

## Image of Indian women

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the image of Indian woman is central to the study of Literature. Woman has inspired literature and has been its pivotal theme too. It is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in literature is all pervading. This is true of Indian English literature. Literature is like a vast canvas in a framework in which writers portray their characters. The purpose of this paper is to flash light on some of those images and unveil them. The paper does not claim to be exhaustive; it is selective and representative of the trends in Indian English Literature. The general image of women in literature identifies the real status accorded to women in society as mother, wife, daughter, in that order in a familial setting. So far, the study of the image of women in Indian literature has been concerned itself with following the transition of a woman from the domestic fold to an individual status of holding herself responsible for her own intellectual and emotional fulfillment. In the words of Mary Ann Fergusson, "One peculiarity of the image of women "throughout history is that social stereotype has been reinforced by archetypes. The woman image is seen on a wider level in English fiction as there is scope for weaving a complex network of human relationships.

**Keywords:** General Image, Society Reorganization, Relationship, English fiction

### Introduction

The image of woman is central to the study of Literature all over the world. Woman has inspired literature and has been its pivotal theme too. She herself is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in literature is all pervading. This is true of Indian English literature. Literature is like a vast canvas in a framework in which writers portray their characters. The purpose of this paper is to flash light on some of those images and unveil them. The paper does not claim to be exhaustive; it is selective and representative of the trends in Indian English Literature. Literature records life and society's response to its which is come to life in the author's image portrayed and exploration of the image of woman in literature enables to assess the writer's vision of them. To become aware of the emerging new image of woman is to be aware of an essential issue in our society. The woman image is seen on a wider level in English fiction as there is scope for weaving a complex network of human relationships.

### General Image of Women

The general image of women in literature identifies the real status accorded to women in society as mother, wife, daughter, in that order in a familial setting. Outside it, she is the prostitute, the widow, the companion etc. In modern times, she is accepted as a professional, but when she protests against injustice and exploitation. The traditional image of woman is a homemaker or social outcast; others identify a new group, which is marked by its struggle for identity and attainment of individual aspirations. The new woman, therefore demand an existence outside the family but within the social framework. So far, the study of the image of women in Indian literature has been concerned itself with following the transition of a woman from the domestic fold to an individual status of holding herself responsible for her own intellectual and emotional fulfillment. In the words of Mary Ann Fergusson, "One peculiarity of the image of women" "throughout history

is that social stereotypes have been reinforced by archetypes. Another way of putting this would be to say that in every age woman has been seeing primarily as mother, wife, mistress, sex object, and their roles in relationship to men". Woman's individual has very little recognition and self-effacement is her normal way of life.

Indian women too, as a part of that set up has accepted it and lived with it for ages. By and large, in the ancient history of India, women have been holy, glorified, and also regarded as myths. "Much more interesting is the insurgent females who have challenged this unfair society; Literature of protest can produce sincere and powerful work". Along with conventional types, there are also protesting women characters in Indian Literature.

### Society Recognize In Women

The society recognized virtues, merit and talent wherever they existed and gender distinctions were not taken into account. Women could fulfillment of their distinctive roles; also participate in several other walks of life. Basically Vedic society visualized two types of women as: "Brahmavadini & Sadyovadhu".

The first type was the ascetic type who carried on the quest of truth. Knowledge and spiritual pursuits for her ideal. The second one – the Sadyovdhu was the domestic type who dedicated herself to the welfare of the family though there was no rigid opposition between the two-the image of women in literature, in the past and present belongs to the second category.

Post-Independence India, when women's education has already commenced and life has started changing, the new women started emerging. The spread of education inculcated a sense of individuality among women and aroused an interest in their rights. Women started becoming economically independent and there was a determined for the realization of their own aspirations. The new women does not belong totally

to either of the two former categories-Brahmavadini or Sadyovadhu, It belongs to a new category. The age-old image of women seems to be slowly blurring and gradually shading off into a new image. At present the image seems to be faced - the old, conventional image belonging to the past, still lingering on and the emerging image of the new women looking forward to the future.

Apart from these sociological, historical, and feministic involvements, the subject is interesting in itself and it is fascinating to watch the unveiling of image of women in several Indian literatures. "The English feminists endowed the new woman with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and her belief that education could make a women capable of leading a financially self-sufficient, single and yet fulfilling life".

### **Modern image of Women**

The modern woman has come to signify the development of woman into a new realization of her place and position in family and society conscious of her individuality. The modern woman has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with man. This period was said to be one of the best periods of Indian history when women were allowed to discuss the highest spiritual truths of life.

Indian woman's freedom from the restraints of illiteracy and ignorance symbolically as well as literally heralded the dawn of independence. Her latent thirst for knowledge and craving for recognition were awakened and her latent potentialities that rusted with disuse were tapped and came to the front position. The first fortunate women who had the benefit of western education began to campaign for political equality for women with men. This was the transitional phase, when the Indian woman had to face the conflict between tradition and modernity. The problems of adjustment between the time – honored values and personal fulfillment naturally led to some kind of friction and resultant frustration.

### **Relationship: Men & Women**

It appears to be paradoxical that men who had advocated female education should be lacking in a complementary progressive attitude to accept and digest the awareness and changed ideas of their women folk regarding their place and position in family and society. While the few liberated women were aspiring for their socio-legal rights, women in general continued to cherish the Sita image. This dichotomy explains the complacency of the Indian-English writer sufferer taking pride of sacrifice. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes "in the relationship between men and woman two chief archetypes are seen; the Radha-Krishna motif and the Rama-Sita relationship, where the woman is the submissive sufferer, who through her suffering enhances the nobility of her husband. These archetypes appear time and again not necessarily because the authors are trying to give a mythical coloring to their work, but because these are part of our cultural pattern, our ideals of aspiration, that may or may not have any basis in the actual conduct of real human being". The major characters belong to an affluent aristocracy, but it is paradoxical, perhaps more ironical than paradoxical, that both find a measure of freedom because of tradition. Tradition dictates that a man supports his family no matter what; tradition dictates that a

woman runs her household no matter what. They try to go deep into the forces that condition the growth of a female in the patriarchal society.

The post-independence period saw the emergence of some powerful women novelists in India English literature. A great reservoir of literary talent lying hidden throughout the disturbed years of pre-independence, found its voice. Some of them have gained the best of education in colonized India. Banking upon this rich surroundings, they depict Indian situations and characters in their novels in a language, though foreign, but very much rooted in the history and culture of the soil. Besides their Indian's, they have tried to view life with a feminine perspective which women alone can have. With realism therefore, they have painted women characters, judged and criticized them from various angles with remarkable ingenuity in their creative writings.

### **Image of women in Indian English fiction**

In the novels of the Indian English women writers, Indian woman has been studied and analyzed in her traditional background. The germs of tradition, superstition and Orthodoxy are widely diffused into her blood that however, much she has struggled, her sensibility has never been completely free from them. The struggling, conflicting, frustrating Indian woman in an infiltrated society has been sketched minutely. Her vacillation between her religious, spiritual, idealistic and the tempting materialistic, westernizing attractions is a marked feature of the Indian women even in the contemporary life. Women have not overcome it. Indian English women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and R.P. Jhabwala etc. discover that Indian women have remained more chained to their circumstances than liberated, more tradition-bound than modern, more restricted and limited than liberated. Some have broken off from their chains and have moved towards freedom.

They are all in a state of unsettlement – seeking something which always deceives them. Thus they suffer at various levels and emerge, even in their victory, as personalities 'more sinned against than sinning'. Nayantara Sahgal is the foster child of the Indian war of independence, being the daughter of Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit and the niece of the late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. She is the first Indian English novelist to dwell authoritatively on politics.

Nayantara's mother, Mrs. Vijaya Laxmi Pandit emerges as the most unorthodox and unconventional Indian woman. She played an active role in the freedom movement of Indian. While participating in the Gandhian movement, she had been the first Indian woman to fall into step with the men and go to prison. She had remained a dynamic force at home and outside. Mrs. Pandit has been the ideal portrait of a liberated Indian woman. Born and brought up in the pervading influence of such idealistic, such unorthodox and unconventional parents, Nayantara Sahgal too, as her autobiography reveals is a representative of the rising, liberated women of the transitional era. However, as a representative writer of the post-independence days. Nayantara Sahgal introduces some traditional characters in her novels along with the conflicting or the liberated women to bring out the changed, rather the awakened sensibility of the Indian woman.

Ms. Sahgal's special insight, her feminine angle of vision, which has helped her create such authentic women characters.

She has known and felt the serious, crucial, and tradition-bound. Conflicting, suffering and struggling aspects of the Indian woman while Mrs. R.P. Jhabvala, after her study and close observation, has portrayed the Indian woman through her ironic vision. Therefore, it can be said that though both Nayantara Sahgal and R.P. Jhabvala along with some other outstanding Indian English Women novelists have explored the world within their limited circle of authentic experience, there is an essential difference in the image of women presented by the essentially and thoroughly Indian women.

Indian woman whose badge has been silent-suffering and who is an upholder of Indian culture is an off-repeated type in Indian English fiction. In Indian English fiction too, though the 'New Woman' finds recognition of her existence and support for her cause from some quarters, she makes her appearance in flesh and blood in the novel of women writers only. The publication of 'Nectar in a Sieve' by Kamala Markandaya ushers in a welcome deviation from the established practice of hero – oriented novels. Woman as an individual with throbbing pulse, feelings and aspirations, involved in the current life that is complicated, demanding and exhausting makes her appearance in the novels by women writers. The appearance of the fully awakened women, prepared to accept the challenges in order to live a meaningful life is a recent phenomenon in Indian English Literature. Among the women writers, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, R.P. Jhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal are very remarkable in the field. The emotional world of woman is explored and analyzed with admirable insight and sympathetic perception. Anita Desai mainly explores the emotional world of women, revealing a rare imaginative awareness of various deeper forces at work and a profound understanding of feminine sensibility as well as psychology. She is an adept in presenting the longings and frustrations of hyper-sensitive individuals. She is hailed as one who ushered in the psychological novel and excels in her chosen field of exploration of the psyche of sensitive women. R.S. Sharma observes, "Cry the peacock, Anita Desai's first Novel, is also perhaps the first step in the direction of psychological fiction in Indian writing in English". However, only after the Second World War that women novelist of quality have begun enriching Indian fiction in English literature.

Ruth Rawer Jhabvala is a European Writer, who lived in India for a considerably long time. She came to India after independence when the social conditions of women were undergoing a change. Generally, women characters are the central figures in her novels. She took up this position of women in a changing society and tried to depict the problems in the social setup through the reactions of Women in various contexts.

### Conclusion

The image of woman is central to the study of Literature all over the world. Woman has inspired literature and has been its pivotal theme too. It is also a creator of literature and therefore a woman's presence in literature is all pervading. This is true of Indian English literature. Indian English literature, like the literatures in the regional languages, spans a rich variety of themes-from the theme of a conventional woman to that of the New Woman, reflecting in the process, the changes that have been going on in society. Man-Woman relationship has rarely been portrayed as a fulfilling experience because the new

development among women has not been matched by an equally new awareness and understanding among men. The new women must arise and then with an equal partner. The woman image is seen on a wider scale in Indian English literature as there is scope for weaving a complex network of human relationships.

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