

GIRL EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE RICKSHAW GIRL BY MITALI PERKINS

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment is required for every girl to be self-sufficient and successful in her work. An empowered girl possesses the ability, knowledge, talent, and self-assurance required to gain the independence and mobility she requires to successfully navigate her life in the home and in society as a mother, sister, wife, and daughter. Girl empowerment is critical to the development of our country. It is necessary for the development of society and the economy. It has benefited a variety of disciplines in India, including medicine, defense, science, and technology. Girl empowerment has been ignored for a long time in India due to a variety of reasons, such as gender inequality, the narrow-mindedness of macho society, the restrictions placed on women's duties, the distance between homes and schools, and others. Without the empowerment of a girl child, development in India will remain a distant dream. The empowerment of females in India has been significantly influenced by a large number of Indian women writers. By exposing the patterns that connect today's women, particularly those relating to female education and the indomitable spirit of Indian girls, they have challenged society with their analytical works. In this study. The Indian author of young adult literature Mithali Perkins, as well as her short story The Rickshaw girl, is examined in this study in light of the value she places on girls' empowerment.

Keywords: Girl Empowerment, India, Mitali Perkins, The Rickshaw Girl.

Introduction

Mitali Bose Perkins is an Indian-American author of children's and young adult books. She is a prominent young literary writer who was born in Kolkata, India. Mitali Perkins focuses on the difficulties experienced by teenage girls and their bravery for survival in her fictitious world. She is unique among Indian English women writers. According to her creating places where young people are safe, welcomed, and loved is one of life's greatest delights. She has authored twelve books for younger audiences, including *You Bring the Distant Near* (Walter Dean Myers Honor Award), *Rickshaw Girl* (New York Public Library's Top 100 children's books in 100 years), *Bamboo people* (American Library Association's Top 100 Young Adult Novels), and *Tiger Boy* (Charlotte Huck Honour Award and South Asia Book Award)

The children's book characters that Mitali uses are intended to reflect just on changes that have occurred in Indian society.[1] The most inspiring tale of a young woman named Naima of Bangladesh, India, who longs to harness her gifts is found in *Rickshaw Girl* by Mitali Perkins.

Naima's courage and tenacity are evident and commendable throughout the novel as well as her battles to survive.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is:

- To examine and analyse how Mithali Perkins brings the concept of male- domination.
- To emphasizes on Girl empowerment in India.

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Literature Review

Writings by Shashi Deshpand, Shobha De, Nina Sibal, Bharati Mukherjee, and other authors have been made possible to write on women and women empowerment. Thanks to the development of feminism by Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, R.P. Jhabvala, and Nayantara Sahgal. The internal scene of the freed woman's perception and her mental reality has been presented in these new female voices. [2]

Indian women are considering how to substitute themselves in the patriarchal society. The journey of the woman toward liberation is progressing slowly. She focuses on the themes of sexual turmoil and feeling unimportant in traditional society. Indian women are considering how to substitute themselves in the patriarchal society. The journey of the woman toward liberation is progressing slowly.[3]

In order to significantly advance gender equity at the societal level and to fulfill the Developmental Goals of fostering gender equality and women's empowerment, it is essential to understand how individual women perceive empowerment and its implications.[4]

Women are typically portrayed in mythologies as subservient, religious, and resilient, while men are typically depicted as chauvinists and utilitarian. Karnad presents women as strong, brave, and empowered to undermine and falsify the stereotypes of women that are typically presented. With particular reference to Padmini's life as it is shown in the play, the study conducts research to demonstrate the empowerment of women. Before she ever steps onto the stage, the playwright presents her as the epitome of beauty through Devadatta.[5]

The freedom to act and accomplish one's aims is how the author defines empowerment. This empowerment approach places an emphasis on the person. Other authors adopt a little more focused strategy, taking into account the institutional, social, or political frameworks rules and norms which the players make and pursue their decisions within.[6]

The difficulties faced by refugees in their newly existing space are depicted by Mitali Perkins in her imaginary universe. Migrants' lives change significantly as a result of acculturation or assimilation. Migrants attempt to adapt to a new culture in order to be accepted by the host society. Migrants attempt to learn the language and adopt the host community's clothing as they begin the process of hybridization.[7]

The generic borders of South Asian children's fiction are currently shown as less rigid and more flexible thanks to the rapid developments in transportation technologies and the liberalisation of economic frameworks. Two such up-and-coming authors of children's literature are Sowmya and Rajendran, who have both started to investigate topics like cultural assimilation in diasporic communities, prejudice, and identity politics against the backdrop of the vibrant sociocultural fabric of South Asia.[8].

Need for the Study

When quickly scanned the body of study on Methali Perkins it is noticed that nobody mentions the idea of girl empowerment in and through the lens of her work.

Methodology of Data Collection and Analysis

In the present study, a qualitative methodology was used to examine the study's objectives. The many publications—books, websites, and articles—that were consulted for this study. Some of the important terms utilised in this study include "Girl Empowerment in India," "Various Types of Girl Empowerment," and "Indian authors." The goal of this article has been chosen after combining the keywords and filtering the selected keywords.

Girl Empowerment in India

To give women or girl the ability to recognise their power in all sectors of life, empowerment is an active, multifaceted process. [9] Women have great power. Without this powerful force, no family, no civilization, and no country can advance. No cause can ever be won without women working alongside men, according to Malala Yousafzai-The world is ruled by two powers. One is a sword, while the other is a pen. There is indeed a third power that is more potent than both: women.

In a growing country such As India, the girl empowerment is a multifaceted issue that calls for the active participation of numerous stakeholders. [10] Women have long been revered in India as both slaves and goddesses. The social norm was that women should stay in the confines of the home and handle domestic duties. She used to get married young and took up the responsibility of a mother. A

woman seemed to have no right to exist once her husband left her according to the Sati ritual. The treatment of women during British control saw several modifications. Women in the west were treated equally to males, and India aspired to adopt the same philosophy. Savitribai Phule became India's first female educator in 1848. It boosted women's confidence. As time went on, social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi led the way in advancing women's education. They tried to get rid of the dowry system, sati, child marriage, and other customs. Abolition of the Sati Act of 1829, the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, the Child Restraint Act of 1929, the Women's Right to Property Act of 1937, and other reforms occurred repeatedly. After the country's independence, women's status in society began to improve. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1961, the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, among other changes, were put into place to provide social freedom and justice for Indian women. Special protections for women were also included in the Indian Constitution. It ensured women's equality and put in place a number of programmes for their advancement. Any form of discrimination against any citizen on the basis of their gender, colour, caste, religion, etc. was outlawed. The provision of equal chances to all citizens in the context of work helped to ensure justice. Our Constitution contains various provisions for the advancement of women since it is firmly rooted in the ideals of liberty, fraternity, equality, and fairness.

The Indian Constitution not only guarantees women's equality but also gives them power. It also directs the State to implement positive discrimination policies in support of women. In this regard, particular emphasis should be placed on Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c), 42, 46, 47, 51(A)(e), 243 D(3), 243 D(4), 243 T(3), 243 T(4) of the Constitution (Bharatache Sanvidhan, 5, 6, 17, 18, 19, 91, 92, 93). In addition to this, measures like maternity leave and just and humane working conditions were provided and women were granted legal equality.

Crimes against women such rape, harassment at the hands of men, torture, and dowry and dowry deaths and molestation was prohibited. In order to promote equality, women were given access to professional training, employment training, and promotion of education through the United Nations' ideals. The National Commission for Women, Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Ujjwala Scheme, and other Indian programmes and policies, such as the National Policy for Women Empowerment came to existence. India forbade prenatal gender investigations to prevent the murder of female fetuses.

In all elected positions in local bodies, whether in rural or urban areas, the 73rd Amendment To the constitution Acts, which were passed by Parliament in 1992, guarantee one among the overall seats for women.

Even after so much progress and development, India ranks 136th out of total 187 countries in the human development Index. Gender discrimination still exists in various parts of the country and remains to go unnoticed. The laws and schemes which are implemented for women empowerment do not reach majority of women. The majority is illiterate and sexual, mental harassment of women still exists. This shows that some work toward women empowerment has to be done at the grass root level.

English Women Writers in India and Women Empowerment

Feminism is the first word that comes to mind when we discuss about women's empowerment. In Indian literature, we have read and heard about the feminist movement on a more general level. Defining, establishing, and protecting equal political, economic, and social rights and privileges for Indian women are the goals of feminism in the country.[11]

English literature as well as women is closely related. Women are naturally creative. Women and writings are strongly associated since being good at literature necessitates a great deal of artistic inventiveness, and women are overly talented in this area. [12]

The female authors believed that women are mistreated by men. More women started turning to writing English-language fiction as a means of expressing their problems as a result of their unhappy situation and their inability to communicate their feelings. They believed that they should write about these challenges and provide solutions.[13] Krupabai Satthianadhan was one of the first authors to write in English in India. She was the very first Indian woman to write a novel in English. She wrote the first autobiographical novel, *Saguna*, which examined the woman's troubling interaction with religion, a mingling of cultures, and feminism during the colonial era.

Roots and Shadows by Shashi Deshpande concentrated on an Indian woman's connections with other members of her vast family as well as how she handled both a personal problem and the future. The feminist perspective in this work has received extensive analysis.

Deshpande's tiny remedies also centered on an Indian lady writer who made the decision to elope and go to a different place in order to pursue her intense passion for music as well as her Muslim partner. She looked for the purpose of her existence and attempts to cope with the loss of her kid as a result of the 1992 Babri Mosque Bombing event.

Kamala Das was mostly renowned for her outspoken and direct facial expressions. Her poetry was characterized by a severe fixation with love and frequent use of confession. She wrote on a variety of subjects pertaining to childcare, women's issues, etc. But her controversial and frank autobiography is what has made her most famous. Her presentation of female sexuality was free and honest without any sense of shame, which gave her writing strength.

Mrs. Das got married at a young age—15—and marriage can provide any number of issues. But she was fortunate that her husband supported her desire to write. She primarily wrote about love, its betrayal, and the agony that results from it. At a period when Indian poets were still influenced by the diction, sentiments, and romanticised love of the 19th century, Kamala Das abandoned the security provided by an antiquated and somewhat sterile aestheticism for an independence of mind and body.

The only Indian woman poet who composed in English was Toru Dutt. Her writings portrayed prominent figures of Indian womanhood, such as Sita and Savitri, demonstrating the resilience of women and bolstering common imaginations and charitable acts in a patriotic way. A very well poet, Kamla Das, created a powerful and overpowering confessional poem in which she addressed the interaction between men and women as a major issue.[14]

Many Indian women who've already immigrated to other countries, such as Jhumpa Lahiri as well as Bharathi Mukherji, shared a concern for addressing the issue of female exploitation and oppression, which provided modern women a new sense of place and identity.

Modern authors like Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, and Bharati Mukherjee have also highlighted the location and condition of women. Writings by Shobha De, Nina Sibal, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, and other authors have been made possible thanks to the development of feminism by Kamala Markandaya, Jhabvala, Anita Desai, R.P. and Nayantara Sahgal. The interior of the new female vocals' recording includes Her mental realism and liberated women sensibilities. In Indian English writing, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Nair, Shashi Deshpande, and Chitra Banerjee hold a unique place. They primarily wrote about the difficulties and problems encountered by women in the predominantly male world of today.

The Rickshaw Girl and Girl Empowerment

This fictional story is on a young girl who lives in a small Bangladeshi village. The young girl's bravery is shown by her desire to assist the struggling family throughout the fiction.

The monotony of her hamlet in Bangladesh and Naima's permanent position as the daughter of a lowly rickshaw driver make the ten-year-old feel constrained. Naima's life is impacted by poverty and gender in a variety of ways. Her experience of washing clothes, fetching water from the well, chopping vegetables, and being unable to work puts her squarely in the household share of gender.

Naima places a high value on money since it would allow her father to pay off his debt, get a rickshaw, and avoid working too hard and endangering his health. Naima can clearly recall the very last time he coughed and shivered. The cash would cover her mother's expenses and enable Naima to stay in school. As a result, the struggle of women to make a living becomes a major theme in the story. Shama goes beyond by having female subjects push the limits of expectations and gender roles.

The woman plays a key role in the narrative by painting painted motifs called alpana in front of the doorway. A constrained type of feminine agency is found in decorative art. In Naima's village, the lady who can create the best alpana wins a prize. It can show the originality of the woman living in a house.

To Naima's utter delight and astonishment, she learns that the repair shop's proprietor is a woman when she arrives. Ironically, the shop owner rejects Naima's offered services because he believes her to be a boy. The female has more agency than that of the male subject. The business owner permits Naima to show off her abilities once she admits that she is a girl. Fortunately, Naima can resolve the family's financial issues without losing sight of who she is as a woman by transgressing cultural barriers through her transgender behaviour.

The proprietor of the shop where Naima visited wore widow's white. She makes it clear that her status as a widow and thus the weakest person in society. She is seated inside the enclosure instead of sitting at home like widows typically do because she is a self-sufficient woman and can support herself.

She defies hurdles and societal standards while painting and maintaining rickshaws. She establishes an entrepreneurial society. She borrowed the money from the woman's bank when she needed financial assistance. She had the education necessary to use the resources that were available to women.

Naima disguises herself as a boy and travels to the next hamlet in search of a rickshaw repairing shop where she intends to swap labour for the necessary repairs, once the auto rickshaw breaks down. She not only overcomes cultural and physical boundaries when she travels to the neighbouring hamlet as a boy, but she also fully appreciates the liberty men have. Naima realised that by dressing as a boy, she could watch television in the tea shop rather from sneaking glimpses at it as she usually does. Her energy was so adventurous.

The woman plays a key role in the story by painting painted patterns called alpanas in front of doorways. Only women have the ability to create this decorative art. In Naima's village, the lady who can create the best alpana earns a prize. It can convey the originality of the woman residing in a home. Naima, a gifted artist, has already won this award and intends to do it again at the start of the story. Making alpanas gives Naima a lot of pleasure, but she is aware that it is a restricted form of agency because it has no lower value. Naima's mom wishes for a son to assist her father in paying off the loan for the rickshaw as he struggles to do so.

Naima's mother responds, "however alpanas can't put rice on the table," when Naima's father says that his daughters are as good as his sons. When Naima overhears her parents talking, she immediately thinks to herself, "A girl was only capable of cooking, washing clothes, and decorating. She was prohibited from engaging in any employment that generated income." Naima, unlike her mother, does not agree to conform to these gender norms and works to come up with creative ways to get money. Although Naima's parents are unable to reject traditional gender roles, Saleem a boy of Naima's age, exhibits receptivity to new concepts. He describes gender roles as being fixed at birth. Saleem starts to understand Naima's obviously unconventional thoughts when she mentions that she's seen a female doctor on television and that her father is aware of a shoe stand in the privately owned by a woman. In addition to being an empowered woman, Naima also gives Saleem new perspectives about women.

Naima, ten years old young girl was a creative youngster with a vivid imagination. She enjoyed creating alpanas, which were traditional rice-paint patterned designs used to adorn homes on important occasions. She was merely trying to help her family out. She cared for her parents and worked hard to do all of the household duties to their satisfaction. She fiercely defended her little sister. Thus, taking on these duties and running errands showed that she was mature beyond her years and had an adult sense of purpose. Naima actually had a hard time living up to the demands that the society and her family's lack of resources set on her. She fervently regretted for not being able to finish the schooling. She had to halt such that her younger sister might take over. She handled everything like a strong, brave young woman. She had to adhere to many traditions because they were the part of the culture, and she did so out of respect for them. She was bothered by the fact that, as a girl, she could not provide for her family financially. She did not remain silent. She attempted to operate the rickshaw herself out of sheer audacity, but it ended in disaster. The definition of a brave woman was not one who tries to fail but rather one who fails to try. She demonstrated this by her willingness to take risks. When she could utilise her talents to help her family succeed, she was glad since it meant that her circumstances were getting better. She proved to be a valuable member of the family despite being a female and being herself.

Her courageous character was something that we observe throughout her life. She never gave up. As a girl, she demonstrated to society that, just like a guy, she could provide for her household in all ways and prevent them from being sad because they were without a son. She had previously believed that "she had to be a guy to make some money," but she now believed that it was fortunate that she was born a girl. The phrase "female child" resonated in her head like a sitar. She had demonstrated that girls were not in any way inferior to boys. If she had been granted the same privileges as the Bangladeshi lads, she might have created a large scale societal differences. Now she might significantly alter things simply by being a girl. Naima thinks she can be as valuable to the [15]

Naima was not forced to bind her spirit by the chains of civilization that held her captive. She felt unbound inside. And as a brave little girl, she demonstrated all the abilities and attributes of a strong, independent girl. The society must help our daughters develop this type of self-esteem if we want to achieve actual empowerment. They must advocate for themselves. Like Naima, they possess innate powers that they can apply in a variety of fields. In this instance, Naima had the desire for her family that she realized. Thanks to her courageous attitude, inspiring many other Indian girls to see their value and pursue their goals. Naima is extremely inspirational in this regard.

Present Day Challenges to Indian Girl –Empowerment in the Light of the Novel

While India has taken some measures on women development compared to global standing on gender equality still it remains low. Male children are preferred more than the females. India stands in 112th place in Global Gender Gap Report. When we look at the employment sector less number of females seek white collared jobs. They are content with house work and looking after the children and most of the families do not help women to go out for employment They have no influence over a family's financial decisions. Additionally, their typical salary is substantially lower than that of their male colleagues. The majority of the older female siblings drop out of school to take care of the younger ones. Due to the families' poverty, they favour the male child, with the understanding that the girl child will not be a lifelong member of the family.

Lack of basic facilities like schools are very scare in the villages. The parents of the girls do not want to send their girls to schools which are away from home besides lack of water, toilet facilities are rare for girls in remote areas.

The Indian legislation is also faced with disparities between policy and practise. Despite current laws to safeguard women and girls, the implementation of these laws and the conviction of accused persons is weak. Similar to what happened with Naima, government institutions were powerless to help people free themselves from their shackles. In India's culture, there are still a few societal expectations and strongly ingrained gender roles that are strongly ingrained. Religious, social, cultural, and economic inequality still exist for women. Physical and domestic gender-based violence is still pervasive. Women are the target of crimes in over 53.9% of cases in India alone.

In addition to carrying the extra responsibility of the family, women also have to perform laborious duties that are beyond the physical capabilities of males. Without a suitable lifestyle and wages, they must toil in stone quarries, road, and building construction projects.

As Naima was expected to follow certain cultural practices and traditions just because she is a girl like wearing sari and not speaking freely to her male friend are seen even today. There are some harmful traditional practices and superstitions women are succumbed to. The Government agencies and private sectors need to still focus on these aspects to work towards girl –empowerment.

Research Gap

The goal of this study was to assess the realities of Indian girls, including their struggle with identity and self-worth. After 75 years of independence, progress seems to be moving in the opposite way, as girls are still constrained by dowries, child marriages, sexual harassment, illiteracy, and other restrictions. Therefore, the primary goal of this research was to develop strategies for improving women's empowerment. In India, there has been some research in the field of girl empowerment, and some assistance has been provided to a certain group of women. To assist the underprivileged women, several different women's sectors should perform extensive background study. The country should first educate women and give them the confidence to fight for their rights.

Strengths and Limitations

According to this essay, this study is among the first to use qualitative research to comprehend the difficulties Indian girls confront and the necessity to give them more control. This study took into account several real-world instances where women needed to be given more power in light of the book "THE RICKSHAW Girl." Making this kind of research will aid in developing plans for women's empowerment for the government as well as private organisations. However, because it solely focuses on girls, the results cannot be applied to the total juvenile population.

Implications

India is one of the nations that has seen numerous difficulties in empowering women and girls. This study supports the need for treatments and policies to address a variety of issues facing girls, particularly those living in rural and underdeveloped areas. Women still need to have more access to jobs, education, healthcare, and decision-making opportunities.

Conclusion

It has been noticed that the book "The Rickshaw Girl" places a significant emphasis on the issue of girl emancipation in the setting of Bangladesh. The author aimed to uphold and maintain Naima's courageous character, which serves as a metaphor for the independent and self-reliant girl and woman in Indian society.

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