



## CHALLENGES OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN BUILDING FEMINIST THOUGHT ACROSS INDIA: STUDY OF POST INDEPENDENT INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Following India's attainment of its independence, the nation made significant progress in a number of areas that were beneficial to women. Numerous strategies and projects were developed with the main objective of empowering women, and a significant amount of work was put into their creation. The key aspects that contribute to the empowerment of women are the encouragement of their participation in the labor force and the advancement of their educational achievement. Despite the fact that rules and measures to alter this perception have been in the works for some time, there are still certain rural communities that continue to see women as citizens of a lower classification. The unfortunate truth is that women and girls are subjected to mistreatment and abuse in every region of the country. On the other hand, as a result of the increase of globalization and industrialization, women are getting access to opportunities for advancement. It is primarily through the acquisition of better employment and the advancement of their education that women in urban regions are able to improve their level of life. Specifically, the following subjects are taken into consideration in this research paper: the situation of women in India after independence, the empowerment of women, gender problems in India after independence, women's political involvement, and the obstacles that working women confront.*

**Keywords:** - Empowerment of women, post-independent India, status, women.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Jawaharlal Nehru's new administration in India had a number of difficulties during his tenure as prime minister. These difficulties included the merger of the princely states, the war between India and Pakistan in 1947, and the struggle in Kashmir. On the other side, the Constitution of India was ratified on January 26, 1950, with the intention of ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their gender, caste, or religion, be afforded equal rights and protections. Possibly included in it was the implementation of affirmative action policies for women and other underrepresented groups. While this was the case, a profound sense of inequity existed across the whole of Indian culture. A standoff between activists who wanted distinct sectarian community laws to have autonomy and those who wanted state-enforced secular law to have supremacy contributed to the silence that prevailed among Indian women's activities after the country gained its independence. The question that needed to be answered was whether the decision and legislation of women's rights should be made by community discourses of cultural preservation and spiritual salvation or by state discourses of liberal humanist rights and personal freedom.

It was as a consequence of this that women's rights made substantial progress in the decades that followed the country's independence. 1955 saw the passage of the Hindu Code Bill, which was intended to establish Hindu law. The legal acknowledgment of widow remarriage and the freedom of women to hold property were both made possible as a result of this opportunity. With the passage of the Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961, the practice of dowry was made illegal and subject to penalties. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person on the basis of their race, religion, gender, or country of origin via the use of discriminatory practices. When this Act was passed in 1972, it resulted in the founding of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which made it illegal to discriminate against people based on their gender in the workplace. Beginning in the late 1970s, the third wave of the Indian Women's Movement arrived with a perspective that was not only more radical than that of the other waves, but also distinct from that of the earlier waves. During this time period, feminists were particularly concerned with the challenges that women from lower castes and social groups were experiencing for themselves. In reality, the beginning of the third phase of the Women's Movement would be marked by the Chipko Movement, which was led by women living in rural areas. In reaction to the escalating issue of violence against them, the women of Himalayan India started the movement that is now known as ecofeminism in the 1970s. They wanted to find a peaceful approach to maintain their woodlands, thus they started the movement. It was during the third stage of the feminist movement in India that a number of women's organizations developed and expanded their membership. The members of these organizations fought for the liberation of women who came from societies that were considered to be of lower caste.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To construct the Indian Feminist Theory Point of View via reevaluating fundamental concepts as patriarchy, gender inequality, freedom, labor, family, culture, etc.;
2. Recommending a suitable approach for research on women's studies in India;

## Status of Women in Post-Independence India

It is stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that pregnant women and children have certain requirements that must be met. Every single person of India is entitled to the constitutionally protected rights to life, liberty, and equality, as defined in the constitution of the nation. Additionally, those who live in the country are required to give up practices that have, throughout history, had a detrimental effect on the equality of different genders. Increasing the status of women is the fundamental objective of the rules and policies that have been included into the Constitution of India throughout the years. Since 1950, when the democratic constitution was first implemented, it has made it possible for women to have equal representation in both social and political spheres. Each and every state has been entrusted with the duty of ensuring that women are treated fairly and that peace and order are preserved. Despite the fact that there have been several declarations, treaties, and pieces of legislation, women are still regarded to be citizens of a lower social class, and they have made very little progress in raising their status (position/status of Women in Society, n.d.).

After the social reformers of the nineteenth century, the women's movement gained strength in the 1920s. This movement followed in the footsteps of those social reformers. The women's movement gained impetus during this period of fierce nationalism and independence struggle. This was the time when the movement

emerged. A great number of things were accomplished as a result of the campaign; nevertheless, the constitutional guarantees for women's equality and the expansion of voting rights to all adults in independent India were the most significant achievements. However, these strategies did not result in a statistically meaningful improvement in the standing of women. Beginning in the 1970s, a new generation of women's suffrage advocates started to make their voices heard in public and in political arenas. Even in today's culture, traditionalists continue to see females as a burden and express a desire to have a boy. The people who live in rural regions are most affected by this phenomenon. According to Indian culture, the manner in which men behave is deeply engrained. They hold the belief that men are intrinsically superior to women and that they should be afforded the advantages of leadership, control, and decision-making.

There has been a shift in the standing of women. The domains of religion, politics, culture, economy, and society are all impacted by their influence around the world. There has been an increase in the number of female students enrolling in postsecondary programs such as colleges and universities. Those who have completed their Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees are able to obtain employment in their respective fields. Female employees are sought after by reputable educational institutions, businesses, and other industries. Some of the disciplines in which they are employed include medical, academia, administration, education, politics, law, engineering, and other related fields. A significant portion of the rise in the significance of women's participation in society may be attributed to shifting ideas.

### **Early Indian Women Writers - Vernaculars & English**

Women authors have a long and complicated history of striving for recognition and the ability to carve out a niche for themselves in the literary world. Throughout history and throughout different countries, women have held a variety of positions. Because of the new system, their position in society has shifted in a different way. A patriarchal society is characterized by the pervasive dominant role of men and their subjection. At the very beginning of the Vedic period, women were regarded in very high regard. In the same manner that we raised boys, we also raised these young ladies. It was up to the girls to do whatever they pleased. There was a high regard for women because of their intrinsic wisdom, their lengthy history, and their elegant presence. Both Gorge and Maitreyee were well-known academics in the Vedic tradition. The Vedas and Puranas include the lyrics of a great number of famous poets, including Val, Saraswati, Ubhayabharati, Lopamudra, Ghosa, Apala, Romasa, Suiya, Savitri, Juhu, and Yami, amongst others. In contrast, the standing of women began to deteriorate during the course of the later Vedic period. There is a new social order that has formed, and males are in charge of it. Due to the fact that knowledge was made available to them, they were able to write "shaastras" that were beneficial to themselves. These scriptures are obligatory for all countries to follow. Emancipation of women, marriage of children, widowhood, and other forms of oppression have come into existence. Women's creative output has come to a complete halt as a direct consequence of this.

Following it were the Puranic and Post-Smriti eras. As it became more established, the regime became more adamant in its opposition to women. The role of women was severely harmed as a result of the Manu Smriti. Specifically, it has restricted the independence of widows and other women in a variety of different ways. Despite the fact that he does not have a personality, the Smritis say that a woman ought to adore her husband as if he were God. For a woman, the only thing that is required of her is to obey her lord. As a consequence of this, women have historically been marginalized, dependent, uninformed, and obedient. A partial transition occurred in the position of women during the Epic Period, which brings us to our second

point. The ability to communicate with a greater number of individuals enables them to develop their personality. Women were granted the freedom to select their own romantic relationships, which was a fundamental human right. The early-Brahmanic society's admirable practice of elevating women to respectable positions was revived with the advent of Buddhism. As a result, opportunities were made available to female members of the Bhikshuni Sangh. They were given the keys to education and self-cultivation. Their impact on society was recognized. As a result, many educated women who were experts in religious writings came into the world.

### **Awakening of Feminism**

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, feminism started to acquire popularity on a worldwide basis. This was the beginning of the feminist movement. In the vicinity of this time period, a number of western women who were well-educated, opinionated, and self-sufficient arose with new views and viewpoints. The concept that women were capable of performing at the same level as men was deeply engrained in their way of thinking. As a consequence of the social revolution, a number of women went through this sort of awakening. They have been composing these essays with the intention of engaging in self-reflection. In a short amount of time, they were going to confront gender stereotypes and biases. Increasing the number of women who participate in the new movement and begin writing about the social issues they are experiencing, in their view, is something that should be done. In their books, a great number of individuals published accounts of their experiences, including their problems, perspectives, emotions, desires, expectations, and failures. Although they used their own personal experiences to fight against the low socioeconomic standing of women and discrimination, only a small number of them were willing to speak publicly about their experiences. In order to prevent any embarrassment in their conventional milieu, they portrayed themselves as mythical heroines from their literature and showed their actual encounters. In their works, they presented a novel female heroine who had rejected the conventional gender norms that were expected of her. The birth of feminism marked the beginning of a new progressive and global philosophy. During the early stages of the women's rights movement, the French dramatist Alexander Dumas used this word to characterize the movement. Over the course of the last several decades, the initiative to advance gender equality in every aspect of society has developed into a significant intellectual movement.

Women in the United States and England were the ones who initiated these activities for the first time, despite the fact that they were known by other names. Beginning in the late 1860s, the Suffragette Movement, which was the beginning of the Women's Emancipation Movement, was the beginning of the fight for women's rights and better living conditions in society, particularly in developed cities. The campaign's primary focus was on protecting women and girls from being abused in institutions and from hazards that they faced in the workplace. In the course of her advocacy for prison reform, Elizabeth Fry saw the deplorable conditions that were responsible for the abuse of the lives of a number of women and children. According to what she suggested, inmates need to be obliged to provide extra facilities. Margaret Sanger conducted a campaign with the intention of helping those who had been abused or sexually assaulted. Angela Burdetteouts established certain charitable organizations with the intention of providing assistance to poor women and girls. The number of women who are actively engaged in civic activities is growing at a rapid rate.

They banded together to voice their discontent with the way society treated them. It is quite obvious that their works exhibit a more profound understanding of feminist ideals. Notable examples include works

such as "The Second Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir, "Erotic Politics" by Kate Millett, "Dreaming About Women" by Mary Ellmann, "Sexual / Textual Politics" by Elaine Showalter, "A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen, and a great deal of other works. These books are largely responsible for the feminist awakening that occurred among women, and scholarly feminist views owe a great deal of gratitude to them. With reference to Elaine Showalter's article in *Women*. As a group, we started to have the realization that the Women's Liberation Movement was a reflection of our own experiences. More specifically, we started to compare and contrast the limited and secondary roles that were assigned to fictional heroines, female poets, and female scholars with the personalities and desires that drew us and countless other women to the study and teaching of literature. The furious urgency of a fresh discovery or a deep awakening is occasionally combined with other themes in works of writing that follow the feminist literary tradition.

### **Writers in English and Feminism - Post Independence Period**

During the time period after India's independence, a group of modern feminist authors who wrote in English developed, each of whom have a personality that was distinct from the others. Sources such as epics, mythology, folklore, and folktales are examples of sources that are not traditional but have been impacted by them. As a result of their adept training, audacity, and persuasiveness, they compel attention. They are unwavering in their understanding of what it is to be a guy. At this moment, there has been a shift in the perspective, the ideas, the images, and especially the attitude. The authors in question depict the contemporary female experience as well as their own unique views. They create their own literature by addressing relevant themes in essays, which serves as a platform for expressing their feminist values and ideas. In other words, they build their own literature. They make an attempt to expose the aspects of "self" that have been concealed due to patriarchal and societal norms over their lifetime. The characters that were developed expressly for this purpose are used to illustrate their experiences and the situations that they face in real life. In relation to the recent English-language works authored by Indian women authors, Rashmi Bajaj makes the following observation: We also broadened our grasp of societal concerns, gained a sharp sense of women's identities, became advocates for women's rights, investigated issues of isolation and crisis of self-identity, openly represented gender, and focused our emphasis on the study of interpersonal dynamics. All of these things contributed to our overall growth as individuals.

During the 1960s, Indian women poets who wrote in English had a period of great success. Roshan Alkazi, Sunita Jain, Lila Ray, Suniti Namjoshi, Mary Gupta, Indira Dhanrajgir, Gauri Pant, Chitra Pershad, Chitra Aziz, Vimla Rao, Malathi Rao, Dorothy Sinha, and Monika Varma are some of the names that are included on this list. However, this list is not complete. In addition, they are poets who are gifted with poetic brilliance. The majority of these would be classified as confessionals. They tell experiences from their own life as a way of expressing the femininity that they possess. Their work is centered on the concept of the connection between a man and a woman. They are symbolic of the challenges that women experience in a society that is controlled by males, particularly when it comes to dealing with feelings such as passion, ambition, sex, sorrow, grief, and so on. These individuals are the pioneers of specific and one-of-a-kind regions of sensuality and intimacy that are available for women to explore. On topics like as abortion, menstruation, masturbation, lesbianism, and other related topics, they do not shy away from having conversations about them. Because of this, Indian women poets have been given more opportunities to revel in their amazing works, which have created a position in English poetry that will stay for a long time. This has occurred in the age that followed the country's independence.

## Male Indian Writers in English and Feminism

The fact that male Indian writers who write in English have made less of an effort to address feminist issues is a surprising development. Even though she is praised and advocated for in Indian-English literature, the "modern lady" only appears in real life in books written by female authors, as stated by K. Meera Bai. This is the case even though she is described as "modern." Mulk Raj Anand's *The Old Woman and the Cow* and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* are two examples of great works written by men that give women the attention they deserve. However, there are also some great works written by women that give women the attention they deserve. Authors such as R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao did their best to address the concerns of women in a society that was undergoing significant change. On the other hand, there is a scarcity of male Indian writers who have been able to give women the credit they deserve and successfully rally readers behind the cause of gender equality. When it comes to depicting the identity problem in their writings, regional language writers continue to keep up with the times, which is an important point to note. Women feminist writers in regional Indian languages include Vatsala (Malayalam), Varsha Adalja (Gujarati), Malini Bhattacharya (Bengali), Tarabai Shinde (Marathi), Nanjanagudu Tirumalamba (Kannada), Kashibai Kanitkar (Marathi), Kalyanamma (Kannada), M. K. Indira (Kannada), Shyamala Devi (Kannada), Triveni (Kannada), Vishvasundaramma Tallapada (Telugu), Acchamamba Bandaru (Telugu), Devi Homavati (Hindi), Raghavan Chudamani (Tamil), and P.

## CONCLUSION

Adherents of the Indian Women's Movement were increasingly ardent in their goal of total gender parity as the movement reached its second and third phases of development. As the Indian Women's Movement progressed into its third stage, there was a rise in the number of publications that aimed to bring about social transformation. During the third stage of the Women's Movement in India, the feminist activists who were mentioned before play a crucial part in bringing about social change. This stage is characterized by the beginning of the movement. Both the battle for gender equality and the raising of awareness about the challenges that women face are being supported by them. The dissemination of information on women's equality and justice would be significantly aided by the contributions of academics, authors, and artists who were active during this period of the Women's Movement.

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