

Top five picks on fiction for WOMEN'S DAY

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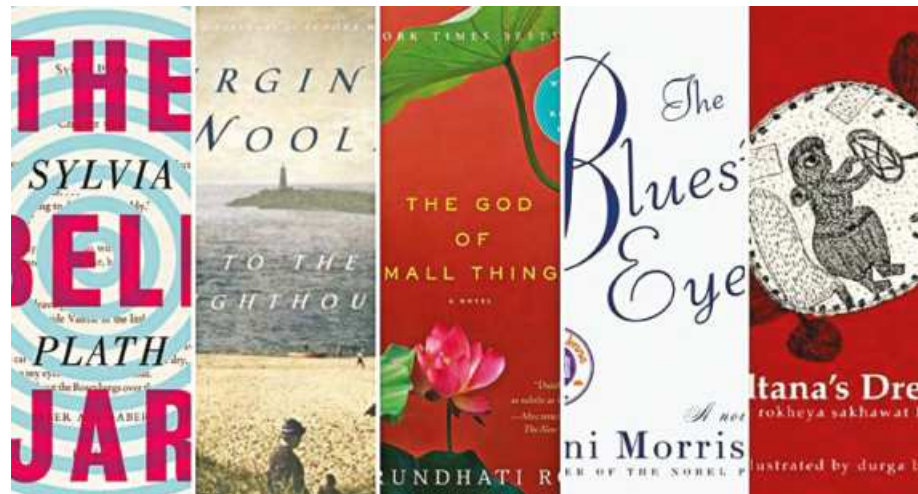
"Women and fiction remain so far as I'm concerned unresolved problems" -- words by Virginia Woolf, a woman making wonders in the world of fiction. As we embark upon this year's women's day we are bound to explore the biases and challenges of gender roles under the theme of #ChoosetoChallenge.

Here are our top picks for the day -- fictions that helped in identifying and portraying the gender-based biases and the challenges women faced for centuries.

The Bell Jar- Sylvia Plath

A semi-autobiographical fiction from Sylvia Plath and considered the female counterpart of J.D Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye" by some. As the protagonist Esther, a young intelligent writer struggles in a world of glamour, the novel puts Esther in a desirable position, any young woman her age would've craved. However, she soon realised that she felt disconnected in their presence and in understanding their world and desires. Throughout the novel, she uses an ironic tone to describe her helpless state.

Like Plath's other works, the realities of mental illness get into the context in this novel. One cannot but connect it to



Sylvia Plath's death a month after the novel got published. Was it a cry for help on her part? One can only assume as she pioneered the confessional style of storytelling. The typical societal norms for women troubled her deeply which resulted in building characters who face these as well, making it a magnificent piece of writing in a more casual manner, more fit for post-modern readers.

To The Lighthouse- Virginia Woolf

"To The Lighthouse" is centred around the Ramsay family and their desired location, the "lighthouse", symbolising a place of hope and comfort.

Different perspectives of the characters' minds pop out in the storytelling. This gives its readers the conflict between "Lily" and "Mrs Ramsay" as they shared different views regarding the role of women -- throughout the novel Mrs Ramsay tried different ways to convince her daughter,

Lily to get married. However, Lily focused on her painting that she began.

Woolf spent her entire lifetime devoting herself to feminist writing. The character of Lily resembles closely herself and through which she explored the idea of art and creation.

The Bluest Eye- Toni Morrison

Written from a young African-American girl's point of view and her desire to have "blue eyes," The Bluest Eye is a tragic and heart-breaking story dealing with racial issues, rape and abuse.

Morrison challenged the beauty standards that African-Americans had to deal with constantly and showed what the consequences of idealising white beauty can lead towards. It did shift towards more dark subject matters and showed the type of abuse and racial oppression black women faced.

Morrison wrote this novel keeping the

historic context of the Great Depression and the second wave of feminism in mind. Through this novel she was able to show the plight of black women who were being doubly oppressed by both black and white men, making this book a revolutionary in black feminist literature.

The God of Small Things- Arundhati Roy

A novel set in Ayemenem, Kerala, dealing with several issues and feminism being an important aspect of it, The God of Small Things is a novel that showcases the plight of the sub-continental woman like no other. The portrayal of "Ammu", gave us a clear picture of how a divorced woman is treated in our sub-continental society.

This is an intricately personal story on the writer's part, that goes way beyond just that and also reflects the social and political reality involving class and caste hierarchy.

Sultana's Dream- Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

A short story written in 1905, in a time when religious morality and strict purdah was maintained in Bengal, Sultana's Dream is a jaw-dropping fiction describing a utopian society where women ruled the country and men were banished in mardanas.

In a time when women's education was considered unimportant, Begum Rokeya portrayed "Lady Land" as a place where women's education is a must. Her using the image of a woman without purdah is also ground-breaking for a time when anyone not maintaining a strict purdah was frowned upon.

This was a piece of fiction way ahead of its time, which helped it remain fresh and relevant to this day.

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