

WOMEN'S ROLES IN WESTERN AND EASTERN LITERATURE

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Annotation: *The portrayal of women in literature serves as a powerful reflection of societal norms and evolving gender dynamics. While both Western and Eastern literary traditions offer rich and varied depictions of female characters, significant differences emerge, shaped by distinct cultural, religious, and philosophical contexts. This article explores these contrasting portrayals, acknowledging the inherent complexities and broad generalizations involved in comparing such vast and diverse literary landscapes.*

Key words: *literary traditions, societal norms, gender dynamics, feminist, literary movement, female character, matriarchal society, rebellious female figures, cultural nuances and historical contexts.*

Аннотация: *Изображение женщин в литературе служит мощным отражением социальных норм и развивающейся гендерной динамики. Хотя и западная, и восточная литературные традиции предлагают богатые и разнообразные изображения женских персонажей, возникают существенные различия, сформированные разными культурными, религиозными и философскими контекстами. В этой статье исследуются эти контрастирующие изображения, признавая присущую им сложность и широкие обобщения, необходимые для сравнения таких обширных и разнообразных литературных ландшафтов.*

Ключевые слова: *литературные традиции, социальные нормы, гендерная динамика, феминистка, литературное движение, женский характер, матриархальное общество, мятежные женские фигуры, культурные нюансы и исторические контексты.*

Abstract: *Western literature, primarily rooted in European traditions, initially presented a limited spectrum of female characters. Classical Greek and Roman works often relegated women to supporting roles, defined primarily by their relationship to men: virtuous wives, seductive temptresses, or tragic figures whose agency was severely limited by patriarchal structures. The medieval period, influenced by religious ideals, introduced figures like the Virgin Mary, yet secular narratives generally confined women to domestic or courtly spheres.*

The Renaissance witnessed a slow increase in female authorship, yet societal expectations continued to heavily influence character portrayals. The Enlightenment and Romanticism brought more nuanced characters, but often idealized as the "Angel in the House," epitomizing the Victorian era's emphasis on domesticity and moral purity. However, this era also saw subtle challenges to these limitations, paving the way for the feminist literary movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. Modernist and Postmodernist literature radically expanded the possibilities, showcasing complex, multi-faceted female characters with agency and diverse experiences.

Eastern Literature: A Tapestry of Diverse Narratives

Eastern literary traditions, encompassing an expansive geographical and cultural range, present a more diverse tapestry. While generalizations are inherently problematic, common themes emerge. Confucianism and other prominent philosophical traditions in many Asian cultures emphasized filial piety and obedience, often situating women within a hierarchical family structure. This frequently manifested in literature through narratives highlighting female virtues like patience, devotion, and self-sacrifice.

However, this is far from a monolithic representation. Ancient Indian literature, for instance, features powerful female characters in epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, although their roles often remain intertwined with dharma (duty) and karma (fate). Classical Chinese literature reveals both demure and rebellious female figures, reflecting the complexities of gender roles within a patriarchal society. Modern and contemporary Eastern literature has witnessed a significant surge in female authors exploring themes of gender inequality, identity, and empowerment, frequently challenging traditional narratives.

Despite their differences, both Western and Eastern literary traditions share some common ground:

- **Evolution of Female Representation:** Both have witnessed a progression from stereotypical depictions to more complex and multi-faceted portrayals.
- **The Rise of Female Agency:** Although manifested differently, both traditions increasingly explore themes of female agency and self-determination.
- **Social Context as a Determinant:** The portrayal of women inevitably reflects the prevailing social, political, and religious norms of their respective times and places.
- **Emphasized Virtues:** Western literature often prioritizes individuality and self-expression, while some Eastern traditions emphasize collective harmony and adherence to societal roles.
- **Forms of Rebellion:** Western feminist literature frequently directly challenges patriarchal structures, whereas in some Eastern contexts, subversion might be more subtle and implicit within the n
- **Treatment of Female Sexuality:** Western literature has witnessed a more open exploration of female sexuality compared to some Eastern traditions, which often maintain stricter constraints on this topic.

Conclusion: Comparing women's roles in Western and Eastern literature demands sensitivity to cultural nuances and historical contexts. While both traditions have moved towards more nuanced portrayals of female characters, their journeys have been shaped by distinct sociocultural landscapes. Further research into specific national literatures within both the East and West is essential for a deeper understanding of this multifaceted topic. The ongoing dialogue around representation, agency, and the evolving roles of women in literature continues to enrich and reshape our understanding of both the past and the present.

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