

Unveiling the Issues and Challenges of Women in the Contemporary World: A Literary Analysis of Contemporary Novels

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse challenges, major issues, and the overall status of women in the present scenario. Today, in the 21st century, the role of Women in the Social, Economic, and Overall development of the countries is inevitable. Practically Women's Empowerment and equal Social Status are still an illusion found in literature only. This paper shows that women have relatively little power and enjoy a lower status than men, despite government efforts and recent laws. It's about the ups and downs of women's lives, about the paradoxical shift of the woman who was once worshipped as a goddess towards her current situation. This paper helps to understand the critical issues, problems, and challenges that they face, as well as several solutions for overcoming them, such as education, employment, or a change in social structure. To reveal the complex issues and challenges faced by women in today's world, as depicted in current novels, this article carries out a comprehensive literary analysis. It inspects the delicate portrayal of female characters grappling with gender-based discrimination, socio-economic barriers, the struggle for autonomy within diverse cultural and patriarchal societies, gender-based violence, economic marginalization, resistance, and reliance, etc. The study shows how literature mirrors the evolution of women's quest for equality and justice by analysing thematic elements and character development in different narratives. Using feminist theoretical frameworks, the analysis explains how contemporary novels serve as platforms for feminist discussion, depicting both the obstacles and the resilience inherent in women's experiences.

In addition, the article highlights how these literary works contribute to understanding and dialogue on the necessity of systemic change. In doing so, it highlights the crucial role that literature plays in drawing attention to the evolution of women's roles and rights in modern society. The study confirms that in advocating for women's liberation and empowerment, facing ongoing challenges, the power of storytelling remains. Women are frequently an especially oppressed group within each unit of socioeconomic stratification. The concept of women's issues does not pertain to women alone because it neither exclusively belongs to the domain of women nor is it an outcome of injustices meted out to women by men. Violence against vulnerable sections of society arising due to a multitude of factors in the era of globalization is a serious matter of social and academic discourse. The growing incidence of violence perpetrated against women in contemporary times is a testimony to the faster-

eroding idea of human security in a globalized world, which originates from the patriarchal power structure existing in society.

Keywords: Women, Challenges, Empowerment, Issues, Problems, Women's Education, Socio-Economic Status, Violence, Injustice.

Introduction

Women are an important social category. In addition to the gender dimension, societal norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and customs are also defined regarding women's status and roles. Women blur the boundary between caste, class, race, wealth, etc., as a social category. The concept of women's issues does not pertain to women alone because it neither exclusively belongs to the domain of women nor is it an outcome of injustices meted out to women by men. In our society, we find several instances in our religious traditions that relegate women to an inferior status in comparison to men. However, we cannot simplify women's issues as a conflict between men and women, or the women's movements as a crusade against men.

Since ancient times, women have played a major role in the culture and society of a country. For several years, however, the issue of women's status has been a subject of debate and concern. There are still many challenges faced by women, despite the progress made in recent years. Several important developments have taken place over the past years concerning efforts towards empowering women. To improve health, education, and economic opportunities for women, the Government has implemented several programs and policies. The number of women in the workforce has increased significantly, and women have made great strides in different fields such as politics, business, and film. Despite these achievements, there are still significant challenges for women in India. Gender discrimination, violence against women, and unequal pay continue to be major issues. Female foeticide and infanticide, particularly in rural areas, remain a significant concern. Women's safety and security are also significant issues, with many incidents of sexual harassment and assault reported each year.

Women in the modern world face a wide range of issues and challenges that hamper their empowerment and progress across all areas of life. Despite progress in gender equality, today's world is full of problems and challenges for women. A wide range of barriers still

exist to women's opportunities and their success, ranging from societal, business, and political obstacles. Today, one of the biggest problems faced by women is the gender pay gap. Women worldwide continue to earn less than their male counterparts for the same work done by them, which in turn can significantly affect their financial stability and long-term plans. Some other challenges that are included are discrimination in education and training. Women still face various barriers to accessing quality education and training opportunities, which limit their ability to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for their personal growth and professional development. Women often face discrimination in the hiring process and struggle the most to secure higher-level positions. Women's access to credit and property rights is difficult to obtain, which restricts them from economic independence and financial stability.

Women's health is affected by several interdependent factors, including the economy and social environment. Social factors that affect women's and society's economic status, including the level of salary and education levels, attitudes towards marriage, age of marriage, values related to fertility and sex of the child, family organization patterns, and ideal roles for women by societal standards.

When it comes to gender inequality, many parents wish for a boy rather than a girl child since, in their so-called "mentality," boys will carry on with their generation, tradition, and customs. Even though it's against the law, people continue to determine a baby's gender. They will abort if they find a girl, and they will carry the pregnancy to term if they find it's a boy. They cannot pass on a generation without a girl. An infant can only be conceived by a woman. A generation cannot pass on without women.

Sexual abuse and harassment are faced by women, according to the most recent government report on crimes. India logged 31,677 cases of rape in 2021, or 86 cases per day on average. There were approximately 49 incidents of violence against women reported per single hour. Many women experience abuse from family members or relatives. In Ludhiana 28-year-old woman was raped by her father-in-law. He spiked her drink and raped her. In Delhi, a 22-year-old woman was gang raped and murdered in the 2012 "Nirbhaya Case". After 7 years, she got justice.

There are a series of women's issues in terms of low access to productive resources, medical facilities, educational and employment opportunities, and various other social and economic

discriminations faced by them. In the last few decades, the latent discontent of women has manifested itself in the form of women's movements in various parts of the country. In the modern women's movement, issues of health and legal status have become key issues.

There are various issues and problems that women generally face in Indian society. Some of the problems are discussed below: Selective abortion and female infanticide- For years in India, it has been the most common practice in which abortion of a female fetus is performed in the womb of the mother after the fetal sex determination and sex-selective abortion by the medical professionals.

Sexual harassment- A girl child is sexually exploited at home, on the streets, in public places, transports, offices, etc., by a family member, neighbours, friends, or relatives.

Dowry and Bride burning- In this practice, a woman is burnt alive if the woman has not paid the agreed-upon dowry to the groom's family. It's usually practiced during or after marriage in low or middle-class families. Parents of boys demand a huge amount of money from the bride's family at the time of marriage to be rich. The groom's family performs bride burning in case of a lack of fulfilled dowry demand by the bride and her family. According to the Indian National Crime Bureau reports, in 2005, around 6787 dowry death cases were registered in and around India. Disparity in education- The level of women's education is less than that of men's, even in today's time. In rural areas, female illiteracy is higher than in urban areas. Where over 63% or more women remain illiterate.

Domestic violence- According to the Women and Child Development officials, domestic violence is like an endemic and widespread disease, which affects almost 70% of Indian women. It is performed by the husband, relative, or other family member. Child Marriages- Early marriage of the girls by their parents to escape from dowry. It is highly practiced in rural India. Inadequate Nutrition- Inadequate nutrition in childhood affects women in their later life, especially women belonging to the lower middle class and poor families.

Low status in the family- It is abuse or violence against women. Women are considered inferior to men, so they are not allowed to join the military services or any other services or jobs.

Status of Widows- Widows are considered worthless in Indian society. They are treated poorly and forced to wear white clothes. Widows are treated very badly by their family

members and even by society. Earlier, women faced problems like child marriage, the sati system, the pardha system, restriction to widow remarriage, widows' exploitation, the devadasi system, etc. However, almost all the old traditional problems have disappeared gradually from society, but have given rise to other new issues. Women are continuously facing many problems even after having self-confidence, individuality, self-respect, personality, capacity, talent, and efficiency more than men. They are facing problems in their daily life, even after they are given equal rights and opportunities like men by the Constitution of India. Some of the major problems modern women are still facing are mentioned below:

Violence against women: Women are being affected by various forms of violence almost every day, which is disrupting society. Women are being victims of violence at a huge level day by day because of increasing crimes against women (according to the report of the Crime Record Bureau of the Central Home Ministry). Women are getting kidnapped every 44 minutes, raped every 47 minutes, 17 dowry deaths every day, etc. They may face violence within the family (dowry-related harassment, death, marital rape, wife-battering, sexual abuse, deprivation of healthy food, female genital mutilation, etc.) or outside the family (kidnapping, rape, murder, etc.).

Gender discrimination: Women are considered a weaker section of society than men and given less importance. Girl children are becoming real victims of discrimination. There is also discrimination of power and work between men and women because of the patriarchal system of families in India. Gender discrimination affects women in areas like nutrition, education, health, care, the decline of the female population, jobs, public life, etc.

Problems of female education: Women's education percentage is low in India, especially in rural areas, because they are discouraged from higher education, such as professional and technical education.

Problems related to unemployment: Women are having more problems in searching for suitable work. They become more prone to exploitation and harassment in the workplace.

Unbearable Conditions. Uneducated women are more prone to divorce and desertion by their husbands at any stage of life. They have to live their whole life in fear of divorce. In some cases, they have to end their life because of unbearable conditions.

Increasing the Dowry system is another huge problem in society, which is increasing day by day. Women are ill-treated, manhandled, disrespected, tortured, and suffer other cruelties (violence, murder, and suicide) because of the lack of dowry at the time of marriage. It causes degradation of women's status to a great extent.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To analyse the Changing Role of Women in Contemporary India
- To analyse the factors that affect women's empowerment.
- To identify the challenges in the path of women's empowerment.

Research Methodology:

The unit of analysis of the present study is the 'Issues and Challenges of Women'. This study aims to analyse the different types of Women's Empowerment. The study is descriptive and analytical. The data used in this study have been taken from purely secondary sources as per the requirements of this study. Secondary data is collected from various reports of national and international agencies, various authentic websites, magazines, and e-content related to Women's Empowerment.

The Issues and Challenges of Women in the Contemporary World

1. Gender-Based Violence: "Trespassing" by Uzma Aslam Khan is a thought-provoking novel that delves into various issues and challenges faced by women in contemporary society, particularly in the context of Pakistan. Throughout the novel, instances of gender-based violence are depicted, highlighting the pervasive nature of this issue in society. Women characters face physical and emotional abuse, often perpetrated by male family members. These instances underscore the power dynamics and societal norms that perpetuate violence against women and the challenges they face in seeking justice and protection.

2. Patriarchal Structures: "What the Body Remembers" by Shauna Singh Baldwin is a poignant exploration of the lives of women in Punjab during the partition of India in 1947 and its aftermath. In the novel, opportunities for self-determination and strict gender roles and norms are to be adhered to by women, which limits their autonomy. In society, inequalities in education, employment, and decision-making perpetuate patriarchal attitudes, reinforcing

women's subordinate status. Women characters, such as Satya and Roop, have to adhere to strict patriarchal rules and have to endure physical and sexual violence at the hands of men.

3. Cultural and Familial Expectations: “The Bastard of Istanbul” by Elif Shafak is a novel that intricately weaves together the lives of women from different generations and backgrounds in Istanbul, Turkey. Women face several issues and changes in this novel. Women in the novel grapple with the weight of cultural and familial expectations, which dictate their roles and behaviours within society. Traditional gender norms often restrict women’s autonomy and limit their opportunities for self-expression and personal fulfilment. Characters such as Asya and Armanoush navigate conflicting expectations from their families and communities, highlighting the tensions between tradition and modernity. Male dominance is evident within families and communities, influencing women’s access to education. Employment and decision-making power.

4. Resilience and Solidarity: “Shadow City: A Woman Walks Kabul” by Taran N. Khan offers a vivid portrayal of life in Kabul, Afghanistan, through the eyes of the author as she navigates the city’s streets and encounters its diverse inhabitants. We will reveal several issues and problems that women in Kabul face. Despite the multitude of challenges they face, women in Kabul are showing resilience, power, and solidarity. Through actions of everyday resistance and collective action, challenging oppressive norms, and advocating for their rights and dignity, women's networks and grassroots organizations play an essential role in providing support and resources, and support for women's empowerment and gender equality.

5. Colonial and Post-Colonial Identity: “In the Country of Others” by Leila Slimani is a novel that follows the life of a young French woman named Mathilde who marries a Moroccan soldier and moves to Morocco during the 1940s and 1950s. The clash between French and Moroccan cultures presents challenges for Mathilde as she seeks to find her place within her new community. The novel examines the impact of colonialism on the lives of women in Morocco and the complexity of post-colonial identity. Mathilde’s relationship with her Moroccan husband, Amine, reflects the power dynamics and inequalities inherent in colonial relationships. Women like Mathilde are caught between the conflicting forces of colonialism and nationalism, grappling with questions of identity and belonging in a rapidly changing world.

6. Identity and Belonging: Women characters in the novel grapple with questions of identity and belonging, navigating the complexities of their heritage, ethnicity, and cultural heritage. In the novel, “The Bastard of Istanbul”, Armanoush’s journey of self-discovery as an

Armenian-Turkish woman underscores the tensions and conflicts surrounding identity in a multicultural and multilayered society like Istanbul. Women's experiences of belonging are shaped by intersecting identities and historical legacies, highlighting the complexities of cultural identity and belonging.

7. Historical Trauma and Memory: "The Bastard of Istanbul" delves into the legacy of historical trauma and its impact on women's lives. Characters such as Asya and Armanoush confront the legacies of past atrocities, including the Armenian genocide, which continue to reverberate through generations. Historical memory shapes women's experiences of identity, belonging, and intergenerational relationships, highlighting the enduring effects of collective trauma on individuals and communities.

8. Socio-Economic Inequality: In the novel "Trespassing", socio-economic inequality is depicted through the lens of gender, with women characters facing barriers to education, employment, and economic independence. Economic disparities intersect with gender, exacerbating women's vulnerability to exploitation and marginalization.

9. Political Instability and Conflict: In the novel "Shadow City: A Woman Walks Kabul", Kabul's tumultuous political landscape, marked by years of conflict and instability, has profound implications for women's lives. Women may bear the brunt of the consequences of conflict, including displacement, loss of livelihoods, and separation from family members. In times of heightened insecurity, women may face increased risks of violence and exploitation.

10. Forced Marriage and Child Marriage: In the novel "What the Body Remembers", the practice of forced marriage and child marriage is depicted in the novel, reflecting the pervasive control exerted over women's bodies and lives. Satya's marriage to Sardarji is arranged against her will, highlighting the lack of agency and consent afforded to women in matters of marriage. Child marriage, exemplified by Roop's early marriage to Sardarji, perpetuates cycles of exploitation and oppression, denying girls their childhood and educational opportunities.

Conclusion

The status of women in India has improved significantly in recent years, but there is still a long way to go. It is essential to recognize the achievements made so far and continue to work towards a more equitable and just society for women. By addressing the challenges that women face in the contemporary world and promoting gender equality, we can ensure that women can fully participate in all aspects of life and contribute to the development of the

country. Women face various issues and challenges in a patriarchal society. It highlights the struggle for women's rights, the prevalence of violence against women, gender inequality, lack of opportunities, and the expectations placed on women to conform to traditional gender roles. Through these stories and novels of these women, the novel showcases the strength, resilience, and determination of women in the face of adversity. It serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing fight for equality and empowerment of women in our society.

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