

## WESTERNISATION AND FEMALE AGENCY IN THE NOVELS OF INDIAN WOMEN AUTHORS

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### ABSTRACT

*The nineteen nineties has been the most significant decade for the Indian novels in English as it brought about a number of important changes in literary discourses. From time to time, various scholars and eminent critics of evaluate and interpret the major works of the major writers of this decade such as Anita Desai, Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhanthi Roy, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur and many other significant names. However, it is clear that Indian feminist movement was meticulously carved by the Indian women novelists as they were highly conscious of the women's liberation movement. These novels have a feminist undercurrent, having woman as the central character. These women mostly rebel against the existing social set up and discard the idea of being submissive, suffering and sacrificing. The present paper aims to depict the different representations of women that Indian-English women novelists have depicted in their novels. However, these Indian women novelists innately understood the worries and presented women as someone who fights against the cover-up and abuse of a male-dominated society. The novels of these women novelists express cruelty, pain, and hopelessness they experienced themselves living in a patriarchal culture. Thus, it can be said that their work has shaped the experience of women in Indian English fiction and beyond. Besides this, the diversity in the contextual reality of the third world women is undermined by the Western feminist scholarship. Hence, by recognizing various forms of oppression, it will also seek to legitimize the existence of diverse oppressive experiences in regards to class and gender dynamics in Pakistan. This recognition will eventually serve to render an authentic agency to women.*

**Keywords:** Indian women writers, Indian Literature, Indian English Novels, contemporary India

### INTRODUCTION

There are many Indian women writers both novelists and poets, based in the USA and Britain. Some like Jhabvala and Anita Desai are late immigrants while others, like Jhumpa Lahiri belongs to the second generation of Indians abroad. Most expatriate writers have a weak grasp of actual conditions in contemporary India, and tend to recreate it through the lens of nostalgia. Their best works deal with the Indian immigrants, the section of society they know at first hand. Sunithi Nam Joshi, Chitra Benerji, Divakarvas and Bharathi Mukherjee are the oldest, and naturally, the most prolific. Writers like Jumpha Lahari, Manju Kapoor, Kiran Desai, and Arundhati Roy too have written novels of Magic Realism, Social Realism and Regional fiction, and benefited from the increasing attention that this fiction has received National and International awards. They have probed into human relationships, since the present problem is closely concerned with mind and heart and the crusade is against age-old established systems. In order to make the process of changes smooth and really meaningful, women writers have taken upon themselves this great task. Away from this line of writing the lives of women, the most successful of the Indian women writers is Jhumpa Lahiri who created the difference among all the Indian women writers. She is a dazzling storyteller with a distinctive voice. She is different from other Indian writers writing in English. Most of the first-generation writers of Indian fiction are born and brought up in India. But Jhumpa Lahiri's connection with India is through her parents and grandparents. India would appear to her sometimes full of wonders,

sometimes full of beggars. Moreover, the writers who live outside comment confidently on economic social and political scenario may appear very often exaggerating or understanding. However, Lahari is honest and authentic to her experiences. Of all the contemporary novelists, she is indisputably the most popular and powerful novelist. She has made commendable contribution to the Indian English fiction. She is a novelist of urban milieu and is a fine mixture of Indian European and American sensibilities. She is essentially a psychological novelist. She claims that her novels are not reflection of Indian society or character. Changes and revolutions took place in all walks of life and women too advanced to acquire their own identity in society. They have awakened women who inspired other women also. As India after Independence laid great stress on women's education, it endorsed refinement of their role in family and society. Women's higher education inculcated confidence and they emerged successfully in all walks of life. They started proving their mettle and showed their best selves in all emerging fields. A woman has been the focus of many literary works down the centuries. In an age of development and flux in every field, one cannot easily ignore half of the population. Indian writers in English have started acknowledging the status of an Indian woman in the patriarchal society. A woman who has been suppressed and marginalized in the writings of male writers has come to the forefront in the novels written by Indian women writers in English.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Dr. Shaily Asthana [2024]** The nineteen nineties has been the most significant decade for the Indian novels in English as it brought about a number of important changes in literary discourses. From time to time, various scholars and eminent critics of evaluate and interpret the major works of the major writers of this decade such as Anita Desai, Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhanthi Roy, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur and many other significant names. However, it is clear that Indian feminist movement was meticulously carved by the Indian women novelists as they were highly conscious of the women's liberation movement. By and large they have portrayed women and their stories with consciousness of the injustice being meted out to women by society. These novels have a feminist undercurrent, having woman as the central character. These women mostly rebel against the existing social set up and discard the idea of being submissive, suffering and sacrificing. The present paper aims to depict the different representations of women that Indian-English women novelists have depicted in their novels. In India, the concept of independence, the pursuit of character, protest and the spirit of resistance have always remained alien concepts when they have been used for women.

**Ashok Kumar Yadav [2023]** Amitav Ghosh is a pioneering voice in the field of Indian English novels in post Midnight's Children era. He has emerged in the field of contemporary Indian diasporic novels with enormous promises and innovative narrative techniques. Each of his novels brings into foreground newer and untrodden areas for exploration and narrative enquiry. Ghosh with his immense research on anthropology and concern for humanity explores several issues and perspectives that encompass major branches of academic discourses. History, science fiction, travel literature and newer discoveries on anthropology and human evolution have been illuminated within the comprehensive frame of his narratives. The Glass Palace (2000) in which Ghosh takes into account a vast span of South-Asian history ranging from the

British invasion of Burma in 1885 to the Second World War. The objective in this paper is to demonstrate Ghosh's exploration of certain silenced episodes of history and narrativising them along with the stories of common man and repressed subalterns. The Glass Palace has a range and sweep not easily matched in Indian English fiction.

**Shelly Bisht [2022]** It is Indian women authors who most often address issues of male ego and female independence. Women writers often use their work as a way to protest male power. Women authors in India write on the cruelty, pain, and hopelessness they experienced living in a patriarchal culture. Many of the works represent a rebellion against the constraints that society imposed on women. Arundhati Roy, Geeta Mehta, and many more are just a few of the many passionate women authors that India's English literature has produced. All of these women authors are well-known for the strong opinions they expressed in their works. Their work has shaped the experience of women in English literature and beyond. To sum up, we may say that the protagonists of their stories are women who are marginalized by male-dominated culture. As a result, it's hard to fault them for their overall contribution. Today fiction by women writers contributes a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. Contemporary women's fiction is a challenge to master narratives. It focuses on "differences that make a difference" to women in dominant masculine culture.

**V. Sudhendra Devi [2021]** Indian writing in English reveals the dialectics of imperialism in its journey from the periphery to the center and echoes a deep core of neo-colonialism based on power politics. Amitav Ghosh, one of the most widely known Indian writers, is a serious novelist and anthropologist writing from a postcolonial consciousness. He belongs to the nation that was once conquered and ruled by Imperial Britain. As a writer, Amitav Ghosh has been immensely influenced by the political and social element of the country. The theoretical argument about identity concerns its nature, process of formation, and its existential questions. Whereas essentialists believe in singularity of individual's identity; the postmodernists prevent from having any such identity. Identity construction has been thus discussed time and again, but one must acknowledge that an individual's identity is to a large extent formed by his or her social location which includes his or her race, class, gender etc.

**Akhilesh Mandal [2020]** Indian writers made the largest contribution to the English novel in English. In the mass diversity and maturity, Indian novel has grown significantly. The development of Indian roman follows certain patterns, and its gradual progression from the imitative period to the realistic stage to the psychological stage to the experimental stage is not difficult to trace. The 1980s occupy a unique position in the growth and evolution of the Indian English novel. Some very promising novelists published their first works during this period. Some old masters also had works showing that their creative capacities were always intact. It was not only in India but also in other countries that Indian novelists won unexpected awards during the 1980s. Like novelists of the third generation, the works of these novelists speak eloquently about their originality and their unparalleled creativity. Indian English literature is now an unknown reality. It has generally attracted interest in India as well as abroad in recent decades.

### **Women In Indian Fiction**

Fiction in India, especially the novel, is an outcome of Western domination. As a literary form, novel takes its readers into the chasm of poverty and patriarchy, thereby giving a written

account of the immoral or dishonourable actions and motives of power and the agony it releases. During the post-colonialism, there came a swirl of novelists who wrote intensely about feminism. Up until the time connotation of such subject and interest were however not mentioned in the writings of the novelists who began publishing their works before independence such as Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and R.K. Narayan before coming into a climax of some prominent and critical writings of feminists like Nayantara Sehgal, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande etc. In their view, a woman is unique when she has confidence in proclaiming her own character and disposition positively upon her own rights as a woman. This kind of 'woman' evaluates and reflects upon her position essentially as a woman in the strategy of things that includes the social, moral, and spiritual spheres.

### **Female Protagonist In The Novels Of Kamla Markandaya**

Traditional Indian society has been passing through a phase of transformation with Western ideologies and systems affecting Indian attitudes and lifestyles. The process of Anglicization started in the mid-nineteenth century. India is in the process of cultural transformation. There is a perceptible change from dogma and orthodoxy to modernism and material prosperity. A close study of Kamala Markandaya's novels reveals the nature of this socio-cultural transformation in terms of its reflection in the changing attitudes and ways of life and living of her characters. Characters like Rukmani, Ira, Dandekar, Sarojini, Lalitha, and Saroja are too obviously Anglicized Indians who identify success with Westernization. Rumania is the protagonist of the novel 'Nectar in a Sieve.' She is a courageous lady. Despite the blast of the misfortunes, she has survived and discovered her identity. Due to industrialization and the establishment of a tannery in the village, all the grains were destroyed and she was compelled to face the problem of starvation.

### **The Concept Of A Modern New Indian Woman**

This article examines the evolving autonomy of the 'new Indian woman' in contemporary English literature by Indian women writers, focusing on single, career-oriented women in urban India. It discusses how these women navigate identity formation within the dual realms of family and career, balancing traditional roles and personal independence. Despite significant economic changes in urban India, there has been limited transformation in societal, cultural, and familial expectations of women. The literature reveals small but important shifts in identity negotiation, suggesting a growing fluidity in women's roles. The analysis underscores the ongoing struggle for greater autonomy among Indian women against a backdrop of persistent traditional expectations.

### **Women And India**

Looking into the details of the changing status of Indian women in relation to ecofeminism down the ages, the Hindu woman idealised the mythic models from the Ramayana and other Puranas. Indian women were asked to get inspired by the archetype of women like Sita, the silent sufferer. Often, the Indian woman is passive and accepts the given role in shaping her destiny. At every stage of her life, she is dependent for her status and survival upon men - her father, her husband, and her sons. The role of women has been full of contradictions so far as Indian customs and traditions are concerned. However, this gloomy picture did not exist in the prehistoric period when there was no gender bias and women were not even considered as separate entities. When India witnessed the advent of Buddhism, there was equal status

between men and women in society, for it allowed women to be educated, to travel as missionaries, and even to remain unmarried.

### **Female Identity In Her Novels**

Caught in a patriarchal society, Deshpande's protagonists are seen learning to devalue themselves. They readily compromise or even disregard personal cost and personal integrity, prepared to go to any lengths to keep their marriages intact. Deshpande's protagonists who were writers, like Jaya, Indu, and Saru, shrink from raising controversial issues even when these issues lay close to their hearts. Deshpande traces the process that transformed these women from bold, sincere, forthright youths to women who prefer to take the line of least resistance, avoiding pain and conflict at all these women find their lives hollow, meaningless and unfulfilled, realising only after many years that their definitions of success (as imbibed from their society) did not coincide with their personal definitions of happiness. The Indian female has for years been a quiet suffer. While she's played various roles as a wife, mother, daughter and daughter, she's not been in a position to state her own personal individuality.

### **METHODOLOGY**

There are five different female protagonists in the episodes in Anita Nair's *Mistress*, who appear to take their life in their own hands and try to live it on their own terms. They have their own individuality and they are strong enough to follow the dictates of their heart. Even Saadiya, a teen-ager from a very orthodox Muslim family, follows the dictates of her heart and makes ultimate sacrifice for the decision she takes. Nair has given agency, strong individuality to every one of these female characters, showing how they take their own decisions and are ready to face the consequences. To begin with, we come across Saadiya, the teenage daughter from the Muslim family, in *Arabipattanam*. Her father, Vapa Haji Najib Masood Ahmed, (Vapa for short), one of the six Chiefs of the Muslim town and the most respected man, impressed on the mind of his daughter that they the Arabs of the town, were of the pure Arab stock, the descendants of the prophet himself. And he had firm belief that he and the other Arabs must safeguard the bloodline, the pure Arabic blood. Saadiya is impatient of being pinned down to the twenty by thirty feet sky above her head, as the Muslim women are confined to their homes, and to the street in the alley, never allowed to venture out on the main road where they might come across and be seen by the other men.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **Female Protagonists In Anita Nair's**

#### **The Better Man And Ladies Coupe**

**Anita Nair's The Better Man:** It must be made clear here that in Anita Nair's fictional works she has presented episodes that delineate the stories of female protagonists. Cambridge Dictionary defines „protagonist“ as “ONE of the MAIN characters in a story or a play”. And in Anita Nair's novel we come across women as leading characters in their episodes facing their own problems.

In Anita Nair's fiction we come across episodes, each presenting a female protagonist, her experiences and struggle in the patriarchal world around her. For example, in *The Better Man* there are stories of female protagonists interwoven in the whole narration. Anjana's story delineates her sufferings and betrayal at the hands of her husband, and how she finds liberation,

becoming economically independent. Meenakshi is another female protagonist, who faces life independently when betrayed by her artist husband, and brings up her child, running a crèche, and later also looks after her ailing husband. Valsala, the youthful wife of an old husband, tries to find her own way out of the unhappy marriage. Paru-Kutty, Mukundan's mother, rebels against her husband when he brings in another woman, and compels him to live separately. All these female characters are at the center of their stories and they have the initiative of action. In Ladies Coupe' also we have several stories in which a woman is at the center, each story presenting the life and experiences narrated by themselves in first person, while men in their life are marginal in their stories. In Mistress, again, the episodes are woven around the female protagonists like Saadiya, Radha, Angela and Maya, who are at the center of the episodes and have initiative of action. In Lessons in Forgetting, Anita Nair has presented female protagonists like Kala and Meera betrayed by their husbands, and who chalk out their own life. Thus, Anita Nair's fiction presents the struggle and experiences of female protagonists, while the male characters are at the margin, the female protagonists are at the center of each episode.

The Better Man (2000) is apparently a male-oriented novel, because its protagonist, Mukundan undergoes regeneration from his psychological state caused by his dominant father. But there are episodes dealing with life and experiences of women protagonists like Anjana, Mandakini, etc. Mukundan is an elderly bachelor and a retired government servant, who returns to his native place, Kaikurusi, an imaginary village in northern Kerala. Mukundan, at the age of eighteen left his village to escape the tyranny of his father, Achutan Nair. Mukundan, in his boyhood had lived under the fear and domination of his father, which he feels even now at the age of fifty. He is also deeply affected by the feeling of guilt of abandoning his mother, when she piteously asked him to take her with him to the city to escape the harsh treatment at the hands of his father. His father had a mistress then. His mother is said to have slipped and fallen from the stairs and died, but this story of accident might have been cooked by Mukundan's father.

The novel narrates the life and experiences of Mukundan, though the female characters in this novel are the protagonists of their own episodes, and they are significant in the sense that they live in a male-dominated family setup, and are victimized by the tyranny of the men in the family. These women protagonists are at the center of these episodes and show initiative of action. Mukundan, after his retirement, returns to Kaikurusi forced by the circumstances. He is still under the psychological domination of his father, who lives across the main residence with his mistress. His father was a stalwart personality in the village community until he was active. As Mukundan was absent from the village for a long time, he has no role to play in the village community after his father. The leadership of the village has now passed on to Power House Ramkrishnan, an ordinary man, who has turned into a millionaire by winning a lottery. Mukundan has, therefore, no role to play in the affairs of the village community. Mukundan who has a guilt feeling about his mother, and the fear of his father, has developed a psychological state from which Bhasi rescues him. Bhasi is popularly known in the village as a house-painter, but he practices a system of medicine evolved by himself and also Homeopathy. Bhasi cures Mukundan of his psychological anguish through his herbal cure. Despite Bhasi's successful treatment, Mukundan betrays him, when power House Ramkrishnan vindictively tries to oust Bhasi from the village to acquire the plot of Bhasi's house. Mukundan

falls prey to Ramkrishnan's strategy of including him in the village committee organized for building a community hall. Mukundan realizes this later and tries to make amends by offering Bhasi a house in his own estate.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration of Westernised protagonism in the novels of Indian women authors reveals a nuanced intersection between tradition, modernity, gender identity, and cultural hybridity. This study has delved into how Indian women novelists have depicted female protagonists who embody or challenge Western ideals—often reinterpreting them within the Indian socio-cultural context. The protagonists in these narratives often undergo journeys that blur the lines between East and West, drawing strength from both while struggling against the constraints of either. One of the key findings of this study is the emergence of individualism and self-assertion in these protagonists, traits commonly associated with Western feminist thought. Unlike earlier depictions of Indian women as passive or submissive within patriarchal structures, contemporary Indian women writers present characters who question societal norms, seek autonomy, and challenge familial and cultural expectations. However, it is overly simplistic to categorize these protagonists as mere imitations of Western models. Instead, what emerges is a hybrid identity—a uniquely Indian articulation of modern womanhood. These characters are not necessarily trying to "become Western" but rather seek to redefine what it means to be a woman in a globalized world. The incorporation of Western values such as independence and equality is often done selectively and is refracted through the lens of Indian tradition, religion, family structure, and socio-political realities.

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