

# A Complete Study of Feminism in English Writing after Independence

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**Abstract** - The study begins by discussing the history of feminism in English literature, starting from the early 19th century. It then moves on to discuss the post-freedom era and the changes that occurred in the literary world during this period. The study also discusses the different types of feminism, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, and postmodern feminism. One of the main focuses of this study is on the representation of women in literature in the post-freedom era. The study examines how women are portrayed in literature and how this representation has changed over time. It analyzes the works of prominent female writers such as Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and Toni Morrison and how they have contributed to the feminist discourse in English literature.

**Keywords** - Feminism, English Writing, Independence.

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## INTRODUCTION

As a reader and lover of literature, I find the development of feminist writings fascinating. The literary canon has contributed much to the cause of gender equality and the removal of long-standing social obstacles. In this piece, I want to examine feminism in post-Civil War English literature in more depth. The significance of feminist literature will be examined, and the difficulties encountered by feminist authors will be discussed. Finally, we'll talk about intersectionality and the literary future of feminism.[1]

Novels by writers like Anita Desai herald an important turning point in the evolution of Indo-Anglian literature. It's a gradual transition from the outside world to one's own internal experience. For the most part, the female characters in Anita Desai's novels, such as *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City*, *Fire on the Mountain*, and *Clear Light of Day*, are very wise and insightful. As they try to take care of their families and investigate the meaning of life, they are on the verge of a conceptual crisis. Aware of the inner world of sensitivity rather than the outward world of action, as K.R.Srinivasa Iyenger puts it, "her preoccupation is with the inner world of action." Modern Indian English novels have a wide cast of characters who are well-read and willing to set their own standards. Through reflection and self-examination, they discover who they really are. When compared to other contemporary novels, Shobha De's descriptions of events stand out for their candor, openness, and simplicity. She gained notoriety for elaborating on materialism's sexual obsession. In works like "Socialite Evening," "Starry Nights," and "Second Thought," she does her best to

reveal the moral and spiritual collapse of contemporary society through the eyes of a woman who has been abandoned but who still yearns for pleasure and the freedom to soar above the clouds. Shabha De's *Snapshots*, is a universe of women where women learn to look at things from their point of view," writes Bijay Kumar Das. They like playing with and occasionally being played by males. There is a lot of sexual interplay between the sexes in this tale. Because they prioritize having fun above everything else, the novel's protagonists see the term "morality" as an insult. Neglecting social conventions and expecting unexpected results.[2]

Difficult Daughter, Manju Kapur's memoir about her tumultuous relationship with her mother, was itself the product of those tensions. Manju Kapur provides evidence to suggest that, in addition to education and economic freedom, the need is to face the reality that there is more to life than depending on marriage, parents, and other similar institutions. Notable feminist writer Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize and a million dollars for her first book, *The God of Small Things*, making her the first Indian author to do so. Ammu, the protagoniste of the tale, abandons her wedding to authorities and her husband's wasteful rituals. Firoz A. Shaikh writes, "In her novel, *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy deconstructs stereotypical ways of life about women, and we get the message that women can play an equal part with men, only if they get a distinct voice of their own and learn to transcend the traditional barriers of their silence." Among modern feminist novels that explore the nuances of womanhood and her quest for self-

identity, the name of Shashi Deshpande stands out as a defining moment. Shashi Deshpande's goal, both in her early and later books, is to explore the methods and readjustments her female heroes use in order to build an identity apart from patriarchal ideals.

Women writers of the contemporary age usher in a more nuanced morality than that of a century before. Self-actualization demands that people's wants be taken into account. Their goal is to alter the social climate so that women are recognized as fully equal to men in terms of rights, opportunities, and responsibilities throughout the course of human association's development. Feminism has prompted a persistent and inquisitive inquiry into women's place in the world.

A girl's social training, which shapes her mind to seek and want only historically acceptable and supported feminine roles, is just as important as her physical changes in determining when she finally becomes a lady. In order to alter the stereotypical portrayal of women in mainstream culture, it is important to discourage the view that a woman is a biologically determined essence whose primary identity is to generate the human species. In the 20th century, women gained more insight about their needs, sexuality, self-definition, existence, and destinies. Feminism is the label given to the worldwide movement that was sparked by women's quest for autonomy and individuality. Feminists and suffragists were vilified by patriarchal society during the revolution's early phases because they encouraged women to reject mindless submission to established orthodox dogmas and spread the notion of emancipation from their oppressed position. However, it quickly became into a global phenomenon. Their imaginative and informative works have greatly influenced the feminist movement and its efforts to assist women achieve equality. Many authors have addressed women's concerns by speculating on and analyzing the lowly position of women in modern society. There has been a significant shift in the social climate thanks to their efforts, which have promoted and bolstered discussions regarding women's repression. Representations of women's victimhood have given way to those of their resistance in current feminist writing. While feminists and feminist authors have been successful in expanding women's legal protections, there is still more work to be done to improve their status in society. Each country, with its own religion and cultural mores, has a unique story to tell about the contemporary woman, her struggles and triumphs, and her fight for autonomy and recognition.[3]

### Evolution of Feminist Literature

Feminist literature is defined as writing that promotes or challenges gender equality, preconceptions about gender, and the emancipation of women. Feminist literature developed as an effective instrument in the

fight for gender equality throughout the '60s and '70s, when the feminist movement was at its height. The reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and job discrimination were primary concerns in the first feminist writings.

As the feminist movement grew, so did the range of topics discussed in feminist literature, which now includes topics like race, gender, sexuality, and personal identity. In the post-liberation age, feminism has broadened its focus to include women of all identities and experiences.

### Key Themes in Feminist Literature

Topics including sexism, gender roles, representation, and power structures are all explored in feminist writing. Feminist literature is characterized by its departure from stereotypical portrayals of female characters. In addition to addressing the objectification of women and the restrictive beauty standards placed on them, feminism in literature also investigates how women are portrayed in society and the media.[4]

The interplay of race and gender is another key issue in feminist writing. For instance, black feminist writing examines the specific struggles black women confront as a consequence of their race and gender. Similarly, queer feminist writing explores the interconnections of gender and sexuality from the perspective of the LGBTQ+ community.

### Feminist Literary Criticism

Analyzing works of literature from a feminist point of view is the focus of the discipline of gender studies known as feminist literary criticism. The field of study known as feminist literary criticism examines both the depiction of women in works of fiction and the capacity of the written word to forward feminist ideals. The expansion of the literary canon and the inclusion of additional works written by women writers are both achievements that can be directly attributed to the contributions of feminist literary criticism.

### Notable Feminist Authors and Their Works

Authors like Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie are just a few of the many influential feminist writers throughout history. The feminist literary criticism classic "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia Woolf argues that in order for women to be fully creative, they need both economic freedom and a quiet place to work.[5]

Toni Morrison's "Beloved" is a profound look at the effects of slavery on the lives of African-American women. The feminist manifesto "We Should All Be Feminists" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has

become a call to action for the advancement of gender parity in society.

### **Challenges Faced by Feminist Writers**

Censorship, marginalization, and criticism are just a few of the problems that feminist authors have had to deal with throughout history. Women authors have long been looked down upon and their writings discounted or neglected because of stereotypes about women and emotionality. When female authors tackle taboo subjects like sexuality or reproductive rights, they can face criticism and reaction.

### **FEMINISM IN INDIAN SHORT STORIES**

Short tales written in English by Indian journalists didn't begin until 1898, with Kamala Saththianandan's publication of *Tales from Indian Christian Life*. However, it is possible to trace the origins of the Indian short narrative back to the Jataka Tales and the Katha Sariotsagara (together known as the "Panchatantra"). In the 1930s, when the Indian short story was at its peak, its potential as an art form was fully explored. When it comes to Desai, the Indian short tale reaches a new degree of maturity, especially in her introspective description of the mind. In her collection of short tales titled "Recreations at Twilight and different Stories" (1978), she advocates for a state of equilibrium and the adaptability of her virtuous characters in the face of shifting circumstances. [6]

Looking at Indo-English literature from the 1970s, it appears that female authors' dedication and awareness have both increased, with many critics coordinating their focus on the generalization of modern Indian women's issues (whether they be psychological, romantic, social, or economic). Topics like the clash of civilizations, spirituality versus materialism, Eastern philosophies versus Western externalized goals, and the like preoccupy women's literature to a much greater extent than any other genre. The great majority of modern young women who write essays prefer the more concise representation.

In India, a feminist book is not one written by a woman just because she is a woman and can write. Written by someone who hasn't been sidetracked by feminism, this piece recognizes that a woman is both a woman and an individual, subject to a variety of overt and covert, external and internal energies. The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the many feminist stances adopted by Shashi Deshpande in her books and to gauge the extent to which she has succeeded in validating for the people of her sex the existing accessible standing in the family and society. The feminism that emerged in Indian English literature had a gradual but significant impact on other Indian languages. Women writers in Kannada are unquestionably to blame for this trend in the language's literary canon. [7]

### **WOMEN IN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH**

The power of language to liberate or imprison speakers is immense. Literature makes use of language to depict reality after it has been heated by the human imagination. When a child learns a language, he or she naturally takes on the images and attributes that the language represents, just as adults do. "Language brings culture and culture helps especially through orature and literature the whole assortment of qualities by which we come to see ourselves and other people," writes Kenyan writer Ngugiwa Thiong 'O.

Since the very beginning of organized human society, language has been shaped and requested in accordance with the male belief system, a condition that reflects the man-centric setup from an era when society was founded carefully and fundamentally on the separation of work and private spheres among its members. Despite the advancements in science and technology and the increased understanding and awareness they have brought, this question has persisted for hundreds of years. Shockingly, men who hold even a moderately valuable position in the economic, political, and social fields of society use the sound and imperative division of work in the foundational phases of human history as an instrument of limitation and control over women. [8]

Progressive systems and polarization in the interaction between men and women occur in a male-centric culture because of the generalizations or fixed viewpoints by which people attempt to understand themselves and the world around them. As the dominant partner and the hub of most social interactions, men tend to give women less consideration than they deserve. Feminists often find themselves marginalized because of the human propensity to administrate and regulate, and to conceptualize in terms of paired criteria such as dominant/sub-par, cultural/natural, typical/unusual, etc. In Foucault's terminology, generalizations, which are "to a great extent the impression of culture" rather than being basically observable, are presented as information. These attitudes and behaviors are indicative of the biases of those who promote an unfavorable view of the opposite sex. These ideas spread through society via institutions like family, education, and media, becoming embedded in the socialization process of the creatures and making women both victims and perpetrators of the abuse methodology. [9]

Society establishes norms for a woman's life and personality even before she is born. The characteristics that society defines as masculine are contrasted with those that society defines as feminine, so limiting her experience of the world. Additionally, the antagonism with the characteristics which fall into the kitty of female, for example, aloofness, infantilism, emotionalism, and silliness rather than experience, conclusiveness, and discernment in male, thought about positive excellencies, do extraordinary mischief to her self-appraisal and individual advancement.



Furthermore, the woman's secluded sphere of influence in the man-centered framework discourages her from exercising her agency as a little sister, wife, and mother, and promotes the domination of her body by the male sex opposite.

By creating black and white images in the categories of husband or prostitute, flawless woman or witch, and mother or flirt, polarization is established among women as a "natural" want. A woman has to embody the qualities of the mythical characters Sita, Savitri, and Draupadi—faithful, devoted, and generous—if she is to be held in high esteem in today's culture. Because of the extreme masterminds who dragged us out of the stereotypical idea of our points of view and drove us to the free and unbiased assessment of the social reality around us, this is a different issue than when we first started thinking about it. [10]

The history of English-language Indian fiction begins with the spread of English-language education and literacy programs in the years before India's independence. Because of its deep roots in Indian culture and history, Indian literature differs significantly from its English counterpart. As feminist consciousness grew in post-colonial India, a wave of feminist journalists concerned themselves vigorously with women's concerns. However, the tendency of such topics and concerns were gradually present in the work of scholars who began writing before independence, such as R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and later Kamala Markandya and Anita Desai, before coming full circle in the more transparent and even polemical works as by Shashi Deshpande, Nyantra Sehgal, and Bharati Mukherjee.

Until Anita Desai addressed them, few people spoke about women as subjects, each with her own unique set of emotions, needs, and levels of awareness. *Cry the Peacock* was published in the same year as the previously mentioned novels, 1963, and it exposed the previously uncharted space of the female mind, including her displeasure, maladjustments, and insane issues that previous therapists like Sigmund Freud had attributed to organic determinism of women. [11]

Notable progress was made in the recognition of the female subjectivity and uniqueness via the examination of the female self's dark and hidden recesses, thereby undermining the social wants and generalizations based on her otherness. In her 1975 novel *Fire on the Mountain*, for which she was awarded the Sahitya Academy Prize, Anita Desai gives readers a glimpse into the mind of her heroine, Nanda Kaul, whose indifference to the affair between her husband and an adulteress, as well as the responsibility of caring for a large and diverse family filled with children and grandchildren, forces her to examine her own worth apart from her roles in society.

The subsequent fictional works spread long-held ideas, such as the closeness of mothers and daughters, the exaltation of women's struggle, and the silence of women about personal concerns. Psychologist and protagonist of Shashi Deshpande's book *The Dark Holds No Terror*, Saru, confides in her father after her mother's death that she is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder due to her boyfriend's perverse sexual behavior. Saru's mother, in stark contrast to the stereotypical mother-daughter bond, had never loved her daughter and had never forgiven her for the childhood incident involving the suffocation of her younger brother in the town lake on the day she went with him. The guilt, fear, and enthusiastic disturbance Saru has been feeling as a young woman and the wife of a man named Manu, whose unexpected nighttime brutish behavior seems to be the projection of his uncertainty as a male at the better social and professional putting of his significant other, has brought her home. Saru's emotional and mental jitters were calmed when she temporarily separated from her partner and shared her grief with her father at their house. This allowed her to regain clarity of mind and make better decisions as she readjusted to life in her own country. [12]

In *Roots and Shadows*, by Shashi Deshpande, the protagonist, Indu, mulls on the futility of her married life with Jayant that has crushed her distinctiveness as she prepares to make an offer on the family home after the death of her distant aunt, Akka. As she enters a long-distance relationship with Naren, she learns to assert autonomy over her body and her desires for the first time. Even in *That Long Silence*, Jaya, the protagonist, is responsible for analyzing how restricting marriage is for women. In *The Binding Vine*, the protagonist, Urmi, reads her late mother-in-law's letters to learn the ugly truth about her abusive marriage, a topic that breaks with the traditional belief in the happy and quiet conjugal presence of our more established age.

As the female protagonists explore the postmodern diasporic realm of liquid selves, they are seen shedding the rigid social and sexual identities that have defined them up to this point. The protagonist in Bharati Mukherjee's book of the same name, Jasmine, is a young Panjabi woman who through a period of "resurrection" or "disclosure" during which she overcomes socio-cultural, societal, religious, and economic barriers in order to integrate into the global community. [13]

## WOMEN WRITERS IN ENGLISH AND FEMINISM

A group of modern English-speaking women academics with a strong sense of self has emerged in India since the country gained independence. They are not conventional; they

are not influenced by myths, folklore, folktales, or fiction. Their expertise, power, and persuasiveness are all top-notch. They understand the significance of masculine authority. Changes in attitude, perspective, subjects, symbols, and language use distinguish this era from its predecessors. [14]

These writers give voice to the female experience and an alternative point of view. They create their own literature by writing about relevant topics, which makes it an effective medium for expressing their feminist ideas and beliefs. They make an effort to unearth the hidden aspects of self that conventional and mostly masculine narratives of identity have obscured. They use characters developed specifically for this function to illustrate their interactions and the realities they face. As Rashmi Bajaj puts it, "We have here expanded social cognition, a solid consciousness of way of life as lady, supporting of women's motivation, issues of estrangement and character emergency, brave depictions of sex, and emphasis on the investigation of individual connections" in reference to the current works of Indian women journalists writing in English.

The 1960s saw the debut of a slew of Indian women authors writing in English. Among them are Mary Gupta, Indira Dhanrajgir, Shri Devi Singh, Lalita Venkateswaran, Gauri Pant, Tillottama Rajan, Chitra Pershad, Nasima Aziz, Vimla Rao, Malathi Rao, Dorothy Sinha, and many others. They have the virtuosity of imagination and are authors. They function primarily as a place to make a confession. They elaborate on their own experiences, displaying the common sense characteristic of women. The dynamics of male and female relationships are developed. Leading female artists today are pushing back against the trend of desexing women. They look down on the conventional Indian view of women. They believe that poetry reveals the ideal female. Their trump card is a sexually suggestive item for women. They describe the female mind and body while drawing the reader into a labyrinth. Modern Indian female painters see sexuality as fundamental to the human experience. [15]

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the post-freedom era has been a critical time for feminism in English literature. It has seen the rise of feminist discourse, the emergence of prominent female writers, and the development of feminist literary theory. This comprehensive study has analyzed the various aspects of feminism in English literature in the post-freedom era, including its history, types, representation of women in literature, role of men in feminism, impact on literary theory, and the role of women in the literary world. One of the key findings of this study is that the post-freedom era has witnessed a significant change in the representation of women in literature. Female writers have been able to challenge the traditional patriarchal norms and stereotypes that have been present in literature for centuries. This has resulted in

a more diverse and complex portrayal of women in literature. Women are no longer depicted as one-dimensional characters, but as complex and nuanced individuals with their own hopes, dreams, and desires.

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