



The Woman Portrayed in Nigerian and Indian Fictions: A Comparative Study with Selected Women Writers

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India and Nigeria are two different countries of two different continent. But there are many similarities in history, society and Economy etc. both countries have had a colonial past. Both countries struggled for independence. The countrymen of both countries suffered lots. Nigeria won freedom on October 01,1960 but the real democracy achieved in 1999. There was a military rule from 1966 to 1975 and from 1983 to 1989. It's a West African nation and its capital is Abuja. It has a rich history and culture. It is a country of ethnic diversity and plurality. There are 250 various ethnic groups like Yoruba, Fulani, Hausa and Igbo etc.it has a number of native languages like India. Islam and Christianity are the two major religions in the country. The Hausas tend to be Muslims while the Igbos are the followers of Christianity. However, indigenous religious practices also continue to survive.

Nigerian literature is Primarily a 'Protest' literature. Almost all the Nigerian literary figures have taken upon themselves the role of 'path finders' and 'motivators.' This attitude is adopted by the literary world of Nigeria after independence from colonial rule was very apt and appropriate. Nigerian literature has been at the forefront protesting against imposition of foreign influence and power over the country. The civil war of 1967-70 gave scope for re-thinking and self-assessment. It compelled the intellectually enlightened people of Nigeria to mobilise and motivate the masses towards revival of their spirits in most positive manner. Those who made significant contribution in generating nationalistic fervour among Nigerians were the literary figures like Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian who became the first African in history to win the Noble Prize for literature. Chinua Achebe is another name globally renowned. The two together have made valuable contribution to post-colonial literature in English. Other writers are John Pepper Clark, Ben Okri, who is the first Nigerian to win the



Booker Prize in 1991, Buchi Emecheta, Helen Habila, Chimamanda Ngozi Aiche and Ken Saro Wiwa.

One very prominent and also significant aspect of Nigerian society and the world at large is that of the neglect of the female population. Enough attention has not been paid towards the genuine pain, problems and grievances of the women folk. Women writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Zaynab Ali represent the values of their respective societies and the reactions towards the accepted social norms.

Flora N. Nkiru Nwapa is a prominent Nigerian woman writer. Being a sensitive human being, Nwapa felt deeply for her struggling nation and suffering women population. The chaos, the confusion on the political front and the plight of women on the social front motivated her to become a writer. She joined the literary world 'to protest' against exploitation, deprivation, poverty, and unrest felt all around. *Efuru* (1966), her most popular and first literary creation, has made her immortal. *Idu* (1970), *Never Again* (1975), *One Is Enough* (1981) and *women are different* (1986) are her creative works dedicated to the cause of women. Although she wrote primarily about African women but she felt the universal similarity of the plight of women the world over. The wide range of Nwapa's literary skill is a proof in itself of women's potentiality in creativity and sensitivity. Her sensitive soul could feel the pulse of every section of Nigerian society apart from her own tribal society.

Buchi Emecheta is another Nigerian female writer is more vocal and assertive in her own way regarding women and their conflict with masculine dominance. Most of her literary works are based upon her own experiences as 'a single parent and a black woman living in Britain. Her first work *In the Ditch* (1972) depicts the struggle of an abandoned wife. In almost all her novels, Buchi Emecheta keeps pondering over the institution of marriage and family. Just like Nwapa, who is equally agitated over this issue. However, their presentation style differs. Nwapa is more somber than Emecheta. Once Emecheta declares:

Being a woman, and Africa born, I see things through an African Women's eyes. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist then I am an African feminist with small "f." in my books, I write about families, because I still believe in families. I have no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children..... (Emecheta,1989)



Buchi Emecheta wrote sociological novels like *Second Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *destination Biafra* (1982), *The Rape of Shavi* (1983), *Gwendolen* (1989) etc. deals with women's problems, who suffered by the culture and society.

Unlike Emecheta, the other Nigerian women writers like Zaynab Alkali. She does not believe in rejecting either men and marriage of family and children. She highlight the problems and make the implicit demand for improvement, so that neither the institution of marriage nor the association of family is rejected by women. Zaynab Alkali has written *The Stillborn*. Through her creativity Zayanab Alkali tries to bring about a certain degree of adjustment between two genders. The northan Nigerian society is very traditional. The patriarchy is very strong and it is precisely due to this social set-up that Zayanab Alkali's novel *The Stillborn* has attracted so much of attention within the Nigerian literary circle and outside. Zayanab Alkali's *The Virtuous Woman* (1986) short stories collection *Cowwebs* (1997), *The Descendants* etc. are all dedicated to the cause of women, and their predicaments as mother, wife, sister, sister-in-law, friend, colleagues etc. every role of a woman plays demands sacrifices and silence from her.

Zayanab Alkali and Flora Nwapa are providing solutions of problems and issues raised by Emecheta. Women must show tolerance, perseverance, education and confidence to make a place for themselves, instead of wasting time in lambasting men. Almost all women writers feel that education is the only medium which can rehabilitate women.

The concerns of Nigerian women writers find an echo even in the works of Indian women writers such as kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and other. Infact, women occupy a central place in the novels of kamala Markandaya too. She writes with a sense of moral binding, an obligation towards her own gender. Markandaya writes with a missionary zeal about the life and predicament of Indian women in general. Social rules regulate and modulate thinking and behaviour of women more effectively than the men. Kamala Markandaya takes upon herself the responsibility to generate awareness against the old age bias towards women. Problems faced by women become more complicated and delicate due to their sentimental nature.



Basically, what most of Indian women writers want to convey is that Indian women are as practical as men and they do not appreciate a reckless life. In order to lead dignified and meaningful life, they tolerate subjugation and humiliations within the four walls. In India, liberated woman is not appreciated even by their own gender. Hence, they preferred to suffer as this is the price for a marriage status. Social standing of a battered woman is higher than that of a liberated woman, is the general opinion in India. It is due to this belief that even female writers avoid going to extremes in the depiction of gender classes in their novels. Like the Nigerian female writers, Indian women writers focus more on Education and financial security of women than anything else. Only educated and self-reliant women can sustain themselves with dignity. Self help is the motto of most of the women writers. The dependency on men for emotion for finance may cause them their very existence.

Indian and Nigerian writers have been very conscious of their cultural heritage and its preservation. They have displayed a strong sense of social commitment in their literary creations. The social fallouts of colonial rule in both the countries have been depicted by almost all Indian and Nigerian women writers. The contributions of women writers of Nigeria in this regard is remarkable. Right from Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta to Zaynab Alkali all have tried to convince their people for introspection. They have taken the initiative to critically analyse their own society and culture in the context of women and their position in family and society.

Buchi Emecheta explores Igbo culture and traditions of bride price and polygamy in her novels. The contributions of Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande and Kamala Markandaya in exploring Indian side of realities related to society and women have provoked serious discussions over the issues related to women's emancipation. Adopting an introspective style of writing both Indian and Nigerian women writers have dealt with larger issues like cultural conflicts, confrontation between older and younger generation, ideological differences between people and social problems like poverty, illiteracy, communal issues and those related to national interests keeping women's perspective as the center of their focus. There is a fear in Nigeria that educated women break homes and pollute the innocent minds. In response to this fear, African women writers have adopted self-explanatory, self-help techniques for women's upliftment.



The concerns of Indian women writers cannot be much different from their Nigerian counterparts as their respective countries share a number of socio-economic and political characteristics. Besides coping with native patriarchal ideology women of Nigeria and India bore the brunt of colonialism too. Hence, their sufferings are more or less identical in nature. In fact, in India the history of the female perspective goes back to the Vedic Age. It is not that Indian women waited for the Renaissance to be awakened by the social reformist of 18th century India. Though Indian women writers have not been lacking in creative virtuosity in India issues related to women are quite vast and of bewildering complexity, because of variations between different regions, between rural and urban areas, between classes and also between different religions, ethnic and caste groups.

In the works of Shashi Deshpande the anguish of middle class educated woman comes out. Deshpande portrays a female protagonist who changes the notion of 'What is right' and 'What is wrong'. She is unapologetic about her conduct and is not ashamed of arguing with her longtime admirer who had all along held her in awe. All the elements that became full blown issues in Arundhati Roy's novel have been present in different proportions in the works of the senior womenwriters of Indian English. Her novels deals with problems of the lower strata women, the East-West encounter, the lonely spinsters, the beaten wife, extra-marital affairs etc. Roy's excellence lies in the fact that she highlights these issues and the horror unleashed by them on helpless men, women and children with extra ordinary urgency and even audacity.

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