**Women in punjabi literature**

# **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

## **2.1 Introduction**

Introduction  
  
Literary works have been used as a medium to represent and discuss social, cultural, and political issues in society. Considering this, Punjab has a rich legacy of literature that is influenced by its social, cultural, and political history. The portrayal of women in Punjabi literature has received significant attention, and the purpose of this study is to explore the representation of women in Punjabi literature and its impact on society.  
  
Research Questions  
  
The following research questions will guide this study:  
1. How are women portrayed in Punjabi literature?  
2. What are the influences behind the portrayal of women in Punjabi literature?  
3. How has the representation of women in Punjab literature evolved over time?  
4. What impact has the portrayal of women in Punjabi literature had on society?  
  
Significance of the Research  
  
Understanding the representation of women in Punjabi literature is essential because it allows us to gain insight into the cultural and social constructs of Punjab. Punjab, being a male-dominated society, might impact the way women are represented in literature. Through this study, we can identify the role of literature in shaping societal beliefs and perceptions about women and analyze the influence of gender ideology on literature. The insights gained from this study could inform the development of policies and programs aimed at creating a more equitable and just society for women.  
  
Literature Review  
  
Historically, Punjabi literature has been an expression of the cultural and social values of Punjab. The treatment of women in Punjabi literature has largely been influenced by these values. According to Randhawa (2012), the portrayal of women in Punjabi literature can be divided into two categories, namely, the female heroines and the saintly women. The female heroines are those who challenge the patriarchal norms and fight against oppression. Examples of such heroines include Heer of Heer Ranjha, Sulakhni of Dulla Bhatti, and Sohni of Sohni Mahiwal. On the other hand, the saintly women are portrayed as creatures of sacrifice, who willingly suffer for the sake of others, such as in the case of Mirza Sahiba.  
  
While these characters have been popularly portrayed in Punjabi literature, there has been a shift in recent times. According to Goklany (2017), modern Punjabi writers have started to portray women in a more nuanced way, moving away from the traditional stereotypes. Contemporary Punjabi literary works now depict women as multi-dimensional characters with their own independent identities, desires, and ambitions.  
  
Studies have also explored the influence of societal values on the representation of women in Punjabi literature. For instance, Chohan (2016) found that the portrayal of women in Punjabi literature was heavily influenced by cultural codes and norms. The study highlighted that women were often portrayed as passive and submissive, owing to the conservative nature of the Punjabi society.  
  
Another study by Jaspal (2018) examined the representation of women in Punjabi literature during the 1980s and 1990s, a period of political turmoil in Punjab. The study found that the portrayal of women during this period was influenced by the political and social unrest in the state. Women were shown as active participants in the resistance movement, fighting against the oppressive state machinery, and challenging patriarchal norms.  
  
Conclusion  
  
In conclusion, the portrayal of women in Punjabi literature has undergone significant changes over time. From being portrayed as passive and submissive, women are now depicted as multi-dimensional characters with their own independent identities and ambitions. However, societal norms and values continue to impact the way women are represented in literature. This study will contribute to a better understanding of the portrayal of women in Punjabi literature and its impact on society.

## **2.2 History of Women in Punjabi Society**

Introduction  
  
Punjabi literature has a rich history and culture that dates back to ancient times. Women have played a significant role in shaping the cultural and social fabric of Punjab, and their contributions to Punjabi literature have been essential in portraying a holistic picture of Punjab's society throughout history. This literature review will examine the history of women in Punjabi society and their representation in Punjabi literature.  
  
Status of Women in Punjabi Society  
  
The position of women in Punjabi society has been an object of inquiry for researchers and scholars for a long time. Punjab, like many other regions in South Asia, had a patriarchal society where men dominated social, economic, and political spheres (Singh, 2002; Kumar, 2013). The traditional roles of women in Punjabi society were limited to domestic duties. Women were expected to get married, manage households, raise children, and adhere to strict gender norms and taboos (Chopra, 1990).  
  
Women were excluded from education, and their contributions to society were undervalued. They were not allowed to participate in public life and governance. However, despite these inequalities, Punjabi women played a vital role in preserving the cultural heritage of Punjab through their oral traditions, folk songs, and stories (Pandey, 2013).  
  
Representation of Women in Punjabi Literature  
  
Punjabi literature, like any other literature, is a reflection of society's values, norms, and beliefs. Women’s representation in Punjabi literature is a testament to their contribution to Punjab’s rich cultural heritage. Punjabi literature depicts women as mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters who sacrifice their lives for others and demonstrate courage, strength, and resilience in adverse circumstances (Chopra, 1990).  
  
In some Punjabi literary works, women are represented as strong and powerful beings who challenge patriarchal norms and empower themselves (Kaur, 2015). The Punjabi epic love story Heer Ranjha portrays Heer, the main female character, as a strong-willed woman who challenges the societal norms and risks everything for the man she loves. Another example of powerful women in Punjabi literature is Amrita Pritam's famous poem "Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nun" that speaks to the issues of Partition trauma and violence in Punjab, in which a woman speaks to the famous Punjabi poet Waris Shah, asking him to come back from the dead to see the current state of Punjab.  
  
However, not all Punjabi literature depicts women in a positive light. Some literary works reinforce patriarchal norms and perpetuate gender inequality. For instance, the popular Punjabi song "Boliyan," which refers to Punjabi wedding songs that women perform during wedding events, often contains sexist lyrics that reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Chopra, 1990).  
  
Conclusion  
  
In conclusion, the history of women in Punjabi society is complex and multifaceted. Women have played an essential role in shaping Punjab's cultural heritage through their contributions to Punjabi literature and oral traditions. However, the patriarchal nature of Punjabi society has severely impacted women's status, limiting their roles and contributions. Punjabi literature reflects these complexities by portraying women as both strong and empowered and promoting gender equality, while other works perpetuate gender stereotypes and reinforce patriarchal norms.

## **2.3 Gender and Language in Punjabi Literature**

Chapter 1: Literature Review  
  
Sub-Chapter 1.1: Gender and Language in Punjabi Literature  
  
Language is an integral part of any literary work. It serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a medium for transmitting cultural values, beliefs, and ideas. The representation of women in literature is influenced by the language used in the literary work. In Punjabi literature, the relationship between gender and language is a complex and dynamic one, shaped by various factors such as social norms, historical context, and linguistic traditions.  
  
1.1.1 Gender and Punjabi Language  
  
Punjabi is one of the most widely spoken languages in South Asia. It has a rich literary tradition, dating back to the sixteenth century. However, the representation of women in Punjabi literature has been a topic of debate. Patriarchal norms and societal expectations have contributed to the under-representation of women in Punjabi literature, especially in the past.  
  
The Punjabi language has been described as a language that is gender-neutral. However, the use of gender-specific terms, such as pronouns, adjectives, and nouns, has become prevalent in modern Punjabi. This situation has not been without controversy, as many people view such changes as reinforcing gender stereotypes.  
  
In a study on the representation of women in Punjabi literature, Manpreet Kaur observed that even though the Punjabi language itself is not gender-biased, the social norms and cultural practices have led to the marginalization of women in Punjabi literature (Kaur, 2018). She further stated that the language of literature reflects and reinforces social norms and gender ideologies prevalent in a society.  
  
1.1.2 Tradition and Modernity: The Changing Representation of Women in Punjabi Literature  
  
Punjabi literature has gone through significant changes in the last century. The traditional portrayal of women as passive, domesticated, and submissive has given way to more nuanced and complex representations of women in Punjabi literature.  
  
In the works of modern-day Punjabi writers, we see a shift towards a more equitable representation of women. These writers challenge the traditional roles assigned to women in Punjabi literature and present them as fully fleshed out individuals with agency, desires, and ambitions.  
  
For example, in her book "Pinjar," Amrita Pritam depicts the struggles of women during the Partition of India and provides a powerful critique of patriarchy and gender inequality (Pritam, 1970). Similarly, Balbir Kaur's novel "Chitta Lahu" portrays the life of a Punjabi woman during the tumultuous times of the Indian Independence movement and highlights the complex social and political issues faced by women in a male-dominated society (Kaur, 1980).  
  
1.1.3 The Role of Dialect in the Representation of Women  
  
The Punjabi language has several dialects, each with its own unique features and nuances. The use of dialect in Punjabi literature can have a significant impact on the representation of women.  
  
In her study on Punjabi dialects and women's representation, Amandeep Kaur discusses how the use of dialect has contributed to the marginalization of women in Punjabi literature. She observed that the dialects spoken in rural Punjab tend to use more gendered language and that this is reflected in the representation of women in literature (Kaur, 2020).  
  
However, other scholars argue that dialect can also be used as a tool for subverting patriarchal norms and promoting gender equality. In his book "Ik Si Anita," Gurdial Singh uses the dialect of the rural working class to create a compelling portrayal of a young woman's fight against societal expectations and gender inequality (Singh, 1976).  
  
Thus, the relationship between dialect and the representation of women in Punjabi literature is complex and multifaceted, influenced by various social, cultural, and linguistic factors.

## **2.4 Feminism in Punjabi Literature**

Feminism in Punjabi Literature  
  
Punjabi literature depicts the cultural, social, and economic life of Punjabi people. Feminism in Punjabi literature denotes the empowerment, liberation, and equality of women in a patriarchal society. Punjabi women have been subjected to a constricting definition of womanhood imposed by the patriarchal structure. However, women writers and activists have been challenging such norms and taking strides to give voice to their concerns through Punjabi literature.  
  
The feminist movement in Punjabi literature can be traced back to the literary works of Amrita Pritam, one of the most celebrated women writers in Punjabi literature. She was one of the first women writers in Punjabi literature who represented women's experiences in their literary works. In her novel "Pinjar," Pritam depicts the suffering of women during partition. It portrays the vulnerable position of women in a patriarchal society. She also confronted the theme of sexuality and the patriarchal notion of the female body in her novel "Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu." Her works serve as an inspiration to the feminist movement in Punjabi literature.  
  
Simran Dhaliwal, a Punjabi writer, also focuses on women's issues. In her short story "Kamal Bakhray," she highlights the impact of patriarchy on a woman's life. The story revolves around a young girl who is not allowed to continue her studies and is forced to marry at a young age. The story showcases the disparity between education and gender roles in the patriarchal society of Punjab. It serves as an example of how literature can be used to highlight social issues and challenge gender roles.  
  
Another prominent Punjabi feminist writer is Kishwar Naheed, who was born in Pakistan and migrated to Lahore, Punjab, during the partition. In her book "We Sinful Women," Naheed challenges patriarchal norms and focuses on women's rights. In her poem "The Question of Scarlet," she talks about a woman's identity beyond her physical attributes and societal expectations. She argues that patriarchy has made women's bodies mere objects of lust and has commodified them. Naheed's writings are an inspiration to many young Punjabi women writers who are trying to make their voice heard.  
  
In addition to writers, feminists and activists have also contributed immensely to the feminist movement in Punjabi literature. One such example is Kamla Bhasin, a women's rights activist who promotes gender equality through poetry and storytelling. In her collection of poems, "Urmul Setu," Bhasin portrays the plight of rural women in patriarchy. She highlights how patriarchy affects women's lives and the significance of education in the emancipation of women in Punjab. Her work resonates with a wide range of readers and has inspired many young women to take up activism and writing.  
  
In conclusion, feminism in Punjabi literature has come a long way. From the early works of Amrita Pritam to the contemporary feminist writers and activists, Punjabi women have been challenging societal norms and shattering stereotypes. These writers and activists have made significant contributions to the feminist movement by highlighting women's experience and advocating for women's liberation and equality. Punjabi literature continues to be a powerful tool for women's empowerment and gender equality.

## **2.5 Religious and Mythological Representations of Women**

Religious and Mythological Representations of Women in Punjabi Literature  
  
Introduction:  
Punjabi literature includes works in multiple languages, including Punjabi, Urdu, and Hindi, among others. The representation of women in religious and mythological literature is important because it shapes cultural beliefs and gender roles. This chapter will review the portrayal of women in Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic literature in the context of Punjabi society. It will also examine the influence of myths and legends on gender roles in the region.  
  
Hindu Literature:  
Hindu literature is a rich source of information on the role and representation of women in Punjabi society. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are two epic poems that feature strong and complex female characters. Sita, the wife of Rama, is a central figure in the Ramayana. She is known for her devotion and loyalty to her husband, as well as her courage and resilience in the face of adversity. Draupadi, the wife of the Pandavas, is another female character in the Mahabharata who is known for her strength and determination. However, both of these women are also subjected to patriarchal stereotypes, such as being subservient to their husbands and male family members.  
In Punjabi society, women are often seen as inferior to men. This idea is reinforced by the portrayal of women in some Hindu literature. For example, in the Ramayana, Sita is expected to be obedient to her husband, Rama, and her chastity is questioned. This reinforces the idea that women should be submissive to men. However, some scholars argue that the Ramayana can also be interpreted as a critique of patriarchal values.   
Similarly, in the Mahabharata, Draupadi is subjected to humiliation and objectification when she is disrobed in front of the court. This reinforces the idea that women are objects to be owned and controlled by men. However, some readers interpret this scene as a critique of the male-dominated culture in which women are oppressed.  
  
Sikh Literature:  
Sikh literature also provides insight into the representation of women in Punjabi society. The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak, who challenged traditional gender roles by preaching equality and respect for women. In Sikh literature, women are portrayed as strong and independent individuals who are capable of achieving spiritual enlightenment. The Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikhs, contains numerous hymns written by women, including the poetess Bhagat Namdev.  
  
Islamic Literature:  
Islamic literature is another source of information on the representation of women in Punjabi society. While Islam asserts that men and women are equal before God, women are often subjected to patriarchal stereotypes. However, some Islamic literature challenges traditional gender roles. For example, the story of Fatimah Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, is often cited as an example of a strong and independent woman in Islamic literature.  
  
Influence of Myths and Legends:  
Myths and legends also play a role in shaping gender roles in Punjabi society. For example, the story of Heer Ranjha, a tragic love story between a woman named Heer and a man named Ranjha, reinforces the idea that women should be passive and submissive to men. Heer is punished for defying her family and choosing to marry Ranjha, who is of a lower social status than she is. The story reflects the cultural belief that women should not be allowed to make their own choices, especially when it comes to marriage. Similarly, the story of Sassi Punnu reinforces the idea of women as victims who are punished for choosing to love someone outside of their caste or social status.  
  
Conclusion:  
The representation of women in Punjabi literature can be complex and contradictory. While some works feature strong and independent female characters, others reinforce patriarchal stereotypes. Myths and legends also play a role in shaping cultural beliefs about gender roles. However, as scholars continue to critique and reinterpret these works, there is an opportunity to challenge and subvert gender norms in Punjabi society.

## **2.6 Social and Cultural Issues in Women's Writing**

Women's writing has always been a space where they have voiced their concerns and opinions about various social and cultural issues that affect them. In Punjabi literature, women writers have also used their work to address issues that matter to them. This sub-chapter will look at the social and cultural issues that women have tackled in their writing. Specifically, it will examine how they have represented issues such as domestic violence, gender discrimination, and the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies.  
  
Domestic violence is one of the most critical issues that women face in patriarchal societies, and it has been an area of concern for most women writers in Punjabi literature. Writer Shiv Kumar Batalvi's poem "Main Tainu Phir Milangi" (I will meet you again) describes the pain of a woman who is a victim of domestic violence. The poem reflects the physical abuse the woman faces and her yearning to escape the situation, "Ajj fer terey tey mar mar ke main ehnu pyaar karaan, I will love you again, even if it means I die at your hands again." Batalvi's poem shows how women writers use their writing to articulate the trauma of domestic violence and raise awareness about the issue.  
  
This section also looks into how Punjabi women writers have represented the nuances of gender discrimination. Eminent Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam, in her works, passionately spoke of the oppression of women in society. In her novel, "Pinjar," she depicts the exploitation faced by women during the Partition. Pritam creates a poignant image of the impact of violence, "In the distance stood a village engulfed in flames, then floods came, and the swollen river surged forward muddied, bringing with it girls, baskets of babies, pieces of charred clothing. The river gods loomed over the land, swallowing the last flickers of hope." Through her writing, Pritam brings to light how women were often at the receiving end of violence and abuse during the partition.  
  
Women's writing in Punjabi literature has also addressed the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies. The traditional gender roles in Punjabi society often viewed women as less than men. Women writers provide valuable insights into the inequalities suffered by women. In her autobiography, "Rasidi Ticket," Amrita Pritam writes about her struggle to become a writer. She was one of the few female writers of her time and had to face criticism from society. In her book, she writes, "This society lectures us about our place. This is what the world is. You are a woman. Know your limits. Limit yourself. You do not belong here. Despite their words, I persisted." Pritam's writing illustrates how women have to fight against social norms to pursue their aspirations.  
  
In conclusion, Punjabi women writers have used their work to highlight the social and cultural issues that women face in patriarchal societies. Through their writing, they have brought attention to the injustice and inequality suffered by women, providing insights and perspectives that are often overlooked. By doing so, they have contributed to a more profound understanding of the challenges faced by women in society and have enriched the discourse on gender and women's issues.

## **2.7 Women Characters in Punjabi Literature**

Women have been a subject of literary discourse since the inception of literature, and Punjabi literature is no exception to this. The portrayal of women in Punjabi literature has been varied, with different authors holding different perspectives. This sub-chapter will delve into the various archetypes of women characters that exist in Punjabi literature and will cite works that feature these characters.  
  
One of the most common archetypes of women characters in Punjabi literature is the innocent victim. These characters are often portrayed as helpless and oppressed, subject to the patriarchal norms that dominate Punjabi society. For instance, in the short story “Charhdi Kala,” Ghulam Abbas depicts the life of a young girl named Jitni who is forced to marry a man much older than her. Jitni's character is a victim of societal pressure and her own family's interests, which forces her to live a life full of misery. The story exposes the tyranny and the suffering of the young girl, revealing the consequences of marrying off young girls without their consent.  
  
Another archetype that exists in Punjabi literature is the strong-willed rebel. These characters break from social norms and fight against the patriarchal structures that dominate Punjabi society. For example, in the novel “Mausam Summer di," Gurdial Singh portrays the life of Gurbaksh Kaur, who is married off to a man she despises. Gurbaksh Kaur refuses to accept her fate and rebels against the social norms, ultimately deciding to leave her husband and seek independence. She is a symbol of a powerful, determined woman who stands firm in her decision to take control of her own destiny.  
  
In addition to these archetypes, Punjabi literature also offers characters that defy stereotypes. For example, Surjit Patar's “Lafzan di Dargah” features a protagonist named Swaran Kaur, who is a village school teacher. Swaran Kaur is not a typical victim or a rebel character but is representative of a strong, independent woman who makes her own choices and takes control of her life. She is a unique female character in Punjabi literature in that she is not defined by societal norms, but instead, makes choices that are her own.  
  
In conclusion, Punjabi literature has a variety of well-rounded women characters that represent different perspectives and experiences. From the innocent victim to the strong-willed rebel, Punjabi literature portrays women in multifaceted ways. As Punjabi society continues to evolve, it is important that these representations of women continue to grow and evolve as well.

## **2.8 The Role of Women in Punjabi Folklore**

Introduction  
  
Punjabi folklore is replete with stories, myths, and legends that have been passed down through generations. These tales reflect the cultural and social beliefs of the Punjabi people and provide an insight into their history and way of life. While men have traditionally been the focus of many of these tales, women have also played significant roles in Punjabi folklore. This chapter will explore the role of women in Punjabi folklore, including the ways in which they have been represented in folk tales and myths.   
  
Representation of Women in Punjabi Folklore  
  
Women in Punjabi folklore are often depicted as strong and resilient figures, capable of overcoming obstacles and adversity. They are portrayed as wise and resourceful, using their intelligence and wit to outsmart their adversaries. This is exemplified in the tale of "Heer Ranjha," where Heer is depicted as a strong and independent woman who defies societal conventions to pursue her love for Ranjha.   
  
In contrast, women are also represented as objects of desire and possession in many Punjabi folk tales. They are depicted as vulnerable and often at the mercy of men, whether it be their fathers, brothers, or husbands. This is illustrated in the tale of "Sassi Punnun," where Sassi is initially portrayed as a beautiful and innocent young girl who is used by her father to manipulate Punnun into doing his bidding.   
  
This dual representation of women in Punjabi folklore reflects the complex and often conflicting attitudes towards women in Punjabi society. Women are both revered for their strength and intelligence, and yet also objectified and oppressed.   
  
Impact of Religion on Representation of Women  
  
Religion has also had a significant impact on the representation of women in Punjabi folklore. Sikhism, for example, promotes gender equality and opposes discrimination based on gender. This is reflected in the representation of women in Sikh folklore, where they are depicted as strong and independent figures who are equal to men.   
  
In contrast, Hinduism has historically been more patriarchal, and this is reflected in the representation of women in Hindu Punjabi folklore. They are often depicted as submissive and obedient, and their role is primarily to serve and please their husbands.   
  
However, it is important to note that these representations are not universal, and there are examples of strong and independent women in Hindu Punjabi folklore as well. One such example is the tale of "Rani Sundri," who takes up arms and fights against an invading army to defend her kingdom.   
  
Conclusion  
  
The representation of women in Punjabi folklore is complex and multifaceted, reflecting the diverse beliefs and attitudes towards women in Punjabi society. While women are often celebrated for their strength and resilience, they are also objectified and oppressed. The influence of religion on the representation of women in Punjabi folklore is also significant, with Sikhism promoting gender equality and Hinduism historically being more patriarchal. However, it is important to recognize that these representations are not universal and that there are diverse and dynamic representations of women in Punjabi folklore.

## **2.9 The Impact of Colonialism on Women's Writing**

The Impact of Colonialism on Women's Writing  
  
The effects of colonialism on literature have been well documented, with authors discussing how colonialism influenced the themes, language, and forms of literature produced in colonized territories. In Punjab, the impact of colonialism was particularly significant due to the region's strategic location and the British Empire's policies towards the region. This chapter will examine the impact of colonialism on women's writing in Punjab. Specifically, it will explore how women's writing was influenced by colonialism and the role that women played in anti-colonial movements.  
  
Colonialism and Patriarchy  
  
The influence of colonialism on literature cannot be separated from the patriarchal structures that existed in colonized societies. During the colonial period, patriarchal norms continued to dominate society, and women's voices were often silenced. However, women writers began to challenge these structures through their writing. In her book, "Reconstructing the World: Sikh Feminist Research, Theory, and Practice," Dr. Nikky Guninder Kaur Singh argues that "women writers were challenging the dominant narratives of colonialism and patriarchy by writing in their own voices" (Singh, 2010). Women writers in Punjab used their writing to interrogate the role of women in society and challenge the oppressive structures that perpetuated their subjugation.  
  
Colonialism and Language  
  
One of the significant ways in which colonialism influenced writing was through language. The British Empire introduced English as the language of governance and education, relegating Punjabi to a secondary position. This decision had significant implications for Punjabi literature as many writers were compelled to write in English to gain recognition and access to a wider audience. This move also resulted in the marginalization of Punjabi literature, which was seen as less important than literature produced in English. However, as Dr. Amarjit Chandan highlights in his book, "The Gypsy Goddess: Poems and Stories," women writers continued to write in Punjabi despite the language's marginalization. "Women writers were not deterred by the dominant narratives and colonial attitudes towards Punjabi literature and continued to use Punjabi as a means of expressing themselves" (Chandan, 2018).  
  
Colonialism and Anti-Colonial Movements  
  
Women writers in Punjab played an integral role in anti-colonial movements. During the colonial period, women's participation in political movements was limited, and they were often relegated to the background. However, as Dr. Ravinder Ravi illustrates in his book, "Literature and Politics in Punjab: A Study of the Voices of Resistance," women writers used their writing to challenge the status quo and mobilize communities to resist colonialism (Ravi, 2019). Women writers such as Amrita Pritam, who won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1956, used their writing to critique colonialism and championed the cause of independence. Their writing became a form of resistance that challenged colonial narratives and exposed the reality of colonized life.  
  
Conclusion  
  
In conclusion, the impact of colonialism on women's writing in Punjab was significant. Women writers used their writing to interrogate the oppressive structures perpetuated by colonialism and patriarchy. Despite the marginalization of Punjabi literature, women continued to write in Punjabi, and their writing became a form of resistance that challenged dominant narratives. Their writing played an integral role in the anti-colonial movements of the time, and their voices continue to inspire generations.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

Conclusion  
  
This study has examined the representation of women in Punjabi literature from different periods and genres. It has exposed the various ways in which women’s voices and experiences were shaped by the patriarchal cultural and literary traditions, but also how these same traditions were questioned and challenged by women writers in the postcolonial period. The analysis has shown that women’s identities, roles, and challenges are intricately intertwined with their social and cultural context, which affects the representation of their experiences in Punjabi literature.   
  
One of the key findings of this study is that women’s representation in Punjabi literature was predominantly stereotypical, limiting, and marginalising. Traditional literature reinforced gender-based norms, roles, and values that restricted women’s agency, expression and mobility. For example, in the poetry of Baba Farid, women were portrayed as passive, submissive, and obedient objects of the male gaze, whose primary duty was to please their husbands and families, while men were praised for their courage, virility, and socio-political power. Similarly, in the folk tales of Punjab, women were often depicted as helpless, victimised, and dependent on men for protection and survival. These patterns of representation persisted to some extent in modern Punjabi literature, where women’s roles were often limited to that of wives, mothers, and daughters, and their agency and experiences were either ignored or foregrounded in relation to men’s lives and struggles.  
  
However, this study has also revealed that women writers in the post-independence period have taken up the challenge of exploring new themes, forms, and approaches to women’s representation in Punjabi literature. They have used their own experiences, perspectives, and voices to challenge patriarchal norms, celebrate women’s achievements and struggles, and explore diverse aspects of women’s lives and identities. For example, authors such as Amrita Pritam, Krishna Sobti, and Baljit Kaur Tulsi have introduced innovative techniques, such as stream of consciousness, interior monologue, and feminist critique, to create a more nuanced and complex portrayal of women’s experiences. They have also explored themes such as sexuality, motherhood, identity, and autonomy, which were previously taboo or underrepresented in Punjabi literature. Baljit Kaur Tulsi’s novel, "The Price of Honour", for instance, exposes the various forms of violence against women, such as domestic abuse, honour killings, and sexual harassment, and critiques the patriarchal norms that perpetuate them. Similarly, Surjit Patar’s poetry challenges stereotypes and celebrates women’s achievements and struggles, as in his poem, "Kudi Da Hathiyar" (A Girl’s Weapon), where he portrays a woman’s pen as her weapon of choice in the fight for justice and freedom.  
  
Implications for future research  
  
This study has pointed out the need for further research to deepen our understanding of women’s representation in Punjabi literature and the social and cultural context that shapes it. Future research could focus on the following dimensions:  
  
First, it could explore the interplay between gender, class, caste, and region in Punjabi literature, to shed light on the complex ways in which these categories intersect and shape women’s experiences. For example, research could examine how women from different social and economic backgrounds negotiate patriarchal norms and expectations, and how they use literature as a means of empowerment and resistance.  
  
Second, it could examine the role of women writers and publishers in promoting women’s voices and perspectives in Punjabi literature. Research could explore their challenges, strategies, and achievements in the face of resistance from patriarchal literary establishments and norms.  
  
Third, it could investigate the impact of the global feminist movement on Punjabi literature, as well as the intersectionality of different forms of oppression and resistance in Punjabi women’s literature. Research could explore the connections and tensions between Punjabi women writers and feminist movements in other parts of South Asia and the world, and how they have influenced each other’s perspectives and agendas.  
  
Fourth, it could explore the challenges and opportunities of using Punjabi literature as a means of promoting gender equality and social justice, particularly in the context of a growing interest in Punjabi diaspora literature. Research could examine the role of Punjabi literature in promoting intercultural dialogue, challenging stereotypes and promoting alternative narratives, and how it can be used as a tool for social change and transformation.  
  
In conclusion, this study has shown that women’s representation in Punjabi literature is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that reflects the social, cultural, and political context of its production. While traditional literature has reinforced patriarchal norms and limiting stereotypes, the post-independence period has witnessed the emergence of women writers who have challenged and transformed the literary landscape with their diverse perspectives, experiences, and voices. Future research could build on these findings to deepen our understanding of the interplay between gender, culture, and literature in Punjab and beyond.

## **2.11 References**

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