

WOMEN IN TRANSITION IN THE WORKS OF INDIAN ENGLISH WOMEN WRITERS: DEFYING CONSERVATIVE NORMS

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Abstract

Indian English women writers have given a new facet to the Indian literature through novels, poetry and short stories. Women novelists have included the persistent female experiences in their writings. Indian women are silent victims dictated by patriarchal and global norms of oppression and suppression but images in the contemporary fiction have undergone a categorical transformation from portrayals of self-sacrificing women towards self-asserting and self-defining women within the broader framework of social sphere and multiple identities. It is refreshing to see in these novels a realistic portrayal of issues central to women's status and identity and a constant craving on the part of women protagonists for widening the horizons of their existence and action from domestic to societal ground. These writers portray a confrontation and a persistent battle of women in this patriarchal society. Their women characters struggle against the social structure framed for women. Whether it is the journey for self-discovery or questioning the customary and conventional roles, she confronts to each and every odd situation. If she faces disparities she does not get hesitated to go beyond domestic boundaries. The women presented in the recent female writings seem to question everything that binds or confines their dreams, desires and aspirations.

Keywords: Patriarchy, self-discovery, transition, identity.

In the past, the work by the Indian women authors has always been underestimated due to some patriarchal conjecture. The priorities have always been given to the male writers and their experiences in our Indian society. Earlier women used to write about a woman's insight

and understanding within the enclosed domestic arena. This used to be neglected by most of the male writers. In contrast, male authors used to deal with weighty themes which were given great importance. Consequently, it was believed that their work is worth and must be given main concern and recognition in the society. However, in the current circumstances Indian English women writings have developed and it took several years to be recognized globally. Owing to the efforts of several eminent women writers the Indian English writing is accepted and acknowledged worldwide. The credit of making Indian writing in English globally recognized goes to those women writers who are the promoters of the rich Indian tradition in their stories. Indian writing in English started in the mid of nineteenth century and with the passage of time, Indian English writing has observed numerous transformations in the writing patterns. In the 19th century, more and more women energetically involved themselves in freedom movement of India against the British rule. It also gave encouragement to the women's writing. Earlier their writings were limited to the country's freedom struggle but later the world of feminist beliefs began to persuade the Indian English writing of India.

Indian English women writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. This great poetess enchanted the readers with her writings. Feminism themes have also been used by authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta. Regional fiction theme has been suitably used by Kamala Das and Anita Nair. Novelists like Kamala Mrkandaya and Anita Desai portrayed the strength of Indian cultures and its traditional values. During the 1990's India became a popular literary nation as a number of women authors came to light during this time. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Suniti Namjoshi used pragmatism as central theme of their novels. The list of Indian women novelists also includes prominent names such as Bharati Mukherjee, Namita Gokhale, Ruth Jhabvala, Dina Mehta, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more. They are acknowledged for the modern approach in their novels. The novels of authors like Namita Gokhale or Shobha De are really candid. Most of these female novelists are known for their open views which are portrayed in their novels. Mainly, these are the novels of protest and confrontations towards reservations and patriarchy. Different from the past, where the works of women novelists were given less concern and were in fact underestimated, categorization of feministic or male writings barely makes any logic today. Majority of the Indian readers contains both male and female. They read the novels of the Indian women authors with certain hope. They expect some Indianness in their writings. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way.

In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as an influential standard of modernization and feminist declaration. The last two decades have seen unexpected success in feminist writings of Indian English writing:

The work of Indian women writers is significant in making the society aware of the women's needs and demands in providing a medium for self expression and assertion. Traditionally, the work of Indian women has been underrated and devalued on mere assumption about the superior worth of the male. Majority of the contemporary Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande have focused on the psychological sufferings, oppressions of the frustrated housewife whose only option was to suppress the storm within, the inevitable existential predicament of women in a male dictated society. The neglected women as characters in their novel attempt for better way of life mentally and physically (Sarangi and Mukherjee 19).

Today's modern women and their novels contain the most recent very strong issues associated with women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long. These books are comprehensively enjoyed by a large mass and the publishers are also making easy money due to them. The brave and unconventional topics are selected by modern women writers which is the prime cause of their survival. The candidness as well as openness has occurred in the writings of Indian English women writers. Their writings give a sight of the unfamiliar female consciousness, which has no accessibility. The popular novels represent the psychological predicament of the disturbed housewife and the women remain in four walls.

In the beginning though their efforts did not attain a huge success and even they faced struggle to establish themselves among prominent race of writers. But with the passage of time they excelled in this profession and demonstrated the image of an emerging and struggling woman with no clearly defined path or destiny and hence the usual share of pain, anguish, sorrow, conflicts and the humility to accept failures. In the contemporary novels the most important aspect which is portrayed by these women writers they try to project different hues of women through myriad roles, desires and images, awareness of her rights and responsibilities, sometimes falling prey to the shine of modern life, at other times effectively resisting against traditional constraints and yet other times walk ahead with all her restrictions to an unidentified and unfathomed path of realizing her full prospective as an independent human being:

She sought to break down the rigid conventions, that restraint her self-development, to accept the challenges with boldness and patience. A tough battle is before her. But she is

not disheartened. The change is taking place at a slower pace, till now the struggle is on and will continue for many years till she acquires equality on all bases (Nimavat 27). Rather than depicting any homogenous, confining or essential image of a new woman the contemporary women writers portray the different shades of women through countless roles, wishes and descriptions, consciousness of her human rights and responsibilities. She confronts against social structures like patriarchy and hegemony of male dominating society. "The image of women in recent writings has undergone a sea change. Women writers have moved away from the traditional, age old portrayal of self-sacrificing women towards conflicting female protagonists searching for identity and self respect" (Sarangi and Mukherjee 21).

Since long, feminism has been used by the women novelists. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that she is not helpless and is not dependent. They feel that a woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today, a woman has also become economically independent and she is not only restricted to family works. The women of modern era think on different lines and that is what is depicted in the novels of the Indian women authors. These facts are included by the women writers. Indian women writers discover the feminine subjectivity and relate the theme that ranges from childhood to entire womanhood. Through their novels they spread the message of what in reality feminism is, which in reality is very broad. These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in stillness.

Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the main theme of their books. For instance, some of the novels of Anita Desai like 'Voices in the City' and 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?' she has portrayed the complexities between a man and woman association. She has tried to discover the psychological aspects of the lead protagonists. The women novelists try to create awareness that this is the time to declare with definite accuracy. The women writers are doing very well and their contribution is immense. Marriage is not a hurdle in their career for them like in earlier days. Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* writes that "Marriage today still retains this traditional form. And, first of all, it is imposed far more imperiously on the girl than on young man" (455). The new woman depicted in the literature of these women writers refuses to give up before the conservative forces of treatment and subjugation as well as to the forces which only counts her as an object and tries to exploit her. She has made her own independent path which could eventually enable her to guide a confident and balanced life. She favours in its

place to declare her independence by challenging the definite social and family norms and structures, be it marriage, wifehood, motherhood or the larger questions related to her liberty, freedom and recognition of her social and intellectual pursuits.

Modern woman depicted in the Indian English Women writings seem to be a product of the rapid transformation and intense disturbing taking place in the society due to various struggles for women's independence and empowerment and new awareness arising out of modern learning, knowledge and alertness. This deep feeling and new realization has taken place after the several years of continuous fight by the feminists. Bell Hooks in his book *Feminism is for Everybody* says, "Feminist movement gained momentum when it found its way into the academy. In classrooms all over the nation young minds were able to learn about feminist thinking, read the theory, and use it in their academic explorations"(20-21). Earlier the images of Indian women portrayed as subaltern class and they were depicted as silent victims dictated by patriarchal and global norms of oppression and suppression, images in the contemporary fiction have undergone a categorical transformation from portrayals of self-sacrificing women towards self-asserting and self-defining women within the broader framework of social sphere and multiple identities.

It is inspirational to see in modern Indian English Women writings a realistic portrayal of issues central to woman's position and identity and a steady longing on the part of women protagonists for enlarging the horizons of their survival and action from domestic to societal ground. Be it the journey for self-discovery or challenging the traditional and conventional roles and disparities or the urge to beat marital limits, the women presented in the recent female writings seem to question everything that binds or confines their dreams, desires and aspirations, though their attempts do not always meet with success and sometimes even land them up in utter chaos and anarchy. It is the image of an emerging and struggling woman with no clearly defined path or destiny and hence the usual share of pain, anguish, sorrow, conflicts and the humility to accept failures. But over and above everything, the most significant aspect in these contemporary novels is that rather than depicting any homogenous, confining or essential image of a new woman, they try to project her various roles, aspirations and images, conscious of her rights and responsibilities, sometimes falling victim to the glitter of modern life, at other times successfully breaking through the traditional barriers and yet other times marching ahead with all her limitations to an unknown and unfathomed path of realizing her full potential as an independent human being.

Contemporary Indian English Women writers have a feminist approach in their writings and their works are written to show the perception of women. Their writings exhibit the confrontation of women against patriarchy and social norms set for them. The feminist always tries to refurbish the images of the woman and make it glorified. One clear characteristic among all the contemporary women writers in Indian writings in English is the revolutionary strength with which they endeavour to write. It is an eruption of unexpressed feelings that has long been gathered within them. Women writers have proved their substance to be more serious and that which requires awareness. They manage things capably by balancing tradition and womanhood in their writings.

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