

INDIAN ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND QUEST FOR PERSONAL IDENTITY IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF MITALI PERKINS

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ABSTRACT

Indian-English writing has given rise to a diverse group of female writers who have explored many parts of girls' and women's lives and shed light on their struggle to discover identity in a culture that is predominately male. In conventional and patriarchal Indian society, how does it feel to be a girl and a woman? How difficult is it for a girl/woman to maintain her femininity? These are issues that are addressed in Mitali Perkin's works. A girl/woman expected to manage several tasks, even continue to be submissive to the male culture, and play the duties that have been assigned to her by the society. The female heroines of Perkin's works come from traditional, low-income homes and are torn between tradition and male dominance. To be heard and have their ambitions come true, they must work incredibly hard.

Keywords: Mitali Perkins, Indian Adolescents Girls, Fight for Identity.

Introduction

According to Erikson's theory from 1968, adolescence is a time of identity crisis marked by teenagers' extensive search for a secure sense of who they are. Teenagers' biological maturity and the ambiguity of adult positions force them to establish a unique culture in their search for identity. [1] recognised as India's Most Entertaining Author Mitali Perkins sincerely believes that books and stories have the potential to inspire young readers and arouse them to forge their own sense of identity. Her characters are young adults, and she was influenced by numerous life situations while growing up in Kolkata, India. She is an excellent writer who uses evocative descriptions of the sights, sounds, and flavours of India to excite the senses. She has ten young adult novels to her credit. Her dedication to changing young people's minds and hearts is truly admirable. She has a gift for taking on significant topics in strange contexts and transforming them into captivating, enchanting works for adolescent empowerment. Both of Mitali's books, *The Rickshaw Girl* and *The Secret Keeper*, center on the bravery of two Indian young girls named Naima and Asha. Both serve as models of inspiration and a sense of empowerment for Indian youth.

Objectives

The goals of this research study are to:

- Examine how young Indian adolescent females are portrayed in a few of Mitali's works.
- To look into the ways wherein culture and tradition shape girls' identities.
- To depict the female protagonists of the chosen literature and emphasize their pursuit of empowerment and self-worth.

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Methodology

The secondary data for this essay was gathered from academic blogs and journals. The data was gathered from a number of previously released articles and instructional resources. This qualitative study was conducted by looking up the keywords "youth empowerment." "Indian authors" A. "Mitali Perkins"

Literature Review

Women in our society must battle for their identities, whether they are wealthy like Saroj and Maya from *Storm* in Chandigarh or impoverished like Marikolunthu, Akhila of *Ladies Coupe*. This is something that Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Nair have really clearly demonstrated. [2]

The novels by Shashi Deshpande centre on a woman's search for herself, an investigation of the feminine mind, and an appreciation of life's mysteries and the protagonist's place in them.[3]

Why are women still confined to the outer walls of her homes in this day and age of freedom and female emancipation? Why they are not allowed to make their own decisions? But she also serves as a reminder that this search for identity is unrelenting, incessant, and unending. [4]

Mistaken Identity by Nayantara Sahgal makes numerous allusions to the awful conditions under which women lived at the time. In this book, Sylla, a Parsee girl, Willie May, an American girl, Razia, the Muslim girl the narrator loves, and the narrator's mother are the four main female characters.[5]

Gita Hariharan is an example of a contemporary Indian woman's voice. Women who have completed their education have access to jobs that provide income. Here, Gita Hariharan demonstrates the need for identity in every woman. Women are not only toys to be played with. There are numerous representations of Indian traditional culture for women in "*The Thousand Faces of Night*." In order to address concerns of identity, this paper.[6]

Young adult literature plays a significant role in the lives of our classmates, whether they produce art themselves or we support various artistic endeavours; either manner, these students have the chance to more fully comprehend both themselves and others as they read and react to literature in their quest for self-knowledge.[7]

The aim of this study was to look at some of the ways in which the characters' quest for identification in the modern teenage novel recapitulates the more general topic of the quest for identity that has influenced previous revolutions in philosophy, religion, and world literature. Three categories—the search-for-self topic, the rebel sufferer motif, and the loss-of-innocence topic—were used to break down and analyse the overarching identity theme.[8] Writing for young adults can help people establish their identities. "Girls' reading can influence how they define their gender.

Young adult literature can have a positive effect on identity development. "Girls' reading can play a role in their construction of female identity" [9]

Similar to other pieces of young adult fiction, protagonists in desi literature are shown to have a lot of power in seeming to forge their own distinctive identities, but they are also shown to be caught by the potent forces of their society's ideals and institutions.[10]

Need for the Study

The issue of female identity in the writings of Indian authors has been examined by a sizable number of authors. However, despite Mitali Perkins' writings, no one has yet addressed the idea of Indian adolescent girls' identities. This is the first and only study that examines how adolescent girls' search for identity is viewed in Mitali Perkins' works.

Concept of Identity

Identity is a significant and decisive aspect in establishing how a person lives in society and in realising their power and status. Identity gives a person a strong sense of self-control and prevents them from being a helpless, dependent being that is frequently seen as a burden by others. Without a distinct identity, a person cannot gain their own esteem or even master the bravery to voice their own thoughts. One is strengthened with a good sense of self-worth, confidence, clarity, and motivation when they have a clear sense of who they are and what they stand for.

Girls and women are viewed as inferior to men in our patriarchal social Indian society. All of their lives, they are born with the head bowed and hand extended. They must live as obedient wives, sisters, and daughters, and in their later years, they must pay attention to their sons. These and other sociocultural roles that affect girls and women are present in Indian society. The actual struggle for a

woman in this modern situation is to find her identity, stand alone, and carve out her own space. The search for originality and identity among the constraints of tradition and culture is a major theme throughout Mitali Perkin's writings. Intact

Personal identity is not a single issue, but rather a variety of issues that are, at best, tangentially related. The well-known ones are including: who am I, what does it mean to be a human, and what it take to survive from one generation to the next.[11]

Mitali perkins Protagonists and their Quest for Identity

Simone de Beauvoir's phrase "One is not born as woman, but rather becomes one" separates sex from gender and implies that gender is a trait of identity that is gradually acquired.[12]

As per Simon de Beauvoir, a woman's identity is not determined by her birth. Her position as a woman is defined by society. Gender is not a trait we have or are born with; rather, it is something we do, or perform. Gender is the societal extension of biological sex, whereas sex is a physiological classification that is mainly based on reproductive capacity.

The main character Naima struggles to maintain her gender identity in Perkin's "RICKSHAW GIRL." Despite the fact that her mother would have preferred a boy kid over a girl, she bravely shows her family that girls are equal to boys in every manner. She was advised to forgo her customary attire and don a traditional woman's outfit, but she finds it uncomfortable.

In a sari, I can't move quickly. You have to surround yourself in yards and yards of material! Although they are attractive, I feel like I am wearing a large bandage. [Pg.12]

Mother frequently lamented the absence of a female kid in the family. She related them to Saleem, who used to drive his father's car around the neighbourhood in the afternoon. However, in their own father's own words

"Naima was the top alpina artist in the community and protected her sister like a tiger protecting its kitten. And Rashida was indeed the top pupil in the institution [Pg. 18] Two amazing daughters I have. They are equally good as boys," a statement that affirms their worth to the family, their contribution, and their fearless bravery.

A woman should stay at home and should not go anywhere else. She was thought to be a domestic angel. Many authors elevate women to the status of domestic workers. [13]

Contrary to popular belief, Naima dresses as a guy and works as hard as she can to provide for her family. She learns that there are both female doctors and shoe store owners in their community. She was always asking herself, "If those ladies could, why I couldn't?" and, as a girl, she was prepared to carry out all the duties that a man in the community was expected to carry out. Even if she fails at it, she takes the chance to drive her father's car. When Naima's hasty attempts to support her family cause them to fall deeper into debt, she uses her resourcefulness to make the most of her skills and adhere to the evolving role models for women in Bangladesh. She makes advantage of her abilities to solve her issues. She paints and pursues her interests while earning money for her family.

In a time of gender bias as well as other social and economic limitations, Naima was a brilliant young girl who was out and about. She disregarded social conventions. She battled for her individuality and self-worth. She gave evidence that wishes can come true. She made her aspirations come true while rejecting traditional society's ideas. At the conclusion, she expressed her appreciation for her, and the words "female child" rang like a sitar in her head.

The Secret Keeper, Perkin's second book, was all about a girl's struggle to express her uniqueness. The young girl named "Asha" acts as the book's main character. Being born in a conservative Hindu home in the 1970s, she yearned for independence as a young woman. She struggled to accept the shift from girlhood to womanhood—to stop playing tennis, wear a sari, and grow long hair.

Uncle was friendly, but the three women had follow his decisions because this is a country with strong traditions. Asha was deeply aware of the unfairness that her Uncle's household's cultural customs had inflicted upon her. She was allowed the opportunity as a child to pursue her own interests, regardless of whether they were perceived as feminine or masculine. She now has to embrace her position as an Indian woman in tradition. Due to a shortage of funds following the father's passing, Asha and her sister were compelled to relocate to their uncle's home.

Asha had a desire of becoming a psychologist when her mother was depressed so she could become a "mender of the mind" and assist people in releasing their secrets. Asha held a secret as well. She started a shady acquaintance with the boy who lives next door.

As it is correctly stated, women must come alongside and assist in their own self-empowerment in order for women's empowerment to be possible [14]. By having to overcome the conservatism of the wider family, making friends with her cousins, preventing her mother's depression, teaching neighbourhood boys a lesson who didn't think girls are "good enough," fending off her sister Reet's unsuitable would-be suitors, and other things, Asha has empowered herself. Asha is disobedient, brave, selfless, and crazy throughout the entire book. She has always been a tomboy. The outdated customs irritate her. Asha is a likeable figure and a role model for girls, particularly those who are juggling obligations to their families and to themselves.

Even yet, she managed to live and make the most of her surroundings by adhering to local customs.

Conclusion

The female heroines in Mitali Perkin's novels, Naima and Asha, surely experienced their own challenges, hardships, failures, and disappointments. But they pursued their sense of self. The novels address issues like the cultural and conventional restraints that a female must endure constantly in order to find redemption. The main characters overcame all of the obstacles society put in their way, broke free from traditional norms, and demonstrated to the world that gender roles are social constructs. One might go beyond them and demonstrate their status as women in society. And they tried to live their lives as fully as possible.

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