

## The Identification of Gender-Based Discriminations in the Post-Colonial Novels of the Representative Indian English Novelists

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### Abstract

The idea of gender-based inequalities implies that in India, a gap in health, education, economy and political participation occurs between men and women. In India, gender-based discrimination is a part and parcel of people's life. Perhaps, due to this reason, *The Global Gender Gap Report* of 2013 ranks India high, on the inequality indices. Women have equal rights under the law to own property and receive equal inheritance rights, but in practice, women are at a disadvantage. However, this research paper aims to explore the issue concerning the chronology of Indian English Novels, authored by Indian writers, who preferred English language as the medium of their literary creation. This paper tends to identify gender-based discriminations and their manner of execution in the novels of the prominent novelists of the post-independence era, from the mid-twentieth century to the present times. The most important reason to consider the post-independent Indian English novelists is that the case studies related to the issues began to intensify after a few decades of independence. Recently, in the literary, social and electronic media realms the issues, like subjugation and exploitation of women are being openly discussed. Moreover, the present book has given place to these gender-based issues among the other titles. Though, due to spatial constraints it was not possible to discuss all the writers, the novels of the prominent Indian English novelist of international repute have been included in this paper.

### Keywords

Gender, Discrimination, Post-Colonial Novels

# The Identification of Gender-Based Discriminations in the Post-Colonial Novels of the Representative Indian English Novelists

**Dr. Gurdeep Singh**

In India, gender-based discrimination is a part and parcel of people's life. Perhaps, due to this reason, *The Global Gender Gap Report* of 2013 ranks India high, on the inequality indices. Though, Dijkstra and Hammer challenge these indices in their analysis, yet the fact is that in India, discriminatory attitudes towards either sex exist for generations, affecting the lives of people. The cultural construct of Indian society is such that it supports gender-based discrimination against men and women. The degree and context of the discrimination may vary according to region, religion, economy, and education. All these factors have directed the Indians to develop strong preferences for male children (Pande, Astone: 2007). Due to this reason, female infanticide and sex-selective abortions are adopted as means to have a male child. These acts eventually echo the societally low status of Indian women.

The idea of gender-based inequalities implies that in India, a gap in health, education, economy and political participation occurs between men and women. An argument is often advanced that due to gender inequality attitudes, men remain at a disadvantage in many important ways. However, research illustrates that gender-based discriminations favor men in many realms including the workplace. Discrimination affects many aspects of the lives of women from career development and progress to mental health disorders (Kundu: 2003). Women have equal rights under the law to own property and receive equal inheritance rights, but in practice, women are at a disadvantage. This is demonstrated by the fact that 70% of rural land is owned by men (*Periodic Review: India report 2005*). Though the laws, such as the Married Women Property Rights Act of 1974 protect women, only a few get a chance to seek legal redress (Rao).

The issues relating to gender-based discrimination and inequalities have been explored in many seminars and by various governments, NGOs and other agencies of national and international repute. However, this research paper aims to explore the issue regarding the chronology of Indian English Novels, authored by Indian writers, who preferred English language as the medium of their literary creation. This paper tends to identify gender-based discriminations and their manner of execution in the novels of the prominent novelists of the post-independence era, from the mid-twentieth century to the present times. It would be quite interesting to mark, that the first Indian English novel, *Rajmohan's Wife*, written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94), illustrates the effects of a bad marriage on a woman. This novel acquired the book form during the

1930s (M. K. Naik: 1982). Though, the first pre-independent novel deals with the idea of gender-based inequality, yet there are reasons to consider the post-independent Indian English novelists to explore the issue in the present paper.

The most important reason to consider the post-independent Indian English novelists is that the case studies related to the issues began to intensify after the few decades of the independence. The authors had gathered a vast experience in this connection while reading the writers of the foreign lands. The various literary movements, such as modernism, feminism, orientalism, post-modernism, socialism were influencing the Indian novel writers. These writers were also getting enlightened with the western literary ideas, from the critical literary approaches, such as philosophical criticism, formalism, psychoanalysis, new criticism and other modes of observations. Though, the idea of gender-based discrimination is as old as human civilization is, yet it is relevant in the present times too. Recently, in the literary, social and electronic media realms the issues, like subjugation and exploitation of women are being openly discussed. Moreover, the present book too has given the place to these gender-based issues among the other titles. Though, due to spatial constraints it was not possible to discuss all the writers, but the novels of the prominent Indian English novelist of international repute have been included in this paper.

The central argument of the present paper is that the gender-based discriminations are also inherently present in the post-colonial India. The woman has been victimized and targeted, so that the others could fulfil their desired goals. It seems that pre-Rushdie politicians, in one way or the other, were in the search of some post-colonial ideal nation. They identified the role and problems of the female gender in context to creation around the idea of their own ideal notions. In their estimation, an individual could hardly be recognized in comparison to the importance of a nationalistic social group. However, the post-Rushdie Indian English novelist favoured the cause of individuals in their literary creations. This paradigm shift appealed the serious readers and masses alike. However, this elementary change in the approach has revealed disparate colours of gender discriminations in which, at large, the female ends as the sufferer. in are- Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayan, Raja Rao, Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906-88), Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Desh Pande, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) has authored memorable and priceless novels, such as *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939) etc. These novels revolved around the lives of the poor people, struggling for their survival and bearing the brunt of oppression, exploitation, misfortune, and casteism. However, his pathbreaking novel, *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), elucidates the gender-based discrimination in the Indian society. The novel is about peasant life and the severities on people that drives them to inhumanity in order to secure their survival. The protagonist is Gauri, the 'cow' of the title, who is deserted by her husband and sold off during her pregnancy. They are compelled to choose between her cow and Gauri. Gauri grows from a cow to a tigress. The incessant physical and mental tortures enable her to resist the lecherous advances and to save herself from being a victim to a rape. The events in the form of trials and travails of Gauri transform her from a traditional village girl to a modern woman. And the through the story of the novel, the inhuman attitudes, brutal rigidity and hegemony of the Hindu social ethos get unearthed which reduce women into stranded creature.

R.K. Narayan became the representative and popular fictional writer after Independence. He started off with *Mr. Sampath* (1949)' a novel about the world of films, and then wrote *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The*

*Guide* (1958), *The Maneater of Malgudi* (1962), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of Signs* (1976), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), and *The Talkative Man* (1986), *The World of Nagaraj* (1990), and *The Grandmother's Tale* (1993). Narayan has been is a delightful comic writer who studies middle-class small-town South Indian ethos. His fictional town, Malgudi, is known more to the readers of Indian English fiction. All his works have Malgudi as their setting, and he controls and carves it to perfection. However, his novel, *The Dark Room* (1938) attempts to a story, which is quiet ahead of the times. The sufferings of a house wife force her to adopt abortive and futile rebellion as a housewife. Savitri is the hostile or total opposite of her husband. She embodies the characteristics of a dutiful and faithful wife. She is immersed in the traditions of Indian womanhood and exhibits qualities of loyalty, honesty and devotion to her husband. She grieves her husband's rage in submissive silence and transfers her presence to her darkroom i.e. the kitchen.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, the pre-independence novel shows that the author is contemplating and depicting the changes that were happening in the construction of the modern nation. In this novel, Rao as an Indian English writer sets out the agenda for Indian English writers. He advises that the Indian English writers are to "convey" their intents "in a language not one's own", but "the spirit that is one's own". *The Serpent and the Rope* is Raja Rao's second novel and it was first published in 1960 by John Murray. The novel has been written in an autobiographical style and it deals with the concepts of existence, reality, and fulfilment. The protagonist Ramaswamy's thought process in the novel is said to be influenced by Vedantic philosophy and Adi Shankara's non-dualism. It also deals with the problems of the Immigrants and Immigration. The gender based social problems, like extramarital affair and divorce have been dealt from the philosophical view point, that the true love is about rejoicing in one another's happiness. When Ramaswamy divorces Madeleine, he realizes that the answer he has been seeking, lies in the journey to seek out his Guru.

Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906-1988), Another social realist, he has said that every novel should have a social purpose. His first novel, *So Many Hungers* (1947), is set during the years of the Bengal famine. *Music for Mohini* (1952) is an attempt to wed the city and the village, through the marriage of a city bred girl and her husband, a Sanskrit scholar, who has his heart in a remote village and where he takes her after marriage. Young, playful and mischievous Mohini dreams of a husband but her education and upbringing and the ideas of liberal professor father are unacceptable to her Brahmin traditioned grandmother. Marriage for love is discarded, matrimonial advertisements in the newspapers bring only embarrassment, and it is through a fortune teller that a match is made. The unusual cast of characters include a passionate and romantic snake charmer, and a matriarch whose worship of tradition leads her to amorality.

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) was a graduate of Madras University, and she is known for writing about culture clash between Indian urban and rural societies. Markandaya's first published novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, was a bestseller and cited as an American Library Association Notable Book in 1955. Her other novels include *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *A Silence of Desire* (1960), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *Two Virgins* (1973), *The Golden Honeycomb* (1977), and *Pleasure City* (1982/1983). *Two Virgins* was first published in 1973; it is a sensitive coming-of-age story of two sisters — Saroja and Lalitha — who have extremely disparate thoughts about life, aims and desires. Lalitha, the elder and the fairer and more beautiful one, has it all very easy. She is her Appa's blue-eyed girl, who gets Miss Mendoza's luxurious school where she learns maypole dancing along with elitist tastes and culture, which ultimately spells doom for her. Saroja, the younger and not-so-good-

looking sister, goes to an ordinary school, takes care of the buffaloes, rides bikes, enjoys Chingleput's sweets, wants to get married and have lots of loveable children. She has, what Lalitha calls, 'peasant's ambition'. But Saroja hardly feels any humiliations because these peasant qualities are admired by her. Set in post-Independence era, Markandaya's work of fiction constantly brings up the clashes between Western liberalism and Hindu orthodoxy. While Saroja's Appa upholds Western ideas, modernism and progressiveness, her Aunt Alamelu is a stickler for Hindu culture and practices all things conventional. Appa and aunt are continuously at war, and it is through their bickering and arguments that Saroja and further enlightened about the cultural conflict, and the benefits and problems of change (G. Pavani: 2018).

Khushwanth Singh's (1915-2014) *Train to Pakistan* (1956), was made into a feature film and it was his first and most famous novel. It is the story of the impact of Partition on a village in the western border. The novel reveals that how the peaceful life of two communities is rent apart by the evil political forces, which remain incomprehensible for the masses. Here men and women both suffer, but the women are more agonized and deprived during the period. *The Company of Women* rejoices the worldwide and the endless story of man's relationship with woman: the relationship of love, sex, and passion. The novel presents this relationship in a very unusual and original style, which is not only licentious and erotic, but also extremely delightful and captivating. However, the story also serves as a sort of modern-day morality tale, with Mohan Kumar committing suicide as he realizes he has AIDS, in effect, paying for his promiscuity. The novel implies that the women are the means of sexual pleasure only.

Nauyantara Sahgal (1927- ) belongs to the Nehru family and she is the only female political novelist In Indian English fiction. She writes about Indian political situation, where the post-independence Indian woman struggles to find her identity and space. Her famous novels are, *A Time to be Happy* (1963), *This Time of Morning* (1965), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *Rich like Us* (1985), *Mistaken Identity* (1988), *Lesser Breeds* (2003).

In *A Time to be Happy* (1958) the character Sanad oscillates between contrary twitches. He hesitates between loyalty to the British and faithfulness to the mother country. His redemption comes about after he meets Kusum, through whom he reconnects with his past and cultural roots. Both portray strains within marriage and the polity. *The Day in Shadow* (1977) is again about a marital breakdown as well as about political activities. Simrit Raman is a married woman whose world spins around her family and her life is confined to the four walls of the house. She belongs to a traditional Brahmin family. The family members get disappointed, when she selects a non-Brahmin husband. She marries a Businessman Som, seemingly a romance hunter and she willingly surrenders herself to the superficially sweet marital servitude. Som has materialistic and ambitious nature and he wants to make a lot of money as soon as possible. While Simrit is simple and is happy with the simple things in life. Simrit in spite of the differences tries in her own way to repair her marital life by getting pregnant repeatedly, so that she could get her husband's total attention to herself. She foolishly believes this to be a solution to her restlessness little realizing her folly and the growing burden of bringing up kids. However, the breaking point in the marriage soon occurs when Simrit does not approve the immoral implications and consequences of the International Business of Armaments which Som was expecting to attain by managing his associations with the Germans.

Anita Desai (1937) is an Indian novelist and the Emerita John E. Burchard Professor of Humanities at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her main characters experience loneliness and struggle to maintain their existence. Desai usually

focuses on the psychological world of her main women characters. Anita Desai in her novel, *Cry the Peacock* (1963) portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl Maya who is haunted by a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster. She is the daughter of a rich advocate in Lucknow. Being alone in the family, her mother being dead and brother having gone to America to carve his own independent destiny, she gets the most of her father's affection and attention and in her moments of affliction exclaims to herself, "No one, no one else, loves me as my father does". In the wake of this excessive love, Maya forms a lop-sided view of life. Maya desires to have similar attentions from her husband Gautama, a father surrogate. When Gautama, a busy, prosperous lawyer, too much engrossed in his own vocational affairs, fails to meet her demands, she feels neglected and miserable. Seeing her morbidity, her husband warns Maya that she is on the verge of becoming a neurotic and blames her father for this condition. Had Gautama shown an understanding towards and been attentive to Maya, he would have saved her from the haunting fears of "shadows and drums and drums and shadows." The gap of communication between them leaves her lonely to brood over the morbid thoughts of the albino astrologer's prophecy. Maya suffers from headaches and experiences rages of rebellion and terror. she in a fit of frenzy pushes him over the parapet to "pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom". Gautama's mother and sister take away completely insane Maya from the scene of tragedy of the house of her father.

The publication of *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie (1947) brought a new trend in the fiction writing. After Rushdie, the Indian English novel has gone transnational with many writers living in the west and writing from a perspective beyond nationality. He blended English with the Indian terms to convey his themes. In this way he in a way initiated the use of a hybrid language and displayed the vast canvas of India to the world. His work, combining magical realism with historical fiction, is primarily concerned with the many connections, disruptions, and migrations between Eastern and Western civilizations, with much of his fiction being set on the Indian subcontinent. *Grimus* (1975), *Midnight's Children* (1981), *Shame* (1983), *The Satanic Verses* (1988), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999), *Fury* (2001), *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) are some of his popular novels.

The novel, *Shalimar the Clown* is based partly in a small town in Kashmir and partly in Los Angeles, America. The central character, India, is the illegitimate child of a former United States ambassador to India, Maximilian Ophuls. At a young age, he falls in love with a beautiful Kashmiri Pandit girl, named Boonyi. The village elders agree to the marriage and all seems fine, except that Boonyi doesn't want to remain stuck in this small village. Things come to a head when Maximilian comes to the village, sees Boonyi dance, and becomes enamored of her. With the help of his assistant, he gets her a flat in Delhi and an affair blossoms. A scandal erupts when Boonyi gets pregnant and Max is forced to return. Shalimar was deeply in love with Boonyi and couldn't bear her betrayal. He devotes the rest of his life to taking revenge on the people that were the cause of his unhappiness. For this purpose he joins up with various Jihadi organisations and becomes a renowned assassin. The story portrays the paradise that once was Kashmir, and how the politics of the sub-continent ripped apart the lives of those caught in the middle of the battleground.

Shashi Deshpande in her novels, such as *The Dark Holds no Terrors* (1980) and *That Long Silence* (1988) explores the different dimensions of the lives of middle-class women. *That Long Silence* (1989), won the Sahitya Akademi Award, given by the Indian Academy of Arts and Letters to outstanding works written in any of India's twenty-four major languages in 1990. The main character of *That Long Silence* is Jaya, a

girl born into a middle-class family. When she is young, Jaya is clever, curious, and bright, all qualities considered unladylike by mainstream society. Jaya's grandmother encourages her to act more conventionally so she can get a husband when she grows up, explaining that civilized and cultured girls are skilled at cooking, cleaning, and household labour. Eventually, Jaya learns to play the part of a subservient woman, while retaining a sense of individuality. As she grows up, Jaya becomes keenly aware of the fact that people, in general, do not like it when she expresses herself or her individuality, and so she learns to hide it. Jaya refers to this stifling of herself and her ideas as "the long silence" since it stretches across her life from childhood to middle age. Only Jaya's father encourages her in her writing and sees her as an individual. She marries Mohan, a successful businessman. Jaya and Mohan disagree on many things and their marriage is not intimate or happy. There is no place in their relationship for Jaya to express her point of view, as Mohan expects her to go along with everything he says unquestioningly. Jaya and Mohan are forced to move from their spacious apartment into a small and dingy one, while their children stay behind with relatives. Jaya begins writing more to supplement the family income. Some of her articles are frank and open about her dissatisfaction with her husband, as he is unable to connect with her or their children. She recognizes that the long silence has stifled communication and openness in her family, making it difficult to support her husband and vice versa. The novel ends with Mohan sending a telegram to Jaya saying that he will be home soon. In addition, his job is willing to take him back. Jaya is ready to accept Mohan back into her life, and she vows that never again will she let the long silence separate them emotionally from each other.

Vikram Seth (1952-) is an Indian novelist and poet. He has written several novels, like *The Golden Gate* (1986), *A Suitable Boy* (1993), *An Equal Music* (1999). He has received several awards such as Padma Shri, Sahitya Academy Award. *A Suitable Boy* is set in a newly post-independence, post-partition India. The novel follows four families during 18 months, and centres on Mrs. Rupa Mehra's efforts to arrange the marriage of her younger daughter, Lata, to a "suitable boy". Lata is a 19-year-old university student who refuses to be influenced by her domineering mother or opinionated brother, Arun. Her story revolves around the choice she is forced to make between her suitors Kabir, Haresh, and Amit.

Suzanna Arundhati Roy (1961-) an Indian author best known for her novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997), which won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 1997 and became the best-selling book by an Indian author. She is also a political activist, human rights supporter and an environmentalist. *The God of Small Things* is a story about the childhood experiences fraternal twins. The life of these twins gets ruined by the "Love Laws" that lay down "who should be loved, and how. And how much." The novel explores that Ammu Ipe is anxious to escape her ill-tempered father, Pappachi, and her bitter, long-suffering mother, known as Mammachi. She persuades her parents to let her spend a summer with a distant aunt in Calcutta. To avoid returning to Ayemenem, she marries a man there but later discovers that he is an alcoholic, and he physically abuses her and tries to pimp her to his boss. She gives birth to Rahel and Estha, leaves her husband, and returns to Ayemenem to live with her parents and brother, Chacko. Chacko has returned to India from England after his divorce from an English woman, Margaret, and the subsequent death of Pappachi. The novel also examines the historical roots of these realities and develops profound insights into the ways in which human desperation and desire emerge from the confines of a firmly entrenched caste society. Roy evaluates the Indian post-colonial complex, or the cultural attitudes of many Indians toward their former British rulers. After Ammu calls her father a "[shit]-wiper" in Hindi for his blind devotion to the British. Roy's theme of forbidden love is that love is such a powerful and

uncontrollable force that it cannot be contained by any conventional social code. The story is set in the caste society of India, at a time when members of the Untouchable Paravan or Paryan caste were not permitted to touch members of higher castes or enter their houses. Roy's novel shows that such a system can be terribly cruel. Love, ideals, and confidence are all forsaken, consciously and unconsciously, innocently and maliciously, and these deceptions affect all of the characters deeply. Another important aspect of social discrimination that Roy deals with is misogyny, mainly through the character of Ammu. She often draws attention to the different opportunities on offer for women and men in India and the fact that, since Ammu has been married and divorced, she sees her life as effectively over. This is one of the main factors that influences her to start her love affair with Velutha. We also see her treatment by a police officer, who taps her breasts with his baton as 'though he was choosing mangoes from a basket,' commenting on objectification of women.

Manju Kapur is an Indian novelist and her first novel, *Difficult Daughters* is the winner of 1999 Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Her other novels are, *A Married Woman* (2003), *Home* (2006), *Custody* (2014) and *Brothers* (2016). The story of the novel, *Brothers* revolves around Tapti Gaina, whose life gets linked with two men, her husband and his brother. Exploring caste, student politics, the freedom struggle and the Emergency, *Brothers* touches the history of the Gaina family. The history is explored from their village and across the emerging metropolis of Ajmer and is ended the loftiness of political power in Jaipur. It is a virtuoso interpretation of ambition, desire, betrayal and anguish, enacted against the fluctuating landscape of family undercurrents. The story unearths the experiences of Gania. She feels torn apart between the traditional times, when among family members there was a line of respect has shyness. However, in modern times one brother tries to capture, whatever the other brother owns. The loss of value system is the main reason behind this tragedy.

The diachronic sketch of the Indian English fiction writers and their representative novels reveals that the female gender is discriminated in the matters, such as good health, education, intelligence, political presence. Even in domestic life, the women are not included in the decisions about their own life. Those women, who dare to challenge the existing systems, they end in sufferings, neurosis, loneliness, and death. They are defamed as rotter, sex-servitors, rebellions or insignificant violators. They are blamed, expected to sacrifice their desires, aims, choices and emotionally blackmailed so that the others could rise, dwell and attain goals. It is a fact that till today, the tragic story of gender inequalities has not changed for 'Gauri', 'Savitri', 'Maya', 'Jaya' or Ammu. Though these women have faced and grabbled with real tragedies, yet hope always remains there. No one can stop them to develop and evolve this attitude, if the situation changes in the favour of women, the novels about their happiness would be crafted by authors in the near future.



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