



THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN WRITINGS IN ENGLISH

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Deepika Rao*

Research Scholar *Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT The depiction of women in Indian writings in English has undergone a remarkable transformation, reflecting the socio-cultural, political, and economic shifts in Indian society. Early portrayals often reinforced patriarchal ideals, presenting women as passive, submissive, or idealized figures. However, with the rise of feminist consciousness and the emergence of women writers, literature began to foreground female subjectivity, agency, and resistance. Professor Sandhya Tiwari's scholarship has been instrumental in analysing these shifts, particularly through her works on diaspora identity, feminist literary criticism, and gender politics. Her studies on marital discord, feminist solidarity, and cultural displacement highlight the dynamic nature of women's representation in Indian English literature. This article explores the evolution of women's depiction, situating it within feminist criticism, postcolonial theory, and cultural studies, while drawing upon ten of Professor Tiwari's indexed works to provide scholarly grounding.

KEYWORDS : Indian English Literature, Women's Representation, Feminist Literary Criticism and Diaspora and Cultural Displacement

INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature has long been a site for negotiating women's roles and identities. Colonial-era texts often depicted women as symbols of tradition and morality, reinforcing conventional roles within family and society. Writers like Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan portrayed women in domestic spaces, emphasizing their roles as mothers and wives. However, the post-independence period witnessed a significant shift, with women writers asserting their voices and challenging patriarchal structures. Kamala Das's confessional poetry, Anita Desai's psychological novels, and Shashi Deshpande's explorations of middle-class domesticity marked a turning point in Indian English literature. Professor Sandhya Tiwari situates these shifts within feminist and cultural studies frameworks, emphasizing how literature reflects broader societal transformations. Her analysis of diaspora identity in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and Bollywood stereotypes demonstrates how literature and popular culture intersect in shaping women's images. By foregrounding women's experiences, Indian English literature has become a powerful medium for articulating gendered realities and envisioning inclusivity.

Importance of Understanding the Depiction of Women in Indian Writings in English

The depiction of women in Indian writings in English is not a peripheral concern but a central axis around which questions of identity, culture, and social transformation revolve. To understand these portrayals is to engage with the evolving imagination of India itself, because literature in English has often functioned as a bridge between local realities and global discourses. Women characters, whether created by male or female authors, embody tensions between tradition and modernity, between silence and articulation, and between subjugation and resistance. Examining these depictions is therefore crucial for grasping how Indian society negotiates gender roles, how cultural narratives are constructed, and how literature becomes a site of contestation and change.

One reason this study is important lies in the historical role of Indian English literature as a vehicle of cultural translation. Since the colonial period, English has been a language of power and prestige, and Indian writers who adopted it often carried the responsibility of representing their society to a global readership. Women in these texts were frequently cast as symbols of purity, sacrifice, or cultural continuity. Such portrayals were not neutral; they reinforced patriarchal structures by idealizing women as guardians of tradition while denying them individuality. Understanding these early depictions allows us to see how literature participated in consolidating gender hierarchies and how women were instrumentalized in nationalist and colonial narratives.

Equally significant is the shift that occurred when women themselves began to write in English. Their voices disrupted the established patterns of representation, introducing perspectives that had been marginalized. Writers such as Kamala Das, Anita Desai, and Shashi Deshpande foregrounded women's inner lives, their psychological

struggles, and their desire for autonomy. The importance of studying these depictions lies in recognizing how literature became a platform for articulating female subjectivity. These narratives challenged the silence imposed on women, insisting that their experiences were worthy of literary exploration. By analyzing such works, scholars can trace the emergence of feminist consciousness in Indian literature and understand how women writers redefined the boundaries of storytelling.

Another dimension that underscores the importance of this study is the role of diaspora literature. Indian women writers living abroad, including Jhumpa Lahiri and Chitra Divakaruni, have expanded the discourse by situating women's struggles within transnational contexts. Their characters grapple with displacement, hybridity, and cultural negotiation, revealing how identity is reshaped in migration. Understanding these depictions is vital because they highlight the intersection of gender and globalization. Women in diaspora narratives embody the complexities of belonging, negotiating between inherited traditions and new cultural environments. Such portrayals enrich our comprehension of how Indian identity is constructed across borders and how women's experiences are central to that process.

The importance of examining women's depiction also lies in its ability to expose systemic issues such as domestic violence, marital discord, and generational conflict. Literature often dramatizes these realities, making visible what is otherwise silenced in public discourse. For instance, narratives of betrayal and infidelity do not merely recount personal tragedies; they reveal the structural inequalities embedded in marriage and family life. By studying these depictions, scholars and readers can better understand how literature critiques social institutions and how it provides a language for articulating women's grievances. This is not simply an academic exercise; it has implications for social awareness and reform.

The study of women's representation in Indian English writings is important because it intersects with cultural politics. Popular culture, particularly cinema, often perpetuates stereotypes that confine women to reductive roles. Literature, however, has the potential to challenge these images by presenting women as complex, multidimensional beings. Understanding this interplay between literature and culture allows us to see how narratives can either reinforce or subvert dominant ideologies. It also underscores the role of literature as a counter-discourse, offering alternative visions of gender and identity that resist commodification and stereotyping.

Professor Sandhya Tiwari's scholarship exemplifies why this study matters. Her work spans feminist criticism, diaspora studies, and psycho-spiritual analysis, demonstrating how interdisciplinary approaches can deepen our understanding of women's representation. By analyzing texts such as Manju Kapur's *Custody*, Chitra Divakaruni's *The Last Queen*, and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, she highlights how literature reflects women's struggles with identity, displacement, and empowerment. Her studies show that depictions of

women are not static but dynamic, shaped by historical, cultural, and spiritual contexts. Understanding these portrayals is important because they reveal the multiplicity of women's experiences and the diverse strategies of resistance they employ.

Another reason this study is significant is its contribution to the broader project of gender equality. Literature does not merely reflect reality; it shapes it. The stories we tell about women influence how society perceives them and how women perceive themselves. By analysing depictions in Indian English writings, we can identify stereotypes that need dismantling and celebrate narratives that promote inclusivity. This process contributes to the ongoing struggle for equality by providing cultural resources that challenge patriarchal norms and inspire social change.

Likewise, the importance of understanding women's depiction in Indian English literature lies in its ability to foster empathy and awareness. Literature allows readers to inhabit the lives of others, to experience their joys and sorrows, and to see the world through their eyes. When women's experiences are represented with nuance and authenticity, they invite readers to engage with issues of gender justice on a deeper level. This engagement is crucial for building a more equitable society, because it cultivates sensitivity to the complexities of women's lives and the challenges they face.

In conclusion, the depiction of women in Indian writings in English is a subject of profound importance. It reveals how literature participates in constructing and contesting gender roles, how women's voices have reshaped narrative traditions, and how cultural and diaspora contexts influence identity. Understanding these portrayals is essential for appreciating the richness of Indian English literature and for recognizing its role in promoting feminist consciousness and social transformation. Scholars like Professor Sandhya Tiwari demonstrate that this study is not only about literature but about life itself—about how women are imagined, how they resist, and how they envision a more inclusive future. To engage with these depictions is to engage with the ongoing struggle for equality, making the study both academically significant and socially urgent.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Trace the historical evolution of women's depiction in Indian English writings.
- Highlight feminist interventions that reshaped literary discourse.
- Examine diaspora perspectives on identity and displacement.
- Assess male and female authors' portrayals of women.
- Situate women's representation within feminist criticism and postcolonial theory.
- Contribute to ongoing debates about gender equality and representation in literature. Professor Tiwari's scholarship aligns with these objectives, as seen in her works on cultural displacement in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and feminist issues intertwined with autobiography in Fay Weldon's writings. Her interdisciplinary approach bridges feminist criticism, diaspora studies, and cultural politics, enriching the discourse on women's representation.

Review of Literature

Scholarship on women in Indian English writings spans feminist criticism, diaspora studies, and cultural analysis. Early critical studies often emphasized stereotypical portrayals of women as passive, submissive, or idealized figures, reinforcing patriarchal norms. Such portrayals positioned women as symbols of tradition, morality, or national identity, rather than as complex individuals with agency. Feminist critics such as Susie Tharu, K. Lalitha, and Meenakshi Mukherjee challenged these reductive narratives, foregrounding women's voices and experiences. Their interventions opened space for nuanced readings of female subjectivity, laying the foundation for subsequent scholarship that interrogated gender, identity, and representation in Indian English literature.

Professor Sandhya Tiwari's contributions enrich this discourse by bridging feminist criticism, diaspora studies, and cultural politics. Her monograph *Displacements and Alienation of Indian Diaspora* (2013) explore how women negotiate alienation in diasporic contexts, emphasizing the psychological and cultural dislocations that shape female identity. This work situates women's struggles within the broader framework of migration and globalization, highlighting how displacement intensifies gendered vulnerabilities while also creating

opportunities for redefinition and empowerment. Her article *Infidelity, Betrayal and Marital Discord in Manju Kapur's Custody* (2019) examines marital conflict and gender roles, foregrounding the ways in which literature reflects the lived realities of women caught in patriarchal structures. By analysing Kapur's narrative, Tiwari underscores how women's experiences of betrayal and discord are not merely personal but deeply embedded in socio-cultural expectations, thereby linking individual suffering to systemic gender inequalities.

In "Sisterhood and Feminist Mentoring in Chitra Divakaruni's *The Last Queen*" (2025), Tiwari highlights solidarity among women, showing how female characters resist patriarchal oppression through collective strength and mentorship. This study contributes to feminist discourse by emphasizing the importance of intergenerational support and the politics of sisterhood in literature, offering a counter-narrative to isolation and marginalization. Her work *Gender Politics and Stereotypes in Bollywood Films* (2024) investigates cinematic stereotypes, demonstrating how popular culture perpetuates reductive images of women while also offering spaces for subversion. By analysing Bollywood's gender politics, Tiwari expands the scope of feminist literary criticism to include visual and cultural texts, underscoring the interconnectedness of literature and media in shaping gendered identities. Bollywood has long perpetuated gender stereotypes, often reinforcing patriarchal norms. Lalitha Gopalan notes that mainstream cinema frequently positions women as "spectacle rather than subject" (Gopalan 45). Similarly, Rachel Dwyer argues that Bollywood narratives often rely on traditional tropes of femininity, limiting women's agency (Dwyer 89). These critiques parallel Tiwari's observations, situating Bollywood within a global conversation about media and gender politics.

In *Indian Knowledge System (IKS) as a Significant Corpus* (2023), she analyses cultural frameworks shaping women's identity, situating feminist concerns within indigenous epistemologies. This work reflects her commitment to integrating traditional knowledge systems with contemporary feminist thought, thereby enriching the discourse on women's representation and grounding it in local cultural contexts. Her study *Migration and Cross-cultural Experiences in Manjushree Thapa's Seasons of Flight* (2023) explores displacement and identity, focusing on how women navigate cultural hybridity and negotiate selfhood in transnational contexts. Similarly, *Aspects of Diaspora and Cultural Displacement in Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss* (2023) examines how women's identities are reshaped by migration and cultural dislocation, highlighting the intersection of gender and diaspora. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays the fragmented identities of migrants caught between cultures. Homi Bhabha's concept of the "third space" explains how diasporic subjects negotiate hybrid identities in contexts of displacement (Bhabha 37). Similarly, Salman Rushdie emphasizes the "imaginary homelands" of migrants, where nostalgia and alienation coexist (Rushdie 10). These perspectives deepen Tiwari and Raj's analysis of Desai, situating her novel within broader postcolonial discourse on diaspora.

In *Constituents and Issues of Identity Construction in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies* (2017), Tiwari investigates the complexities of identity formation, highlighting how women characters embody the tensions between tradition and modernity, displacement and belonging. Her article *Feminist Issue Intertwined with Autobiographical Elements in Fay Weldon* (2017) demonstrates how feminist concerns are embedded within autobiographical narratives, emphasizing the interplay between personal experience and collective gendered realities. Finally, *Western Psychology and Eastern Psycho-spirituality in Dialogue* (2025), co-authored with S. Mandal, reflects her interdisciplinary commitment, showing how psycho-spiritual frameworks inform women's identity and resilience. This comparative study bridges cultural paradigms, offering new insights into feminist subjectivity and the ways women draw upon diverse traditions to negotiate identity. Together, these works demonstrate Professor Tiwari's interdisciplinary approach and commitment to feminist scholarship. By engaging with literature, diaspora studies, cultural politics, and psycho-spiritual frameworks, she enriches the discourse on women in Indian English writings, foregrounding their struggles, resilience, and agency across diverse contexts. Her scholarship not only critiques patriarchal structures but also illuminates pathways of empowerment, making her a vital voice in contemporary literary studies.

Marital discord in Kapur's *Custody* resonates with feminist critiques of domesticity. Shashi Deshpande's novels similarly portray fractured marriages, underscoring how patriarchal structures exacerbate

betrayal and emotional estrangement (Deshpande 54). In addition, Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* illustrates how infidelity and betrayal destabilize women's agency within traditional family systems (Hariharan 102). These narratives align with Tiwari's reading of Kapur, situating marital discord within a continuum of feminist Indian fiction.

DISCUSSION

The depiction of women in Indian English writings is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by historical, cultural, and social contexts. One of the most persistent themes is the tension between tradition and modernity. Women characters often find themselves negotiating between cultural expectations rooted in patriarchy and their own aspirations for autonomy. This duality is evident in novels such as Manju Kapur's *Custody*, where marital discord and betrayal expose the fragility of traditional family structures. Professor Sandhya Tiwari's analysis of Kapur's work underscores how literature mirrors the lived realities of women, revealing the systemic pressures that constrain their choices while also highlighting their resilience. Marriage and domesticity remain central concerns in Indian English literature. Writers like Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have explored the psychological and emotional dimensions of women's roles within the household. Tiwari's scholarship adds depth to this discourse by situating these narratives within broader feminist frameworks. Her study of infidelity and betrayal in Kapur's novel demonstrates how women's struggles are not isolated incidents but part of a larger cultural narrative that often privileges male authority and silences female agency.

The Indian Knowledge System emphasizes holistic approaches to learning and living. Kapil Kapoor highlights how IKS integrates philosophy, science, and spirituality, offering a "pluralistic epistemology" (Kapoor 21). Similarly, Debi Prasad Chattopadhyaya underscores the importance of indigenous frameworks in resisting Western intellectual dominance (Chattopadhyaya 14). These perspectives support Tiwari's exploration of IKS as a vital corpus for cultural and intellectual renewal.

The Indian diaspora often grapples with cultural dislocation and identity crises. Stuart Hall argues that diasporic identities are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 235). This perspective highlights how alienation is not static but evolves with migration experiences. Similarly, Avtar Brah emphasizes the "politics of location" in diaspora, where belonging is negotiated across multiple cultural spaces (Brah 16). These frameworks complement Tiwari's exploration of displacement by situating it within broader postcolonial debates.

Divakaruni's *The Last Queen* foregrounds female solidarity as a counterforce to patriarchal oppression. bell hooks describe sisterhood as "political solidarity between women" that transcends individual struggles (hooks 67). This notion of feminist mentoring is echoed in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's call for transnational feminist alliances that resist cultural essentialism (Mohanty 78). Together, these perspectives enrich Tiwari's analysis by situating Divakaruni's narrative within global feminist discourse. Diaspora literature introduces another layer of complexity, as women navigate identity in transnational contexts. Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Divakaruni, and Kiran Desai portray women negotiating cultural hybridity, displacement, and alienation. Tiwari's works on diaspora—such as her studies of *Sea of Poppies*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *Seasons of Flight*—highlight how female characters embody the challenges of belonging and selfhood in unfamiliar cultural landscapes. These narratives reveal how migration intensifies gendered struggles, but also how it creates opportunities for redefinition and empowerment.

Resistance and empowerment emerge as recurring motifs. Women characters often challenge societal norms, asserting individuality and agency. In her analysis of Divakaruni's *The Last Queen*, Tiwari emphasizes the importance of sisterhood and feminist mentoring, showing how solidarity among women becomes a powerful tool for resisting patriarchal oppression. Such narratives shift the focus from victimhood to empowerment, offering alternative visions of female subjectivity.

Fay Weldon's fiction often blends feminist critique with autobiographical elements. Elaine Showalter notes that feminist writing frequently merges personal experience with political analysis, creating a "double-voiced discourse" (Showalter 201). Similarly, Toril

Moi emphasizes how feminist literature interrogates the intersection of gender and subjectivity (Moi 112). These perspectives reinforce Tiwari's argument, situating Weldon's autobiographical feminism within a broader literary tradition.

Cultural politics also play a significant role in shaping women's representation. Bollywood films, as Tiwari's 2024 study demonstrates, perpetuate stereotypes that confine women to reductive roles. Yet, literature often counters these images, presenting women as complex, multidimensional beings. By analysing both literary and cinematic texts, Tiwari underscores the interconnectedness of cultural mediums in shaping gendered identities and highlights the potential of literature to challenge and subvert dominant narratives. Her interdisciplinary approach, including comparative studies like *Western Psychology and Eastern Psycho-spirituality in Dialogue*, further enriches the discourse. By integrating psycho-spiritual frameworks, Tiwari demonstrates how women draw upon diverse traditions to negotiate identity and resilience. This perspective broadens the scope of feminist criticism, situating women's struggles within both cultural and spiritual paradigms. In sum, the discussion reveals that the depiction of women in Indian English writings is not monolithic but diverse, reflecting the multiplicity of women's experiences across different socio-cultural contexts. Professor Tiwari's scholarship underscores the role of literature in challenging stereotypes, promoting feminist consciousness, and envisioning inclusivity. Her work demonstrates that women's representation in Indian English literature is both a mirror of societal realities and a catalyst for change.

CONCLUSION

The depiction of women in Indian English writings has evolved from static, stereotypical portrayals to dynamic, multidimensional representations that foreground female agency, resilience, and subjectivity. This transformation reflects broader socio-cultural changes in Indian society, including the rise of feminist consciousness, globalization, and the increasing visibility of women in public and private spheres. Literature has become a powerful medium through which women's voices are articulated, challenging patriarchal structures and envisioning alternative possibilities for identity and empowerment. Professor Sandhya Tiwari's scholarship underscores this evolution by situating women's representation within diverse frameworks—feminist criticism, diaspora studies, cultural politics, and psycho-spiritual analysis. Her work on marital discord in Manju Kapur's *Custody* highlights the systemic pressures that constrain women within domestic spaces, while simultaneously revealing their capacity for resistance. Her analysis of sisterhood and feminist mentoring in Chitra Divakaruni's *The Last Queen* emphasizes solidarity as a crucial strategy for empowerment, demonstrating how collective female strength can challenge entrenched patriarchal norms. Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* explores identity formation amid colonial trade and migration. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that colonial subjects are often "subaltern," denied voice within dominant narratives (Spivak 82). Paul Gilroy's notion of the "Black Atlantic" similarly highlights how transoceanic histories shape hybrid identities (Gilroy 4). These frameworks complement Tiwari's reading of Ghosh, emphasizing how identity is constructed through displacement and global flows.

Diaspora literature, as explored in her studies of Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, and Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight*, adds another dimension to women's representation. These works reveal how migration and displacement intensify gendered struggles but also create opportunities for redefinition and hybridity. Tiwari's scholarship situates these narratives within the broader discourse of identity construction, showing how women negotiate belonging and selfhood in transnational contexts. Her engagement with cultural politics, particularly in *Gender Politics and Stereotypes in Bollywood Films*, demonstrates how popular culture both perpetuates and challenges reductive images of women. By analysing cinema alongside literature, Tiwari underscores the interconnectedness of cultural mediums in shaping gendered identities. Her interdisciplinary approach, exemplified in *Western Psychology and Eastern Psycho-spirituality in Dialogue*, further enriches the discourse by integrating psycho-spiritual frameworks into feminist analysis, offering new insights into resilience and identity formation. Taken together, these contributions highlight the richness and diversity of women's representation in Indian English writings. They demonstrate that literature is not merely a reflection of societal realities but also a catalyst for change, capable of challenging stereotypes and promoting feminist consciousness.

Tiwari's scholarship affirms that women's depiction in Indian English literature is both a mirror of cultural dynamics and a site of resistance, where alternative visions of gender and identity are imagined.

Dialogues between Western psychology and Eastern spirituality highlight the potential for integrative approaches to mental well-being. Carl Jung acknowledged the influence of Eastern thought, particularly in his engagement with concepts like mandalas and meditation (Jung 89). Similarly, Richard King argues that comparative philosophy reveals both tensions and possibilities in bridging Western rationalism with Eastern spiritual traditions (King 56). These perspectives complement Tiwari's work, situating psycho-spiritual dialogue within global intellectual exchange.

The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of continued scholarly engagement with women's representation in Indian English writings. As society evolves, literature will continue to reflect and shape the discourse on gender, identity, and empowerment. Professor Tiwari's work provides a vital foundation for this ongoing exploration, demonstrating how interdisciplinary approaches can deepen our understanding of women's experiences across diverse contexts. Ultimately, the depiction of women in Indian English literature affirms the transformative power of storytelling, offering pathways toward inclusivity, equality, and social justice.

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