

Leading/Prominent female characters in the Urdu novel

The scope of this study entails two basic elements: the era of the novelists and their works. It encompasses the writings of selected Urdu novelists and their presentation of female characters. The study does not limit itself to any specific period, although it does exclude novels written in India, after Independence. A chronological sequence has been adopted in the selection of writers and only eminent and critically acclaimed novelists have been included. The criterion followed for the selection of characters focuses on their role in the plot of the novel. Central characters about whom no detailed information has been given have been ignored as has been done for novels that do not present female characters. This includes novels which present female characters with the sole aim of developing the story without any specific role being assigned to the character in question.

After Independence Hindu-Muslim culture started to lose its commonalities, with the change in the physical and cultural dimensions of both countries along with the religious and political biases. This resulted in a change in themes and styles in the world of Urdu literature. Since Urdu literature divides into two channels, in the aftermath of Independence, the focus of the research is Pakistani literature, and particularly Pakistani novels.

Female characters portrayed in "Murat-ul-Uroos" are the hallmark of Muslim culture and that is the sole reason for their inclusion in this study. Since Independence was responsible for the bifurcation of the two cultures, literature written in India — in the post partition era — could not be made a part of the study. Another and more important reason for the exclusion of such literature was the fact that it would not have been in the scope of this study to include female characters from two different cultures. The common culture that developed side by side in the two countries has been taken as the backdrop for the study and comparison of female characters. At the same time care has been taken not to divulge in unnecessary details about the techniques of the writers and only those aspects have been highlighted that are relevant to the topic.

This thesis has been divided into nine chapters: The first chapter briefly discusses conventional and traditional perception of women, the emergence of the Urdu novel and the overall development of female characters in Urdu novel. For this reason, female characters in folklore and dastaans have been studied. The second chapter deals with female characters and an in-depth study of the works of pioneer Urdu novelists. Chapter Three highlights Prem Chand's as a novelist and his presentation of female characters in the changing social order. The Fourth chapter is based upon the influence of the Progressive Movement on technique, style and realistic approach in Urdu fiction. Selected novels and their female characters have also been discussed in this chapter. Chapter Five not only touches upon works created after Independence, but also discusses female characters created during the early post-Independence era. The Sixth chapter deals with the depiction of female characters in selected novels written with a social and rural background. Chapter Seven discusses the Pakistani novel and female characters from selected novels. The

Eighth chapter deals solely with female writers and female characters from selected novels. These characters, confined within the four walls of their homes, bring forth all the questions and conflicts in the minds of women, revealing sentiments and emotions which male writers have either failed to understand or have otherwise ignored. The Ninth and last chapter concludes the argument with an overall review of Urdu novel, with special focus on the eastern woman and female character representation in Urdu novel.