavor to study feminism taking selected literary pieces from Sanskrit, British English Literature and Indian English Literature.*

**KEYWORDS:** Women in Our Society, Gender Inequalities, Women in British Society, Women in Ancient Indian Society, Society through Literature

## INTRODUCTION

'What is literature?' is one of the most important questions in literary theory. Despite this, numerous literary scholars and contemporary theorists think that 'literature' cannot be defined and that there is no reference to the use of language. Definite theories are praised not only for their conclusions and techniques, but also for how they construct meaning from a 'text.' Theorists, on the other hand, agree that these writings do not convey a single, fixed, and 'right' meaning. Typically, such molding and shaping results in the cessation of telling fictional stories, conjuring intense emotions, or dispersing thoughts. The Russian Formalists were troubled by the idea that appearance is only clothing that adheres to content. Instead, the form persists on its own, which is what makes literature 'literary.' Surprisingly, meaning has no effect on the shape. Each form has its own distinct history and set of regulations. For historians, men's reasoning, like their actions, is inextricably linked to their values and attitudes. His standard for judging people is based on

the evidence for their actions, not on any conceptual construct of his own. It is up to him to disconnect it and reassemble it, whether through the principles of a scholastic debate or the spread of Methodism. Any field of knowledge can only be comprehended through the application of some sort of selection principle. Interpretation in a situation does not imply imposing it from the outside; rather, it means giving cohesion to what men have discovered significantly.

## FEMINISM AND SOCIETY

To suggest that a theory is dependent, or that it has multidimensionality, is not to assert unrestricted freedom, but rather to pause and consider the possibilities. These are not always the result of free will, but they may occur exactly because there is no single determinant to trigger them. Thus, theories are integral to human matters less through personal freedom of choice, which is often so limited in critical areas as to be of minimal consequence, than through the dearth of



conscious choice. On the one hand, most scenarios are the consequence of a series of overlapping actions, which, as previously said, are the result of a number of wills operating independently of and frequently in opposition to one another, and so their conclusion is neither willed nor predicted by their agents. An act is only free if it consists of opting to still do one thing over another, and the act of opting eliminates the options that it was previously free from. As a result, 'ism' might be defined as an interwoven collection of theoretical ideas and perspectives.

When one begins to see the world via the lens of theory, one's independent will to assess the world fades away, and a prominent and comprehensive perspective emerges, which no one can voluntarily overcome. In most circumstances, one is content with the impressions that have already been established. To embrace any new world view, one must be extremely conservative. The world is reduced to a single entity. It develops into a sliver of a self-constructed world. It is kept quiet and undisturbed. In a nutshell, these deeply held beliefs serve as a jail. The believer becomes 'deafeningly deaf' S/he pays little attention to the outside world and remains motionless, his or her opinions and viewpoints already taken into account. The challenge for feminists is that the majority of believers are female. They connect their personal lives to theories or hypothesized perspectives, resulting in solid and stigmatic beliefs that create a psychological prison. The liberal mindset has vanished. One is content and argues with a belief that has already been accepted and determined as complete. As a result, the self-built prison is imagined by its strict practitioners. It becomes a jail that one age passes on to the next. The history of some deeply held beliefs lives on. The penitentiary does not alter.

## FEMINISM IN INDIAN SETTING: A LITERARY AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

In the Indian setting, feminism has an entirely different meaning and application. Indian society is indeed made up of various religions, languages, classes, cultures, traditions, and historical events that have shaped each of these classes of people, their socio-cultural dimensions, and outlooks, all of which are vastly different from westernized feminism theories and concepts. Even before the term "feminism" was coined, Buddhist nuns in India demanded "*Mukti from the Grahesti*" (Freedom from Domestic Life), because domestic life involved bonds, which led to tyranny and oppression, which they refused to accept. We cannot dismiss the great feminists' western notions, but we must first learn about and comprehend Indian feminists like Mahadevi Verma in order to comprehend how our culture, society, or religion views feminism. Since there was a simultaneous importance of society construction, Indian feminists did not think it relevant to override patriarchal, but they also did not want to be subjugated by them. They want things that were rightfully theirs, such as respect, admiration for their labour, and emotional independence. *Women, although*

*possessing all the attributes, have turned into a basket of virtue and culture, which has to be now aroused and shaken,*' says Mahadevi Verma. These words are still valid today. Those challenges, as well as the current ones, can only be resolved, according to feminists, via physical participation of women in the economy, socially and culturally, emotional freedom, and, most crucially, psychological enlargement of both sexes. Sex-stereotyping should be abolished since it implies that women are inferior, regardless of their religion, country, race, or time period.

Scholars agree that extending the 'status of women' in a varied and huge society like India is extremely difficult. While women in India are legally endowed with a plethora of legal rights and remedies, in practice, these are denied to them. "*The Fundamental Rights included in the Indian constitution- equality under the law for men and women (Article 14), equal pay for equal work (Article 39), equal opportunity in matters of public employment (Article 16), equal accessibility to the public spaces (Article 15). In addition, there are provisions that guarantee rights, such as the Maternity Benefit Act, 1976 and the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976. Section 498 A of Indian Penal Code, 1983, criminalizes mental and physical cruelty to married women bolstered by their husbands and in-laws. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 prohibits the taking and giving of dowry. The Hindu Succession Act, 1955, grants equal rights to parental self-acquired property*" (Adhikari & Saha, 2021).

Women's access to school, the media, and paid employment have been suggested as economic indicators, while participation in decision-making, age at marriage, the amount of, social and personal acceptability of domestic abuse, and women's mobility have been considered as social indicators. While some Indian women have achieved significant positions in the court, education, politics, information technology, medicine, and other sectors, the most of women in the country are denied these privileges. We have a female Prime Minister, President, two Lok Sabha Speakers, sixteen state Chief Ministers, and so forth, but we have yet to pass the Women's Reservation Bill of 2008. As a result, there are inconsistencies between theory and practice, as well as between western and Indianisation of the concept of feminism.

Indian women authors have made major contributions to the English novel world. The Indian novel has expanded significantly in terms of both diversity and maturity. The growth of an Indian book follows certain clear characteristics, and it is not difficult to chart its progressive progression from imitative to rational to psychological to investigative. In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy plays a social critic. She is not cut off from society, the system, the brutality, and the injustices that surround her. By mixing history, inventiveness, and sheer beauty, Roy has depicted the terrible realities of society. This work becomes an attempt to analyze the characters in Roy's novels, who become the spokesperson of the writer herself—her thoughts, ideologies, attitudes, and occasionally her experiences—as a result of the events, situations, and difficulties



observable in their social environment. Taboos rule Indian society, and they can sometimes destabilize the social order. To make matters worse, it is sometimes fueled by politics, political competition, and a ruthless desire for power. The outcomes are unmistakably predictable. Higher authority and social standing provide ample justification for oppressed people to be dictated to and swayed, rendering their lives vulnerable and defenseless. This novel is a sober attempt to ascertain a research of socio-political situations and human lives' fragility.

## THE SOCIAL STATUS

In terms of women's freedom of movement and access to the public sphere in general, national data shows that the proportions of women working for income are minor in most Indian states. Only one in four women can visit friends and relatives without their families' permission, and only one in three women can travel to the market without their families' consent. Women are considered to be less informed than men, with only slightly more than half of India's female population being literate, compared to 75% of the male population. As a result, it should come as no surprise that women marry significantly earlier than men. There is also evidence that one in every five women has been subjected to violence from their husbands or other family members, with a large number of married women aged 15 to 49 believing that a man is justified in abusing his wife if she does not fulfill expected gender roles, such as cooking, if her natal family does not provide the expected dowry, or if she is found neglecting the home. While dowry was formerly a Hindu high caste norm, dowry demands are now a component of Indian marriages. It has become ingrained in the marital traditions of various castes and ethnicities. Following that, this was seen as one of the factors leading to son preference, female infanticide, sex pre-selection, and termination of female fetuses, and thus to a sex ratio that, in contrast to western societies, favors men over women, with 927 women per 1000 males in the 1991 census. The 1991 census continues what has been referred to as a "secular decline in the sex ratio" that began at the turn of the century.

## DEPICTION OF WOMEN CENTURIES BACK: TYPIFYING GENDER

Literature is a kind of social expression. It indicates that literature accurately reflects the contemporary social context. This is incorrect; it only depicts a portion of society. It does not represent the entirety of one's existence. Both social and historical truths are conveyed by the artist. Because it demonstrates social truths of cultural and artistic worth, a work of art is a social document. The writer's declaration must not be mistaken with the work's actual societal implications. Balzac, for example, sympathized with the church and the aristocracy. Speculators and merchants, on the other hand, piqued his interest. As a result, there is a distinction to be made between faith and competence. In general, the theory and practice of

abilities in current times are vastly different. While great epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata distinguish between good people, there seems to be a lingering duality in Indian philosophy. This dualism depicted women, whether as a sensuous, pagan creature like Surpanaka or as a dedicated wife and mother like Sita. Indian women are portrayed as compassionate wives and tender mothers, and this performance has been applauded or appreciated more in India than anywhere else. All of these perspectives are men's perspectives on women. These viewpoints rarely reflected how women themselves felt or thought about them.

Marriage has always been a popular subject among Sanskrit, art, and iconography specialists. Sanskrit love dramas contain unique characteristics and as depicted in the *Rasas*. Shakuntala, the class's most powerful representative, exemplifies these characteristics admirably. Temporary union, separation, and re-union are the three options. After viewing the entire play, it becomes clear that the plot involved in the acts of Shakuntala is created in ascending sequence, which would facilitate temporary union even more. The romantic excursion, as in any other play, pits the hero and heroine against one other, resulting to the hermits' invitation for Duyanta to stand guard and preserve the hermitage, and the passionate bilateral love that ensues. These three can be thought of as the possible phases of the three acts, arranged in ascending order. The decline begins after the events have steadily risen "It is a dictum of Sanskrit critics that there is no charm in love unless it is sweetened by separation. Acts 4, 5, 6 of the *Shakuntala* delineate this downward progress of separation" (Kale, 1969, p.50). Mythology has always been a fascinating subject that has captivated readers and listeners for millennia. Mythology has a unique function in society, employing sacred myths, art, and rituals to maintain the community's ideals and morals. This style of transcribing mythological tales was widespread over the subcontinent, and it spawned its own Sanskrit literature. But quite unfortunate enough, even mythology has depicted women as subjugated. *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, written by the renowned Sanskrit maestro Kalidas, is one such monumental opus. It is also worth noting that mythology in the form of books was only available to a small group of people, including the elites, literates, and scholars, and as a result, a vast portion of the population was uninformed of these events and values. At the same time, it is a tribute to the predicament of women.

## A BRITISH SOCIAL NARRATIVE

Life seems to have been much more foreseeable for them because of their established roles as 'woman in the house' and 'woman in society.' As a result, female authors limited their subject matter to the clearly defined 'women's domain.' By way of a single experience, the writers were aware of the problem of conventional pictures; a mood or an emotion concentrated on a moment or moments of revolt. The authors' requirement to give ample expression to these investigations would not be met if a generation's use of the long narrative form is in the midst of



collaborating out fresh perspective for itself, new approaches to mastering one's life, and perceptions would not meet the authors' requirement to give sufficient expression to these investigations.

*The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster ponders the Elizabethan marital tradition, as well as the laws governing marriage, their transgression, and the consequences that result. Because of the Duchess's magnificent appeal and her innovative attempt to defy the 'authority of societal rules and standards,' the play continues to echo among today's viewers. The Duchess is praised for her daring in attempting to go forward and win over a spouse for love. Weddings, one of the most important events in a woman's life, were viewed through a different lens, with a distinct temperament and a 'non-secular' image. During the Elizabethan period, a woman had no say in who she chose as her future husband. Men were viewed as superior to women. Women in Elizabethan times were taught that they were inferior to men and that they had to accept 'the other's verdicts.' Disobedience was a crime against religion, with horrible repercussions. Webster employs magnificent features to express the Duchess' feminine strength of virtuosity and magnificence, eliciting empathy and respect from the modern audience. This drama attempts to explore *The Duchess of Malfi*, decoding Webster's socio-cultural and theological perspectives, as well as the aristocratic manners that contributed to the Duchess' eventual collapse. This drama also digs into Webster's efforts to portray her as a tragic heroine and a victim of the law.

## CONCLUSION

The standards appear to be influenced in part by feminist interpretations of women's images, as they are founded on equal rights for women both within and outside the household. However, there appears to be an underlying assumption that 'good taste' and 'decency' are part of a shared value system. In reality, the code's implementation has been delegated to bureaucrats, who only do so in exceptional circumstances. As a result, there is a significant difference between how a theory is viewed and lived in the western context and how it is viewed and handled in the Indian context as well as in many first world countries. Women who contributed to public life and were already being examined by social scientists, women social scientists, and women who have been victims of the most repulsive and flagrant kinds of male pre-eminence emerged as undeniable candidates for this paradigm which we have studied in the research paper. It is also worthy to notice that whether be it Sanskrit, British English Literature, or Indian English Literature, every literature showcases depiction of the eroded society which dominates women and observes her silent plight.

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