



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Concept Of Hegemony In Contemporary Indian English Fiction

Dr. Divya Bala Pathak

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Amar Singh College, Lakhaoti (Bulandshahr)

Abstract: This research paper explores the pervasive manifestation of **male hegemony** within Indian fiction in English, examining how literary narratives mirror the systematic subjugation of women across physical, emotional, and socio-economic strata. Drawing upon the Gramscian framework, hegemony is defined as a preponderant influence exercised through society's superstructure, establishing a paradigm where the male figure serves as the "commander" and the female is relegated to the status of a "feeble sufferer". Through a critical analysis of seminal works by authors such as **Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, and R.K. Narayan**, this study illustrates how male dominance persists regardless of a woman's education or financial independence.

The paper identifies recurring motifs of **patriarchal violence**, ranging from the drugged violation of bodily autonomy in *Sea of Poppies* to the institutionalized objectification by law enforcement in *The God of Small Things*. Furthermore, it investigates the fragility of the "male ego," particularly when confronted with female professional success, leading to domestic discord and sexual sadism as seen in *The Dark Holds No Terror*. By analyzing the spatial and social restrictions imposed on female characters—vividly depicted in the works of **Deepa Anappara and Rita Garg**—the research highlights a cultural "fixed formula" that demands women remain subordinate to maintain social harmony. Ultimately, the study concludes by advocating for a transformative shift in contemporary literature: the move away from the "epitome of sacrifice" toward the portrayal of the "**New Woman**"—a revolutionary, intellectually formidable figure who reclaims her existence from the "mild yoke" of traditional hegemony.

Keywords: Hegemony, Indian Fiction in English, Male Ego, Patriarchal Violence, The New Woman, Subjugation.

Hegemony refers to preponderant influence or authority over others which implies social, cultural, ideological and economical influence exerted by a dominant group. Indian fiction in English reflects the impression of hegemony clearly where women characters are dominated by male characters physically, mentally, emotionally, financially and culturally. Literature mirrors life with all its shades therefore the glimpses of male hegemony can be noticed in society apparently where man represents 'supremacy' or 'leadership' in other words a leader, a guide, commander, chief' and the woman is subjugated by him. The novels of several Indian writers reflect this spirit. If one understands the term in broader sense then only one can grasp its influence in Indian fiction in English. This idea is all pervasive in Indian novels where woman is represented as feeble, poor, parasite and sufferer.

According to **J. A. Cuddon**, “In ancient Greece, hegemony entailed the dominance of one city-state over another.” Hegemony refers to preponderant influence or authority over others which implies social, cultural, ideological and economical influence exerted by a dominant group. Although the concept existed much before when Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist philosopher coined it in cultural context. For him, hegemony was a form of control exercised primarily through a society’s superstructure as opposed to its base or social relations of production of a predominantly economic character. In simple terms hegemony means domination, influence or authority over another.

Indian fiction in English reflects the impression of hegemony clearly where women characters are dominated by male characters physically, mentally, emotionally, financially and culturally. Literature mirrors life with all its shades therefore the glimpses of male hegemony can be noticed in society apparently where man represents supremacy or leadership in other words a leader, guide, commander, chief and the woman is subjugated by him. The novels of several Indian writers reflect this spirit. Women writers like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Rita Garg and many others reveal the same in their novels. A woman whether educated or uneducated, financially dependent or independent becomes a victim of male hegemony. In fact, society is well trained to accept this format without giving it a thought that a woman deserves equal rights and freedom of thought. Not only women writers but also men writers have depicted the same picture of society in their novels. The novel ‘**Sea of Poppies**’ (2008) by Amitav Ghosh unfolds the story of Deeti, an ordinary village woman. She was married to Hukum Singh, a crippled worker in Ghazipur Opium Factory, the unfortunate woman realizes the fate on her wedding night. The concept of hegemony prevails in her life too when she was dominated by others for her life’s decisions. She was drugged with opium by her mother-in-law so that her husband’s younger brother could rape her and consummate the marriage in place of her crippled or impotent husband. Not only this, she receives many threats of rape by him in the later part of the novel. Her daughter Kabutari was biological daughter of her brother-in-law without her will. Glimpses of Sati ritual and other social tradition figure out the dominance of male dominated society over a woman.

Arundhati Roy’s debut novel **The God of Small Things** (1997) also tells the tale of male hegemony over female. Ammu Ipe, the central character of the novel, is fed up with her ill-tempered father Pappachi, later she suffers at the hands of her husband and brother not only this but she is tortured by policeman in police custody too as she dares to fall in love with Velutha, an untouchable. In the beginning of the novel, she is desperate to escape her irritating and dominating father therefore she leaves her native place Ayemenem and to avoid returning she marries a man in Calcutta which she later realizes a mistake because he was an alcoholic and in order to tarnish her spirit, he physically abuses her not only this he dares to pimp Ammu to his boss. Thus, treating her as a plaything he wants to govern her physically, mentally, emotionally and financially. After giving birth to twins Estha and Rahel, she returns to Ayemenem to live with her parents where she was not welcomed. Not only this but Chacko, her brother too dominates her in the later part of the novel. Physical, mental, sexual dominance of male dominance is visible everywhere in the novel viz. a group of communist protesters humiliate Baby Kochamma. Estha is sexually molested by the ‘Orange drink Lemon drink Man’ who was a vendor working at the snack counter, Ammu’s treatment by a police officer, who taps her breasts with his baton as though he was choosing mangoes from a basket which shows he considers woman as an object not as an equally respected human being.

A serious novelist Shashi Deshpande while writing her novel **The Dark Holds No Terror** sings the same saga, reflecting that hegemony is used as a superpower to bring one’s own identity. Hegemony is noticed when the dominated person accepts their supremacy on an issue will bring out a unique space in society. Hegemony is closely associated with feminism which has been mirrored in Indian fiction. The novel *Dark Holds No Terror* represents the life of a middle-class woman Sarita whose economic independence and reputation in society hurts ‘male ego’ of her husband Manohar. She becomes well established doctor but her husband, being head of the family, wants to dominate her, due to this he unconsciously develops sexually sadistic behavior which shatters his mask of supremacy. Indian society has a typical role to men and women unconsciously. A man should earn more and dominate the finance and other decisive issues of family and a woman should be a few steps behind her husband, it’s a fixed formula of happy married

life. Not only married life but parental home also witnesses the same ideology in Saru's life. Preference to male child by parents is reflected as a type of male hegemony is unconsciously accepted by society.

Several other novels by Indian authors unfold the same. R.K.Narayan, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Nair, Deepa Anappara, Rita Garg and many others portray woman as subordinate to man. In R.K.Narayan's famous novel **The Guide** Raju tries to dominate Rosie, converts her into Nalini, though he helps her to achieve her dream yet wants to overpower her money, fame and her decision making power. When her popularity increases, his male ego gets hurt. Even her husband remains indifferent to the talent of Rosie. Opposing her in chasing her dreams he abhors and abandons her saying: "What had come over this woman? Was she in league with her husband? She had every authority to ask me to get out. Probably she repented her folly in encouraging me all along." (140) On the contrary Raju helps her to achieve her dream because it is not possible for a woman to come out of the house without man's support to fulfill her dreams. Ironically, he remains unable to digest her soaring success. The condition of women can be observed when Raju's mother criticizes Rosie: "Girls today! How courageous you are! In our day we wouldn't go to the street corner without an escort. And I have been to the market only once in my life, when Raju's father was alive." (146)

Kamala Markandaya reveals the more bitter glimpses of male hegemony in her novel **Nector in a Sieve**. Rukmani's daughter Irvaddy is deserted by her husband because he is unable to bear child for him which she later does while she accepts prostitution due to dire poverty. Men of her village readily pay her for her 'services' ironically no one was able to help her without such kind of 'service', the result of her profession was a child whose father remains unknown. Her husband remarries and never returns to her. Another example of male hegemony over woman is visible in the autobiographical work **My Story** by Kamala Das who unhesitatingly outpours her bitter experiences of married life in her autobiography. Deepa Anappara debut novel '**Djinn Patrols on the Purple Line**' highlights numerous scenes of male hegemony, when drunkard husband of poor maid beat her to meet out their demand of money for liquor. The scene of Jhansi ki Rani reveals the exploited women whose daughter has been raped and killed by a group of loafer boys and no action was taken against them. The mother loses her mental balance and since then roaming here and there to take revenge of her only daughter, who was a brilliant student hence a hope for her future. The other instance "Like a lion in a cage, Runu Didi" (124), highlights the restriction on girls not on boys in the moment of crisis. Jai a nine years old boy was moving here and there in search of his kidnapped friends but his sister Runu didi has to obey parents order of not crossing the boundaries of home and leaving her passion of sports though she is kidnapped by unknown kidnapper later.

The novel '**Q & A**' by Vikas Swarup reveals the other side of the coin- a prosperous actress Neelima Kumari gets physically abused by her so-called lover several times, covering wounds with makeup and faint smile. At other place, a daughter's sexual torture by father is also portrayed by Swarup in the same novel. Dr. Rita Garg's novel '**An Abbreviated Child: Gloom to Bloom**' represents the dominance of minister ji over Radha, his wife. He does not allow her to know whatever he does politically and socially. In fact, she remains restricted to roam in the half part of the house which shows his hegemony over wife. Similarly, the central character Chhotu's mother suffers at the hands of her husband she had to bore six children despite of dire poverty and physical weakness. Kalia's wife, mother and sister, daughter all were controlled and troubled due to his stubborn nature and alcoholic cravings. Anita Nair's **The Chain of Custody** unfolds the heinous side of the picture where woman is treated as an object. A young girl outpours her pain in front of inspector Godwa: "I was six years old when my father sold me to a man for a thousand rupees." (10)

Indian fiction in English is repleted with various examples of man's hegemony over woman. In order to project woman characters as the epitome of sacrifice, dedication, care, love and suffering, several authors have neglected the need of a woman. The new woman emerging in the contemporary novels is ambitious, self-conscious, progressive and emotionally strong. While portraying her as a helpless poor lady which she does not want to look like at present. There is a shift in the portrayal of Indian woman now a days, the

digitalized, techno savvy, progressive, aware and educated woman who does not want to let man capture her existence culturally, financially, socially, politically need to be depicted in Indian fiction in English.

Hegemony covers many aspects in governance as Indian authors represent man's hegemony over woman culturally, socially, economically, psychologically and physically. A frame of ideal woman who more or less suits man's wishes is projected as praiseworthy woman beside it the woman needs to be curbed. She is expected to match the will of man or else portrayed as a sufferer. The image of revolting woman is still unacceptable in society and in fiction too. If she bears the mild yoke given by man peacefully, she matches the expectation of male dominated society otherwise she needs to be jolted out to realize her responsibilities and boundaries. The above-mentioned authors have brought such facts in limelight.

Hegemony needs to be understood in broader sense to grasp the full meaning of the concept. Woman folk are controlled by a male force in Indian novels that is more sensitively represented by Indian women fiction writers. Despite the fact male authors have also painted the realistic conditions of Indian society in their novels. The sense of supremacy in male is all pervasive in Indian fiction due to which the authors portray woman as feeble, poor, dependent and sufferer in fiction. It is the need of the hour to represent revolutionary spirit of woman. It is an accepted fact that practical happens after a theory, every great change begins with literature. It is the responsibility of modern novelists to project 'new woman' in novels who is determined, self-satisfied, strong, intellectual, running business equal in importance to man, asset to family and society, full of zeal to reform society and in short 'an iron lady with a pious soul.'

REFERENCES:

1. **Anappara, Deepa.** *Djinn Patrols on the Purple Line.* Penguin Random House India, 2020.
2. **Cuddon, J. A.** *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory.* Penguin Reference Library, 2013.
3. **Deshpande, Shashi.** *The Dark Holds No Terror.*
4. **Garg, Rita.** *An Abbreviated Child: Gloom to Bloom.*
5. **Ghosh, Amitav.** *Sea of Poppies.* 2008.
6. **Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa.** *Indian Writing in English.* 2020.
7. **Mohan, Indira J. M. J.** *Shashi Deshpande: A Critical Spectrum.* Adhyayana Publishers and Distributors, 2006.
8. **Nair, Anita.** *Chain of Custody.* Harper Black, 2016.
9. **Narayan, R. K.** *The Guide.* Indian Thought Publications, 1958.
10. **Roy, Arundhati.** *The God of Small Things.* 1997.
11. **Sharma, Siddhartha.** *Shashi Deshpande's Novels: A Feminist Study.* Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2005.
12. **Singh, Jyoti.** *Indian Women Novelists: Feminist Physiological Study.* Rawat Publications, 2007.
13. **Swarup, Vikas.** *Q & A.* Black Swan, 2005.