



Examining Representation and Gender Bias in Modern Indian English Playwriting

KM Swati Sharma, Research Scholar, Dept. of English, The Glocal University Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh
Dr. Vandana Srivastava, Associate Professor, Research Supervisor, Glocal School of Art & Social Science, The Glocal University, Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the portrayal of gender prejudice in Indian English playwriting, focusing on its origins, growth, and intersections with race. This article explores the ways in which gender discrimination presents itself in literature through the use of stereotypes and cultural prejudices, which also have an effect on how male and female characters are portrayed. In this research, notable playwrights such as Dina Mehta, Poile Sengupta, and Manjula Padmanabhan are highlighted in order to demonstrate how these authors tackle important societal themes such as prejudice based on caste, gender inequity, and the difficulties of modern life.

WIKIPEDIA

Keywords: Gender Bias, Representation, Indian English Playwriting, Modern Theater, Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

By providing a compelling focal point through which to investigate the intricacies of cultural norms, power dynamics, and individual organization, the representation of gender bias in literature serves as a compelling focus point through which to investigate these particular subjects.

1.1. Gender Bias

When it comes to literature, the phrase "gender bias" refers to the manner in which individuals are shown, treated, and represented differently from one another based on their gender. It is possible for this prejudice to manifest itself in a variety of ways, including the formation of stereotypes, the limitation of perspectives, and the unequal treatment of male and female characters in the media.

One of the most prominent ways that gender prejudice manifests itself in written works is through the use of stereotypes. The portrayal of men and women in literature has frequently been characterized by stereotypical portrayals in the past, which served to reinforce social standards and expectations. At the same time as women are often portrayed as being emotional, subservient, and caring, men are frequently portrayed as being strong, logical, and authoritative. The unfavorable gender norms that are supported by these beliefs are in addition to the fact that they limit character depth.

In addition, the manner in which female characters are portrayed in works of literature is an example of cultural bias against women. Especially in action and adventure genres, where male heroes have traditionally dominated the narrative, women are usually ignored or placed in supporting roles. This is especially true in the genres of action and adventure. Female characters are frequently presented as being one-dimensional or passive, with less depth and agency than their male counterparts. This is the case when there are female characters in the story.

1.2. Definition of gender bias

The tendency to favor or discriminate against individuals or groups on the basis of their gender is what is meant by the term "gender bias." When individuals are subjected to unequal treatment, opportunities, or expectations as a result of their gender identity or perceived gender roles, this phenomenon is referred to as gender discrimination.

1.3. Indian English Playwriting

The vibrant and ever-evolving area of Indian English playwriting reflects the country's complex political, social, and cultural context. Its roots are in the colonial era, when English was introduced as a language of instruction and communication, and it first gained prominence in the 20th century. Early writers who combined traditional Indian subjects with Western conventions, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh, set the



groundwork. Indian English playwriting flourished after independence as writers like Girish Karnad, Mahesh Dattani, and Vijay Tendulkar tackled modern themes like social justice, identity, and the intricacies of modern life. By tackling important issues like gender inequality, caste prejudice, and the gap between urban and rural areas, these playwrights have helped to give voice to underrepresented groups and encourage sociopolitical dialogue.

The development of Indian English playwriting, which incorporates experimental approaches and a variety of narrative forms, also reflects bigger developments in world theater. Dramatists such as Manjula Padmanabhan and Abhishek Majumdar have challenged convention by employing cutting-edge techniques for narrating stories and tackling worldwide concerns like climate change and migration. Indian English theater serves as a vital cultural link since Indian playwrights may reach both domestic and foreign audiences by using English as their medium. Furthermore, the growth of English-language play festivals and platforms in India has given rise to a lively environment for up-and-coming artists and experimental works. The relevance of Indian English playwriting as a potent instrument for cultural expression and social transformation is highlighted by its ongoing evolution and adaptation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brooks, D. J., & Hayes, D. (2019) In addition to being a matter of discussion in the political discourse of the United States, gender bias in elections is also a source of dispute in the academic literature of political science. As a consequence of this, the American people are presented with a variety of signals on the degree to which women contend with disadvantages in their campaigns for public office.

Dauids, J. S., Lyu, H. G., Hoang, C. M., Daniel, V. T., (2019) Women surgeons are underrepresented in academic surgery and may be subject to implicit gender bias. In colorectal surgery, women comprise 42% of new graduates, but only 19% of Diplomates in the United States. We evaluated the representation of women at the 2017 American Society of Colon and Rectal Surgeons Scientific and Tripartite Meeting and assessed for implicit gender bias. This was a prospective observational study.

Makhortykh, M., Urman, A., & Ulloa, R. (2021) Through the process of filtering and ranking information, web search engines make an impact on how people perceive social reality. On the other hand, their results are frequently vulnerable to prejudice, which can result in a biased portrayal of topics such as gender or professional professions. We utilise a mixed-method approach in our study to investigate the presence of race and gender bias in the depiction of artificial intelligence (AI) in picture search results originating from six different search engines.

Mukherjee's (2013) The empowerment of women and the impact that it has on gender bias in the birth and survival of girls in urban India are two of the issues that are currently being investigated as part of a number of different research topics that are currently being investigated. She uses statistics on birth rates and child mortality to investigate the ways in which factors such as women's education, work, and autonomy influence the preferences of families for sons over daughters.

Blumberg, R. L. (2007) study, "Gender Bias in Textbooks: A Hidden Obstacle on the Road to Gender Equality in Education," published by UNESCO, critically examines the persistent gender biases in educational materials. The study reveals how textbooks often reinforce stereotypes, hindering progress towards gender equality in education. The research highlights the need to address systemic inequalities within educational systems, as these biases shape students' perceptions and influence societal attitudes and behaviors.

3. EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Since the East India Company established the English language for official use in government organizations in the 17th century, the English language has been extensively acknowledged in India. This recognition dates back to the time when the East India Company introduced it. However, due to the fact that it developed and modified over the course of time,



it was not immediately accepted by the people. Through the development of Hickey's Bengal Gazette, India's first printing press, Sake Dean Mahomet published his voyage account in the year 1793 A.D., marking the beginning of the printing press in India. In spite of this, the majority of people at that time were not familiar with the English language, and the Indianization of language was necessary in order to promote western inclinations.

As a result of Lord William Bentick's decision in 1835 to establish the rule "Favor English language alone," topics such as literature and science were required to be taught in English. As a consequence of this, there were modifications made to the educational system, with educational institutions and universities adopting the English language into their subject matter. The first generation of persons who were able to speak and write in English was accomplished as a result of this endeavor.

Between the years 1850 and 1900, the literary movement known as mimetic Indian literature was prevalent, and romantic writers were often seen dressed in formal garb. Between the years 1900 and 1947, Indian poets attempted to incorporate romanticism from the British period of the early twentieth century as well as decadent romanticism, which ultimately led to the attainment of political freedom in 1947.

Indian poets such as Sarojini Naidu, Tagore, Aurbindo Ghosh, and Harindrath Chattopadhyay contributed to the development of a more Romantic attitude among Indian writers throughout the second-generation period. The lyrical output that they produced was abundant, and it reflected nationalism, spirituality, and mysticism in a manner that was distinct from English Romanticism. The poets in question stressed the splendor and abundance of the traditional Indian way of life and societal culture.

India saw a period of considerable literary development in the beginning of the 20th century, with Rabindranath Tagore being a pivotal role in this process. He was extremely talented in the fields of poetry, playwriting, and painting, and he is frequently referred to as the Leonardo da Vinci of India. Convent boarding school educated and elite writers such as Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, and Dominique Lieperre established the literature world when the English language in India experienced considerable development in the late 1970s. This was also the time when the English language in India underwent substantial development.

Several new authors, including Pankaj Mishra, Chetan Bhagat, Jhumpa Lahiri, William Dalrymple, and Hari Kenzura, have made significant contributions to the development of Indian literature recently. The works of Jhumpa Lahiri, which were influenced by the feelings of cultural diaspora, received recognition all around the world. As a result of the growing demand for the language, an increasing number of literary minds started writing and expressing their thoughts through the medium of novels and poems. In India, members of the modern millennial generation and Gen Z are drawn to literature because it allows them to voice their perspectives on societal, political, and economic issues.

From the works of Anita Desai, Kamala Markandeya, Kamala Das, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Nayantara Sehgal, Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Nair, Manju Kapoor, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai, it is clear that women in India have been provided with the opportunity to express themselves through the medium of literature. Issues that are traditionally associated with women and feminists transcend geographical boundaries and become relevant in the world that is dominated by men.

A tremendous increase in the number of literary works written in Indian English has resulted in the language being a major language on a worldwide scale. The English translations of a great number of regional texts are frequently liked by readers. India is credited with having one of the most distinguished literary personalities and a unique recognition from the perspective of the entire world thanks to the English language.

3.1. Significance Of Indian English Playwrights in Shaping Literary Discourse

Playwrights who write in Indian English play a crucial part in developing literary discourse by the following means:



▪ **Cultural Representation:**

The portrayal of Indian culture, history, and society on the international stage is made possible by the work of Indian playwrights who write in English. They do this by showcasing the depth and diversity of Indian traditions, languages, and customs via their works, which in turn challenges misconceptions and promotes understanding amongst different cultures.

▪ **Social Commentary:**

Indian English playwrights frequently employ theater as a medium for social and political criticism, tackling current topics such as caste injustice, gender inequality, religious intolerance, and corruption. Theater is a means by which they express their opinions. They provide a contribution to public debate and encourage awareness and dialogue on significant social issues through the plays that they perform, which bring attention to the subjects in question.

3.2. Intersectionality Of Gender and Ethnicity in Indian English Literature

There is a complex and diverse theme in Indian English literature that investigates the overlapping identities and experiences of individuals who traverse both gender and ethnic dynamics within the context of India. This issue is known as the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity. The concept of intersectionality puts attention on the specific challenges, hardships, and victories that individuals who belong to gender and ethnic groups that are marginalized or underrepresented in India confront.

▪ **Double Marginalization:**

The concept of intersectionality draws attention to the fact that people who belong to both gender and ethnic groups that are marginalized are sometimes subjected to double discrimination and marginalization. For instance, Dalit women in India are subjected to oppression not only because of their gender but also because of their caste identity. This results in distinct types of discrimination and marginalization that intersect with one another and compound one another.

▪ **Cultural Expectations:**

Within the realm of Indian English literature, the concept of intersectionality investigates the ways in which cultural expectations and conventions concerning gender and ethnicity cross to impact the lived realities of individuals. For instance, women who come from cultures that are more conservative or patriarchal may be subjected to more stringent gender norms and expectations than women who come from backgrounds that are more progressive or liberal. This adds additional levels of complexity to their experiences of gender identity and expression.

▪ **Representation in Literature:**

The intersectionality of gender and ethnicity is frequently investigated in Indian English literature through the use of a wide variety of characters and points of view. The intersectional experiences of women from different ethnic backgrounds have been represented by authors such as Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. These authors have addressed topics such as migration, identity, family relationships, and cultural heritage in their writing.

4. INTRODUCTION OF SOME PLAYWRIGHTS

❖ **Dina Mehta**

Dina Mehta is a playwright, editor, and fiction writer who is located in Mumbai. She is well-known for her works, which include *The Myth-Makers*, *Tiger, Tiger*, *Brides Are Not for Burning*, *Getting Away with Murder*, *When One Plus One Makes Nine*, *Sister Like You*, and *The Other Woman and Other Stories*. Her plays put the spotlight on the dangerous position that Indian women find themselves in inside patriarchal societies, where they internalize the bad image that is provided by this socialization.

The work of Mehta addresses a variety of topics, including the uneasiness of a woman who has reached the end of her prime as a single woman, the trauma of child sexual abuse, childlessness, and infidelity, and the challenges of contemporary Indian women to recover



these body blows. Three lengthy acts make up the format of the play, with the first two taking place in Pramila's bed-cum-sitting room and the third taking place in Savitri's private residence.

As a result of Pramila's concerns with her physical appearance, she requests that her maid servant, Mukti, come and collect her. Her father, the untouchables' colony, and the dirty pond are all elements that she recreates through the use of sound effects in her prior history. In order to display pictures from her history, the dramatist makes use of lighting. These images include her father's occupation as a leather worker and the untouchables' colony.

At the conclusion of the play, Anand departs, and Pramila communicates with her maid for the fourth time, requesting that she see him once more. In addition to that, Mehta has composed and published two collections of short tales and two novels.

Dina Mehta's plays, in conclusion, investigate the complicated relationship that exists between women and the roles that they play in civilizations that are patriarchal. She draws attention to the difficulties that women in today's society confront, as well as the significance of self-expression and introspection, through the art that she has produced.

❖ **Poile Sengupta**

Playwright, poet, novelist, and children's author Poile Sengupta is well-known for her work that urges social intervention and challenges established paradigms. Her work has been published in a variety of literary forms. She was born in 1948 and holds a Master of Arts degree in English from Delhi University. She has written a number of plays for adults, some of which are Mangalam, Inner Laws, A Pretty Business, Keats was a Tuber, Collages, Alipha, Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni, and Samara's Song.

Abhijit Sengupta, her husband, has directed the majority of her plays, but Joy Michael has directed a few of them for Yatrik, which has been performed on the stage in Delhi. Theatre is another one of Sengupta's passions; he is the creator of a club called Theatre Club, and he has also performed on stage and in films. Role Call and Role Call Again, Vikramaditya's Throne, How the Path Grew, The Story of the Road, and The Way to my Friend's House are some of the works of fiction that she has written for children. She has created a collection of seven one-act plays for children and has written essays for children that have been featured in a variety of journals. When she entered the playscript competition held by The Hindu-Madras Players in 1993, her first full-length play, Mangalam, was selected as the winner due to the socially important issue it featured.

In addition to this, the play investigates the development of the metrosexual male character, Vikram, in contemporary times. Characters such as Sumati and Suresh, who are depicted as powerful and capable of speaking and acting for themselves, are featured in the drama, which takes place in a world that is unstable and patriarchal. The drama also illustrates the rise of the metrosexual male character, Vikram, who, in today's world, would be considered to be a metrosexual male.

A number of the characters, including the mother of Sumati and Suresh, are depicted as being victims of violence and abuse in the second act of the play. The play draws attention to the societal conventions as well as the power relations that exist between the characters, displaying the complexities of gender roles and the expectations that society places on individuals.

❖ **Manjula Padmanabhan**

An accomplished author, novelist, short story writer, playwright, cartoonist, and illustrator, Manjula Padmanabhan has illustrated twenty-four children's books. She is also a talented cartoonist. Not only has she authored a memoir titled Getting There (1999), but she has also written two novels, namely Escape (2008) and The Island of Lost Girls (1915). Her plays, such as Lights Out and Harvest, dissect the representation of women in masculine texts and performances, bringing to light the inner tensions and challenges that women face as a result of the oppressive character of human civilization.



As a result of the fact that they encompass Helen Keyssar's description of productions of scripts that are characterized by the consciousness of women as women, dramaturgy, and performance that deconstructs sexual difference and destroys patriarchal power, Padmanabhan's plays are significant in the canon of feminist theater. Through her work, she has introduced a novel approach to both performance and writing, one that does not necessarily adhere to the highly established pattern of male playwrights.

5. CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the examination of gender prejudice in Indian English playwriting unveils a multifaceted and dynamic story that both mirrors and contradicts the socio-cultural landscape of India. Plays by authors such as Poile Sengupta, Manjula Padmanabhan, and Dina Mehta demonstrate how literature can be a powerful tool for challenging and reforming social conventions. Through their exploration of gender injustice, intersectionality, and cultural expectations, these playwrights provide complex and multidimensional viewpoints that enhance literary conversation and advance social consciousness. The ongoing development of Indian English playwriting emphasizes the play's importance as a vehicle for social change and cultural representation, underscoring the theatre's persistent capacity to effect change and promote a more nuanced comprehension of gender relations in modern society.

REFERENCES

1. Ali, S.S. (2005). Gender Discrimination in Shakespeare's Tragedies. *Journal of European Studies*, 21(2), 210-221.
2. Allwood, G. (2012). *French feminisms: Gender and violence in contemporary theory*. Routledge.
3. Al-Qatawneh, S., & Al Rawashdeh, A. (2019). Gender representation in the Arabic language textbook for the ninth grade approved by the Ministry of Education for use in schools in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 60(November 2018), 90-98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2018.12.001>
4. Alter, J. S. (2004). Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46(3). Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/3879472.
5. Anggawati, L. S., Suwastini, N. K. A., & Mahayanti, N. W. S. (2018). Women's characterization in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In M. H. Santosa, I. M. S. Paramarta, N. L. P. S.
6. Campbell, D.E. (2010). *Choosing democracy: a practical guide to multicultural education*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
7. Caplar, N., Tacchella, S., & Birrer, S. (2017). Quantitative evaluation of gender bias in astronomical publications from citation counts. *Nature astronomy*, 1(6), 0141.
8. Chatterjee, M., Karnik, I., Padmanabhan, M., Raghunathan, S., Ramnarayan, G., Ravishankar, A., & Venkatesan, J. (2019). *Disparate Voices of Indian Women Playwrights: Creating a Profession*. Lexington Books.
9. Dabbagh, A. (2016). Gender representation under critical image analysis: The case of Iranian ELT textbooks. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*, 4(4), 39-52.
10. Dalmia, S., & Lawrence, P. G. (2005). The institution of dowry in India: Why it continues to prevail. *Journal of Development Areas*, 71-93.
11. Das, P. R. (2021). *A Theatre of Their Own: Indian Women Playwrights in Perspective*. Partridge Publishing
12. David, H. (2014). Stifled Voices: Indian English Women Playwrights Writing Themselves into Existence. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, 2(3), 166-174.
13. Dijkstra, A. Geske, and Lucia C. Hanmer. "Measuring socio-economic gender inequality: Toward an alternative to the UNDP gender-related development index." *Feminist economics* vol. 6, no.2 , 2000, pp. 41-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545700050076106>
14. Kumar, T. (2021). The culture of patriarchy, gender bias, and class discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 5(S1), 60-69.
15. Mukherjee, S. S. (2013). Women's empowerment and gender bias in the birth and survival of girls in urban India. *Feminist Econ*, 19, 1-28. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13545701.2012.752312>