

Female Protagonist voice in Bharatian English literature and cinema

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doi.org/10.64643/IJIRTV12I7-189310-459

Abstract—The richness of literature of Bharat is no more less than the other literatures worldwide and is making its place at its own. The female characters in the writings in bharatians literature varies from voiceless to prominence. The female characters have evolved vividly. And claiming their own identity in various aspects and questions traditional norms and over above it is appealing to the readers. And Bharatian female writers is playing a pioneer role to shape those characters in their fiction or nonfiction writings as it is a tool of empowerment. The paper examines the female protagonist's characters in bharatians English literature and how authors like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya, and Manju Kapur, through their writings redefines the complex and realistic characters. This paper will focus on these women writers as well as their women protagonist giving voice, enhancing the desires, emotions and their struggle for patriarchal society. While analyzing they become the literary symbols of transformation and existence, in the themes gender inequality, marriage, social expectations, freedom and may more too. It also shows women was silence and suffering and then rebel. None the other this paper discusses the voice of the women in bharatians English literature proved as a powerful expression of change in the society and will be leading the way for future writers of modern Bharat.

Index Terms—feminism, Bharatian English literature, protagonists.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mostly in especially Bharatian literature, the portrait of women is as simple, oppressed, sacrifice, and silence. she was shown as duty full and self-sacrificed; she was set in parameters of social norms and family expectations and very early novels of Bharatian English or Hindi or any other regional literature she

was imaged as secondary and their voice were mostly unheard or not considered .and same with the literature also where female as protagonist were less figured in the words. Eventually as the civilization improved writers began to focus on such themes where they could pull out the emotions, feelings, desires, dreams inner conflicts expressions in female context and challenged the traditional literature and also questioned the established inherited norms of the society in many ways. The tool – pen became the best instrument writing the fiction and nonfiction poetry or drama, it awakens the inner repressed emotions of the countless women who were ignored from centuries. It was really reawaking for the writers as well. Those writers were the frontier who focused the female voices, breaking the silence, a defining woman as struggling for self-state in this patriarchal society .and later writers expanded the narratives in social, political and psychological aspects in broader way too of womanhood. And changes were revolutionary. It reflected the rise in education movements, feminism, and urbanization. The female roles as written in literature were not only the survivor or the sufferer but also as active rebellion or the changer. She proved herself for her beliefs, justices or to choose what she wants. It will be wrathful to say that bharatians English literature turned women's consciousness. The female roles is the collective journey of all bharatians women from silence to speech to empowerment. And these women turned into women of words to challenge social realities.

Kamala Markandaya – Nectar in a sieve 1954

This novel tells the life of the character Rukmani, a poor girl married to a young man Nathan, a tenant

farmer. The condition was poor with no comfort but Rukmani loves her husband and family. they both work hard to survive but it was constant struggle against poverty, famine. The tannery in their village brings some hope for them but at the same time destroys the rural peaceful life. Rukmani 2 sons died and other leaves to city for the work. In old age couple travels to city for the work where Nathan dies. Rukmani is all alone to survive.

Anita Desai – Cry, the Peacock 1963

The protagonist Maya, speaks of her desires in patriarchal marriage. Her internal monologue reveals hoe the social expectations can suppress the women's emotional needs. In the story, Maya a wealthy and pampered girl is terrified by the prophecy that she or her husband will die after 4 years of marriage. She was married to old detached man, more than her age, Gautam. The marriage was not fruitful as Maya feels lonely and want emotional support whereas Gautam is practical. Her mental health declines day by day and in a tragic moment she pushes her husband off the terrace. This story shows how loneliness and psychological fear destroy her life.

Shashi Deshpande – That long silence 1988

The lead female role of Jaya, from middle class housewife maintains peace in her marriage with Mohan, suppressing her voice and desires. And as moved ahead in the novel Mohan involved in a financial scandal and was fired. The couple shifted to a small house in Bombay. This was the turning point in Jaya's life. She begins to think of her past, her ambition to be a writer accepting society norms and her actions to be credited as a good wife. She understood that she must now live for herself also rather than only living for her family. In the end of the story, she breaks her long silence. Her journey is reflected as suppression to self-awakening.

Arundhati Roy – The God of Small Things (1997)

In this story the twin siblings Rahel and Estha grow up in the traditional family background. Once their cousin Sophie came to visit them and she dies in an accident. This incident effects the entire family bringing guilt, blames. Both the girls are separated. One more incident how their mother Ammu, is indulged in an affair with lower caste man Velutha and his tragic death. After too many years both the twins meet but

still wounded by their pat. The novel shows how once happy life is destroyed by unspoken emotions and strict orthodoxy.

Manju Kapur – Difficult Daughters (1998)

Central figure Virimali in Punjab wants to study but her family pressure her to marry and follow the traditions. But Virimali loves a professor, Harish who is married. Her family is strong opposition of this relation but the girl did not listen and becomes professor's second wife. This marriage was not the happy one. She finally feels trapped and solitude. The novel depicts the harsh truth of patriarchal society and how an educated women cost of breaking the social norms.

II. FEMALE PROTAGONIST REPRESENTATIONS IN INDIAN CINEMA

Kahaani (Dir. Sujoy Ghosh, 2012) - Vidhya Balan as pregnant women comes to Calcutta in search of her missing husband. Her wit, courage and spirit challenging the male centric thrillers shows how even females can perform such grand characters also.

Pink (Dir. Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury, 2016) – the court scene of this movie was proved to be the stage spoken against patriarchy. Minal.Falak, and, and Andrea spokes their voice with courage and truth.

Lipstick Under My Burkha (Dir. Alankrita Shrivastava, 2026) – the secret desires and small actions of three women Rehana. Leela and Shireen, proves how Bharatian women are rewriting their own folks against gender biasness. The story set in Bhopal, the 4 women from different generations and backgrounds depicts their search for freedom and joy.

English Vinglish (Dir. Gauri Shinde, 2012) – Sridevi as Shashi shows language as barrier in her personality but later proves herself and her story is like every woman in Bharat story searching for self and dignity

Thappad (Dir. Anubhav Sinha, 2020) - Protagonist Amirta Tapsee Pannu straightly ends her marriage life after a single slap by her husband This shows the women dignity begins before any other emotions

Dangal (, Dir. Nitesh Tiwari, 2016) – protagonist real life wrestlers, Gita and Babita beaks the stereotype by proving and challenging through their performances and excellences.

Neerja (Dir. Ram Madhvani, 2016) - Based on a true story, Neerja Bhanot (Sonam Kapoor) represents

bravery and compassion — sacrificing her life to save others during a hijacking.

III. THEMES IN FEMALE LITERATURE IN BHARATIAN (INDIAN) ENGLISH WRITING

Bharatian English literature written by or about women beautifully captures the changing faces of womanhood — from submission to self-realization. These writings do not just tell stories; they express emotions, struggles, and the deep desire for equality and identity. The following are major themes with new examples from modern and classic works.

1. Quest for Identity

Women writers often focus on the inner search for self — beyond their roles as wife, daughter, or mother. The protagonists question social definitions of womanhood and seek individuality.

Example: *Clear Light of Day* by Anita Desai – Bim, the unmarried sister, represents an independent yet emotionally conflicted woman searching for self-fulfillment.

Example: *The Dark Holds No Terrors* by Shashi Deshpande – Sarita, a doctor, faces both professional success and marital pain as she struggles to balance identity and duty.

Film Parallel: *English Vinglish* (2012) – Shashi's transformation from insecurity to confidence mirrors the modern Indian woman's identity awakening.

2. Education and Self-Realization

Education becomes a symbol of awakening for women, helping them rise above ignorance and tradition.

Example: *Ladies Coupé* by Anita Nair – Akhila, a single working woman, learns about freedom and strength through the stories of other women during a train journey.

Example: *In Custody* by Anita Desai – Though centered on male poets, it also reflects the silent women who support art but remain unseen, questioning access to education and voice.

Film Parallel: *Chalk and Duster* (2016) – Highlights how female teachers fight for dignity and recognition in a male-dominated education system.

3. Marriage and Patriarchy

Marriage, once seen as a sacred duty, is questioned by female writers as a social contract that often limits women's choices.

Example: *A Married Woman* by Manju Kapur – Astha's emotional emptiness in marriage leads her to rediscover herself through love and art.

Example: *The Binding Vine* by Shashi Deshpande – Urmi's story explores motherhood, widowhood, and the unspoken emotions tied to marriage and loss.

Film Parallel: *Astitva* (2000) – A woman questions her husband's moral authority and claims her own agency.

4. Female Bonding and Sisterhood

Solidarity among women often becomes a healing force. Female friendships and shared experiences help women find courage to change.

Example: *Ladies Coupé* – The women's conversations form emotional sisterhood, teaching Akhila that she can live without depending on men.

Example: *The Terrace Garden* by Paro Anand – Shows how women from different backgrounds unite through shared trauma and resilience.

Film Parallel: *Four More Shots Please!* (2019, series) – Modern women in urban India redefine friendship, love, and ambition beyond stereotypes.

5. Conflict between Tradition and Modernity

Women often find themselves torn between traditional expectations and the modern desire for independence.

Example: *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri – Ashima's journey from Calcutta to America reflects the emotional struggles of adapting to new identities while holding onto old values.

Example: *Fasting, feasting* by Anita Desai – Uma's life of domestic confinement contrasts sharply with her brother's freedom abroad, showing gender imbalance in Indian families.

Film Parallel: *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021, Malayalam) – portrays the suffocating expectations on housewives and their fight for self-respect.

6. Resistance and Empowerment

From enduring victims to voices of power — women in literature begin to challenge male dominance and assert their will.

Example: *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni – Retells the Mahabharata from

Draupadi's perspective, reclaiming her voice as a powerful and intelligent woman.

Example: Sita's Ramayana by Samhita Arni – Reimagines Sita not as submissive but as a strong, reflective woman who questions injustice.

Film Parallel: Mary Kom (2014) – Depicts the strength and determination of a woman who conquers both gender barriers and global boxing arenas.

7. Body, Desire, and Self-Acceptance

Modern female writers explore the woman's body not as an object of control but as a source of strength and freedom.

Example: Erotic Stories for Punjabi Widows by Balli Kaur Jaswal – Middle-aged widows in London rediscover their desires and voices through storytelling.

Example: Custody by Manju Kapur – Shifts focus on women reclaiming control over their bodies, emotions, and maternal rights.

Film Parallel: Lipstick under My Burkha (2016) – Four women secretly pursue their desires, symbolizing inner freedom within outer constraints.

8. Social Justice and Gender Inequality

Many works connect women's struggles with wider issues of class, caste, and justice.

Example: The Lowland by Jhumpa Lahiri – Gauri's intellectual independence causes conflict with family expectations.

Example: Sister of My Heart by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni – Highlights women navigating love and duty across generations.

Film Parallel: Article 15 (2019) – Though male-centered, its female voices demand justice and equality within oppressive systems.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This paper is written choosing the primary sources of Bharatian English literature novels and films. The research is qualitative and analytical. The paper explores the feminist theory and socio-cultural approach.

V. CONCLUSION

In literature and cinema, always been the male clothed area where now females are uncovering, with brilliant

tendency to write and explore the core of the society by words and writings. It will be upheld to say how they introspect and challenges the patriarchy prevalent so far. The everyday common women are facing too many challenges which may be left or untouched even today but the literature explores the minor and the minute observation in the society. The inner conflict of the women can be felt rather than seen. It is metaphor to say the writers tired their best to explore those ideas and had jot them in fine words in the plays, novels, story, etc. it is not one day task to talk and stop, this is continuous process to enhance the challenges and break that silence which is still prevalent. Bharatian writers have given the voices to numberless women characters each varies in their own way or the other. And redefines to speak, to exist, to resist and turned literature into liberation where they became power.

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