



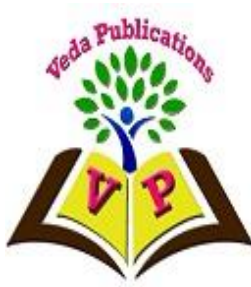
WOMEN IN LITERATURE

M.Sudharani

Lecturer In English, Dsgdcw, Ongole

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ABSTRACT



Writing is an important tool for women to voice their experiences - of identity, sexuality, marriage, love, family, life. But often women find it hard to use traditional forms of writing and literary conventions to convey these personal experiences. Language has been created and shaped by men. Although one of the main topics of world literature has been romantic relations between women and men, until the last few centuries there were not many women authors. That fact reflects the status of women in most societies.

Keywords: *Women, Literature, Equality.*



First of all, women's literature is certainly not simply literature "of women." There are plenty of books about women, or at least with prominent female characters, written by men. While some of these women are poorly written (think of George Orwell's Julia who was only "a rebel from the waist down"), others are richly textured well-executed characters like Lady Macbeth or Gertrude—but even the plays those characters hail from are named for their husbands and sons.

Until the nineteenth century most women lacked sufficient education and leisure time to write. The concept of the artist defined the role as masculine. As cultures became industrialized and women increasingly were educated and as printing technologies were used to produce cheaper books and enlarge reading audiences, it became more possible for women to write. Women then produced some of the most popular novels in England, France, and the United States and became more visible as poets and playwrights.

The female characters are usually given negative traits of deception, temptation, selfishness, and seduction. Women were controlled, contained, and exploited. In early literature, women are seen as objects of possession, forces deadly to men, cunning, passive, shameful, and often less honorable than men.

Women are always portrayed as weak, emotional and neurotic while men are expected to be strong, aggressive and dominant, which are depicted from both their external appearances and internal qualities. The gender of the author also contributes to the different descriptions of the characters in the literary works

Women had been seen and treated more as complements to the men in their lives than as individuals or spiritual entities; they were depicted in literature as womanly, weak, dutiful, and stupid. Most authors continued to write with the misguided perception that women were always inferior to men.

Virginia Woolf once wrote: "For most of history, Anonymous was a woman." Thankfully, women are able to claim possession of their literature now for the most part. Women's literature as a category celebrates the fact that women create and have created great literature and expand the space for their work.

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Only in the seventeenth century did women authors begin to become more prominent, developing the new literary form of the novel, though many still published their works anonymously. The first historical novel was written in France by Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, Comtesse de la Fayette (1634–1693).

With the advent of literary modernism women authors came into their own as innovators. As they traditionally had, women writers tended to focus on the experiences and insights of female characters, domestic difficulties, and the social tragedy caused by wasting the will and talent of women. With modernist aesthetic experiments women authors could begin to develop their own lyrical modes of expression. Using imagery and subjective perspectives, modernist authors inscribed a different experience of the world through a lyrical language of the senses

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Women's writing, as a discrete area of literary studies and practice, is recognized explicitly by the numbers of dedicated journals, organizations, awards, and conferences which focus mainly or exclusively on texts produced by women. Women's writing as a recognized area of study has been developing since the 1970s. The majority of English and American literature programs offer courses on specific aspects of literature by women, and women's writing is generally considered an area of specialization in its own right.

The novels of early 1950s and 1960s dealt with the binaries: tradition-modernity and rural-urban. The period witnessed writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Manohar Malgonkar, Anita Desai, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, who took up new subjects and new themes dealing with women's self-awareness. For many Indian woman novelists the quest for identity as impacted by the patriarchal system has been the favorite theme. Manjul Bajaj notes,

The novels of 1970s are woman-centered and increasingly become vox- populi for the new



dynamic Indian woman. A radical thought for those times was Telugu writer Snehalatha Reddy's drama *Sita* (1974), which critiques Ramayana, and upholds the rights of Sita as a wife, as an individual and as a woman

The 1980s saw a maturity in the use of language, style and technique. The self-effacing tone of the earlier writers is replaced by the self-asserting tone of the latest ones.

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The twentieth century saw Indian English writing taking off in a big way. The triumvirates Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan gave the genre a big boost.

Studies of women's literature have shown that there are certain common themes that tend to play out in women's writing. Since the beginning of the women's movement, there has

been a strong rise in the amount of literature that is self-consciously feminist in tone, clearly espousing the ideals of female equality.
