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**FEMINISTIC PSYCHE IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE:
A CASE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY WOMEN CHARACTERS**

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ABSTRACT

During the 1960s, many Indian women writers in English emerged, writing a plethora of good works. These writers cover a wide range of topics, including the search for identity, the independence movement, poverty, feministic approaches, migration, and globalization. Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, and Jhumpa Lahiri are among them. In their writings, they expressed their experiences and encounters. Women are marginalized at all levels of society, whether in terms of economic, social, or political engagement and gender inequality has seeped into people's lives. Women writers mostly focused on feminism and female domestic abuse. They have depicted the challenges that women experience in patriarchal society and how women are discriminated in every way through female characters. We know that patriarchal notions about men's higher merit have discounted the work of Indian women writers. Because of male chauvinism, the work of women writers has not been accorded the respect it deserves in the past. The core subject matter of women writers in the past was a woman's feelings while she was trapped within the walls of a house, whereas the main authors wrote on vivid issues. As a result, male writers' work has received more acclaim from readers, but modern female writers are critical of traditional Indian womanhood beliefs. The present research paper looks at some of the female characters in Indian women literature and seeks to give them a critical appraisal.

Keywords: Patriarchal society, quest for freedom, feminism, agony

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The Indian women novelists depict Indian situation and characters in their novels. They are also rooted in the history and culture of the soil of India. Besides their Indianness, they try to view a feminine perspective. In the novels of the Indian English women writers, Indian woman has been studied and analyzed in her traditional background. Women novelists portray the struggling, conflicting and frustrating Indian woman in their novels. It shows that women writers are interested in portraying the conflict between tradition and modernity, images and roles, career and expectations, and so on. Women and their roles in India, the Post-Independence period has witnessed the emergence of women novelists.

Despite the fact that women writers began writing in this new genre as early as 1879, it was not until much later that they were able to compete with the mainstays. The common blending of fiction and autobiography is also explained by the search for self and an attempt to define it. Not only does the protagonist remain at the center of both novels, but the story is also written from her point of view. This may also be viewed as an unwillingness to conform to the dominant literary culture's standard categories. Women, in particular, have always had to be more careful to keep inside the lines imposed for them by social rules, by their own conditioning—a type of self-censorship that women impose on themselves without realizing it.

Women have been oppressed and dominated by men for millennia. In all realms of human activity, women, who make up half of the world's population, are regarded differently than men. Despite the fact that every woman slaves for the development of her family, her husband, and children, they are repressed, stifled, and ostracized when it comes to sharing the available opportunities for fulfillment in their lives. She's been treated as a commodity her entire life. She has traditionally been seen as the weaker sex by men. The enslavement of women to men has been sanctioned by all of the world's faiths.

Traditionally, a woman's major function has been limited to the home. In literary works, women are frequently 'marginalized, "repressed," or 'silenced.' Feminist criticism is a particular type of political discourse that opposes patriarchy and sexism. Women are oppressed not only as a result of individual male violence, but also as a result of society's patriarchal system. Defining a woman's secondary role, H. M. Parshley also argues that:

Since patriarchal times, woman has been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, a position comparable in many respects with that of racial minorities in spite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of human race, and further that this secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural 'feminine' characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men. (9)

This is what Kate Millett has taken up is 'Sexual Politics'. Millett states, "The term 'Politics' shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (Millett 23). Man is superior, God like: female is inert, passive,

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“doomed to immanence by man”. Commenting on the status of woman, Juliet Mitchell observes: “Production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children are the key structures of woman’s situation” (Mitchell 100).

Githa Hariharan cleverly employs Indian mythology for plot development and characterization in her *The Thousand Faces of Night*. A conventional or legendary story about deities or demi-gods, sacred entities, or famous heroes is known as myth. Myths, as an element of literature, have long held a special place. The mother-daughter connection is portrayed from a different perspective in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Sita portrays herself as a harsh disciplinarian, while Devi yearns for a motherly touch. Devi misinterprets her mother as “too snobbish to caress freely” (85). Devi’s lone memory of her soft touch is of a day when she was sick and her mother massaged her while she feigned to be ‘deep asleep’ (85). Sita has a secret affection and sympathy for her daughter, as we can see from a close reading. Because she had to concede in order to be an ideal daughter-in-law and wife, her motto is ‘order, reason, and progress’ (26).

Kamala Markandaya, the first of the top female novelists, rose to prominence with her debut novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*. Kamala Markandaya has published eleven novels so far. She is familiar with the interaction of the two cultures Eastern and Western as an Indian writer based in London. Her works depict the East-West encounter in various settings and the ensuing identity problem. Kamala Markandaya believes that literature has the potential to help society correct its flaws. Her main focus is for people. “Personal relationships are Kamala Markandaya’s forte,” it is said, “she builds relationships step by step, analyses them, and powerfully makes them reflect something larger than themselves.” Her imaginary world is infused with a delicate feminine sensibility.

Nayantara Sahgal has established reputation both as a journalist and as a novelist. She has written a good bulk of English novels – *The Day In Shadow*, *Rich Like Us*, *A Situation In New Delhi*, *Storm In Chandigarh*, *A Time To Be Happy*, *This Time Of Morning* and two other books namely *Freedom Movement in India* and *Indira Gandhi's Emergence and Style*. Her writings portray India after independence in a realistic manner. Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s reign has also been depicted, as she is the daughter of famed freedom fighter Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. She was naturally drawn to Nehru’s and Indira Gandhi’s social, political, and philosophical visions. She is recognized as “one of our best socio-political novelists today” as a fictionist who highlighted the modern scene of India in her works. Nayantara demonstrates the need for a new morality in which a woman is regarded on an equal footing with a man and the relationship is built on mutual trust, love, and understanding.

Arundhati Roy, India’s Booker Prize-winning writer, launched a career of activism and resistance against local and global inequities with her novel *The God of Small Things*. Ammu is the most important female character. She is a divorced middle-class bourgeois mother with two daughters, Eshta and Rahel. Ammu, who is well-educated and articulate, is not welcomed when she returns to her father’s home. Her brother Chacko, a kind of aristocratic Marxist, marginalizes her. She’s also trapped by the Syrian Christian community in Kerala’s

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traditional family structure and inheritance laws. Ammu falls in love with the untouchable labourer Velutha, breaking the “Love Laws” that her society has inherited from their Hindu background, among other things. Her defiance of caste, economic, and religious barriers is a form of defiance against her marginalization as a woman. Aijaz Ahmad calls her “a woman of great grit” (1) and Murari Prasad comments thus about her attempt at self-realization which is not unconnected with the fate of other subalterns: “Ammu’s rebellion against maternal and marital conventionality, and finally, her liaison with dark-skinned and untouchable Velutha (ironically meaning white) constitutes a violation against a determinate social order, sponsoring the immutable love laws.

Bharati Mukherjee is a novelist and short story writer of Indian-American-Canadian descent. On July 27, 1940, she was born into a rich Indian Hindu Bengali Brahmin family in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Bengal (now West Bengal), India. She has emphasized the roles of women in many situations in her works. The majority of her female characters are sensitive beings on the hunt for personal and cultural identity. She has addressed a variety of subjects in her writing, including the search for identity, immigration, diaspora, Indianness, expatriation, metamorphosis, acculturation, Americanization, and assimilation, among others.

The Tiger’s Daughter, Bharati Mukherjee’s first novel, tells the narrative of Tara, the novel’s major protagonist. The novelist has attempted to emphasize the protagonist’s sense of isolation in this work. The novel’s plot is based on Mukherjee’s and her sisters’ experiences when they moved to America to study. Tara returns to her native India after seven years in the United States of America, as depicted in the novel.

Wife is Mukherjee’s second novel, and it tells the life of Dimple Dasgupta, a wife. She is dissatisfied with her life as a wife and desires to break free from the traditional role, image, or taboo of a typical Indian woman. Dimple is a young Bengali girl with a lot of hopes and goals for her future marriage and life. As a result, she is impatiently and joyfully anticipating her marriage.

She has finally tied the knot with Amit Basu. Following their marriage, her husband is anticipated to immigrate to the United States. As a result, she begins to dream of her future life in America with Amit. As a wife, she is constantly expected to play the role of an ideal wife, just like any other normal Indian woman. Dimple’s frustration grows as a result of a variety of circumstances and conditions. Dimple is irritated by her husband’s usual behaviour. Her husband expects her to be a docile and subservient wife. He has no understanding of Dimple’s emotions, sentiments, or pains. M. Rajeshwar in his work discusses about the psychological conflicts and traumas of the characters of the novels. He says; “the characters are therefore shown grappling on one hand with the psychic conflicts of personal origin. These conflicts and traumas become too pronounced at a particular point of time in their life when a part of their psychic apparatus refuses to submit to several hostile cathexes they manifestly display three distinct tendencies: some move from neurosis to psychosis, others arise at a compromise solution for their problems and yet another group sets

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out to become compulsive idealists because they find the realities of life too harsh or repulsive to put up with.” (Rajeshwar, 142)

The third novel, *Jasmine*, is one of Bharati Mukherjee’s most famous and well-known works. It is one of Mukherjee’s most accomplished novels. The narrative is on the protagonist’s adaptability rather than his defeat. Jyoti, a Punjabi girl from the countryside, is the protagonist of the story. The novel’s suspense begins when the astrologer predicts Jyothi’s widowhood. Jyothi is married to Prakash, an active and dynamic man. Her marriage to Prakash is going well and there are no problems. She meets all of her responsibilities as a wife. She does everything a wife is expected to do in her marriage, just like a good Indian wife. Jasmine is the new name she has been given. She enjoys hearing about her husband’s ambitions and objectives. She is now eager to relocate to America, the home of many possibilities and hopes.

Manju Kapur portrays all of her female characters as women who are fighting against the odds. Her prose is laced with feminism’s strands. The struggle of her female characters, their fragility, and struggle for identification, liberating attitude, the female psyche, and the feminine biological world are all examples of this. The strong bars of traditional patriarchal rules betray the protagonist in her first novel, *Difficult Daughters*. Virmati grew up in a family where women don’t have their own identity or the right to higher education. She wants to study and work, but social customs of the time and location prevent her from doing so. She defies authority and asserts her right to an education. Dipika Sahai (2004:09) in this connection opines:

As a rebel she is conscious of her emotional needs. Herself assertion goes to the extent of having illicit love with the married Professor whom she subsequently marries. The hardship and suffering involved in fighting against an established order, the shattering experience of rejection by her family on becoming the second wife of the professor, and the resultant alienation from society forms the theme of the novel. Her life is a continuous struggle. She wants to establish an order through defiance. She rebels against the accepted and existing moral codes and social norms. (42)

In *A Married Woman*, Astha exemplifies the strength of a freeing soul. She is always battling for attention and a social cause. Her married life provides her with a delicious smoothing via conjugal joy, but she gradually feels alienated and dissatisfied. She was raised in a regular middle-class family’s traditional home atmosphere. Astha is lonely at home because her husband is preoccupied with his business. She decides to pursue a career as a teacher. Hemant doesn’t have much time to talk to Astha about her sentiments or her everyday routine. Astha has an affair with a woman named Pipeelika, who provides her with a lot of comfort. She’s stuck in an impossible circumstance. Astha wants to capture what she has seen and experienced on canvas.

As a child, Nisha in *Home* is sexually assaulted by her adolescent cousin Vicky. Nisha is taken to her aunt Rupa Masi after the incident, where she excels as a student. Nisha’s

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horoscope indicates that she is a mangli. This is yet another case of fate's torment. Even as a ten-year-old child, Nisha is compelled to observe her first "karva chouth" fast for her future spouse. Sona's retelling of Vat Savitri Katha to Nisha and the other ladies in the family is a good example of religion being used to oppress downscale women.

The story of an Indian woman in a distant land is told in *The Immigrant*. The female body and physiology are a topic of feminist writing. Nina's unmarried status is shown using her ovaries and "the unfertilized eggs ejected every month" in a similar manner. Nina's mother is excited about her daughter's upcoming wedding. Ananda, a dentist in Canada, is her husband. Nina has excellent experience as an immigrant after her marriage. Ananda makes every effort to meet her needs. However, it becomes evident that Ananda is unable to provide her with a good sexual experience. Ananda is still busy with his practice. Nina is forced to experience feelings of isolation and worry. She starts working part-time and enrolls as a library student. She begins an extramarital relationship with Anton at the library. Nina becomes dissatisfied and depressed as a result of her experiences. She weeps in misery and travels to India after her mother's untimely death. However, she prepares herself for a new beginning at the end of the novel.

Sahgal depicts the creation of a new woman who is no longer "a sex object and beauty girl, fed on fake dreams of perpetual youth summoned into a passive position that requires no originality" in her works (Sahgal, 1970: 04) but someone who can claim to be man's equal partner.

Simrit is a projection of Sahgal herself in *The Day in Shadow* (1971), and her search for identification runs parallel to Sahgal's struggle for self-assertion. Simrit has left Som's world as a typical guy, and to him, Simrit is only a magnificent showpiece of his house, as shown in the first chapter. He grew up in a culture where women for use had been the norm for far too long. His chauvinism is visible not only in his interactions with his wife, but also in his interactions with his children. She merely wants to be free of their marriage, which was foisted on them by society. Within the marriage, however, freedom becomes impossible. She realizes that marriage is a mistake for which she will be held responsible for the rest of her life.

A Situation in New Delhi (1977) is another work of Nayantara Sahgal in which the character Devi is an important and an exception not only among Sahgal's women but also among the majority of women we came across. Freedom is her prime destination and have a number of affairs with men but also among the majority of women we came across. She has truly achieved the dream of equality of sexes. She enjoys freedom and can have a number of affairs with men. In her character, Sahgal has tried to bring out the conflict of two aspects of a woman –the woman and the cabinet minister. As a politician she searches for satisfaction in the mass movement led by Usmaan. In her case we can observe that neither Usmaan nor Michael could give satisfaction to a woman within her. Men desire her but she likes to live in shadow of her brother. She in fact coexists with her brother. And soon after her brother, she becomes too much of a minister, and ignores herself as woman. She admits that the presence

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of Michal is like a soothing therapeutic marriage. If Michal is a clear friend, Usmaan gives me courage. In other words Michal and Usmaan are two strong pillars which support the being of Devi.

Sahgal's third novel, *Rich Like Us* (1985), has her first foreign woman, Sonali, as well as her second and final career women. The imposition of Emergency in 1975 served as the backdrop for the film. The story is told through the eyes of two women, Sonali and Rose, who represent modern womanhood. Sonali is a young woman with a dream to start a new tradition in order to gain independence. Her profession demands her to make numerous compromises. Since her college days, she has been a self-sufficient young lady. She felt a new sense of liberation at Oxford. Sonali is not only mentally and financially independent, but she is also emotionally resilient. She rejects the borrowed order and security of home by rejecting Ravi Kachru, his boyhood friend. Her family history teaches her that she is not the only victim of the system. Sonali is, in some ways, a continuation of Devi. Both are single, free, and self-sufficient.

Sonali's fight for independence is a little different from that of other women. Rose, a friend of Sonali's who is dealing with similar issues at home, is another female character. Rose, the foreigner, is just as much of a victim as Sonali, the Indian woman. Rose sometimes sacrificed her employees, her company, and even her self-respect for Ram. It was only out of love that she disobeyed her family, parents, and religion to travel to India and marry Ram. She comes with Ram, forgetting herself, in pursuit of her new life as a living entity. Her submission is the outcome of her pride and power. "A woman's instinct to cherish and preserve," Sahgal says of her. The theme of sisterhood is explored by Mona and Rose, Ram's two aggrieved wives. The ideal example of love and sharing is then presented by these two women. Natural affection, trust, and mutual sympathy and trust are the foundations of their connection. Rose vows to look after Dev, Mona's stepson, and his new spouse during Mona's death, allowing Mona to die in peace. Here, the author takes advantage of the prospect of female cooperation leading to liberation. Thus the women writers expressed their internal agony in their works. They started to pen down for the rights of the women.

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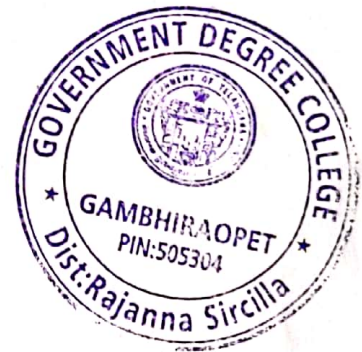
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