



Impact on Society by Indian Women English Writer

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Abstract:

Traditionally, the work of Indian Women Writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. The factors contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women writers have observed no domestic space. The Indian women's perceptions of their aspirations and expectations are within the framework of Indian social and moral commitments. Indian Women Writers in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-a-vis their regional counterpart's. Since proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intellectual, affluent, educated classes, a frequent judgement is made that the writers, and their works, belong to a high social strata, and are cut off from the reality of Indian life.

As, ChamanNahal writes about feminism in India:

"Both the awareness of woman's position in society as one of disadvantage or in generality compared with that of man and also a desire to remove those is advantages."

The majority of these novels depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife, this subject matter often being considered superficial compared to the depiction of the repressed and oppressed lives of women of the lower classes that we find in regional authors writing in Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, and other native languages. Indian writing in English is now gaining ground rapidly. In the realm of fiction, it has heralded a new era and has earned many laurels both at home and abroad. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hands of man. They have shown their worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it even today without any hurdle.

Introduction:

English education was introduced to India in the nineteenth century, serving as an ideological force behind social reform and control. There was an imperial mission of educating colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that in the long run served to strengthen western cultural hegemony.

The establishment of English colleges in India led to the creation of an English-educated, and predominantly Hindu, elite, who eventually became critical of both their own religious orthodoxies, such as the caste system and child brides, and of British rule. The British-style education also had the effect of linking Indian writers to literary traditions of the West, enabling Indian writers writing in English to reach an audience in Europe as well as in India.

In the nineteenth century, both progressive and orthodox reformers supported female education in India, believing that social evils could be eliminated through education. However, the concept of education was limited to producing good homemakers and perpetuating orthodox ideology, as women were believed to support the traditional values of Indian society. Christian missionaries and British rulers, especially in Bengal where the British had made their first inroads in the mid-nineteenth century, started girls' schools, and in the 1880s, Indian women started to graduate from universities. The vast majority of girls, however, did not attend school, as education for women was mainly confined to the larger towns and cities.

The English language in India

Many critics see the use of the English language in India as one among many postcolonial mimic activities, resulting from the imposition of the English language as a part of British colonialist intervention in Indian education, language and literature. In India, some critics see the hegemony of English language and literature as a form of continuing cultural imperialism. Others argue that the widespread use, prestige, and expansion of English in India in recent decades are attributable to the post-war hegemony of the United States rather than to the British Empire, that is, its growing global currency as a medium of communication.

However, the English language can alienate a text from its culture of origin, a view put forward by the Indian author ShashiDeshpande. She bases her argument on the idea that the English language is in some ways harmful to Indian culture not because it is the language of the ex-colonizers, but because it has become the language of the privileged, elite classes in India. She admits that when she writes in English she is aware that her work will reach out to only a few English-speaking readers, most of whom will be thinking the way she does. The problem is that if an author writes in English with the purpose of changing social traditions, the language excludes the women whose involvement is most needed, English having no place in those women's daily lives. Another problem is the fact that writing in English also means using a language which most, or at least many, of one's characters do not speak. However, for many Indian authors English is no more than the medium through which they express themselves, and through which they can reach an international audience.

Today, the works of KamlaMarkandaya, NayantaraSahgal, Anita Desai, GeethaHariharan, ShashiDeshpande, Kiran Desai and ManjuKapur, Arundhati Roy and many more have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English. A major development in modern Indian fiction is the growth of a feminist or women centered approach, that seeks to project and interpret experience, from the point of a feminine consciousness and sensibility.

As Patricia Meyer Specks remarks,

"There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries."

Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity. The theme is from childhood to womanhood-developed society respecting women in general. Santha Rama Rau's 'Remember for the House,' (1956), Ruth PravarJhabvala's first novel 'To whom she will', 1955 and her later novel 'Heat and Dust' (1975)', KamlaMarkandya's 'Two Virgins' (1994), Rama Mehta's 'Inside the Haveli' (1977), and Gaeta Hariharan 'The Thousand Faces of Night (1992)' are some of the leading women writers writing in Indian English literature. The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring self-sacrificing women, towards conflicts, female characters searching for identity; no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. A major preoccupation in recent Indian women's writing has been a delineation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. In a culture where individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the woman's role at home is a central focus. It is interesting to note the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural displacement. Women's presentation is more assertive, more liberated in their view and more articulate in their expression than the woman of the past .

Some Prominent Feminist Women writers in India

1. ShashiDeshpande's writing

ShashiDeshpande is the second daughter of the famous Kannada dramatist in Karnataka and Sanskrit Scholar Shriranga. She did a graduation in Journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Mumbai and worked for a couple of months as a journalist for the magazine 'On Looker'. Her first novel 'The Dark Holds No Terror' was published in June 1999. She is a winner of the Sahitya Akademi award, for her novel 'That long silence'. Her third famous novel is 'Roots and Shadows'. She has projected objectively a new female face with subjective experiences with a geocentric vision. She reflects on the problems and concerns of the middle class Indian women. Her writings are rooted in the culture in which she lives. Her remarks are sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences and give an artistic expression to something that is simple and mundane. Her feminism is particularly Indian in the sense that it is borne out of the predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities. The women characters are with traditional approaches trying to tie family and profession to maintain the virtues of Indian culture. ShashiDeshpande's novel 'A Matter of time' is a continuation of her exploration into the many facts of the feminine experience in writing. In this novel, she has displayed the themes of silence, gender differences, passive sufferings and familiar relationships into much deeper realms. It is a story encompassing three generations of women coming to terms with their life in and all female worlds. The relation women characters share with their men is homered with silence, absence or indifference. The pain of disintegration of the family troubles

Aru, who consider herself for her father's action and sets out to undo it. It is in this stifling atmosphere the characters evolve and come to a newer understanding of their lives. The role of fury and destiny are playing as main themes around which Deshpande weaves her tale.

The underlying theme in ShashiDeshpande's novels is human relationships especially the ones that exist between father and daughter, husband and wife, between mother and daughter. In all relationships, the women occupy the central stage and significantly, the narration shifts through her feminine consciousness. In her novels, three types of suffering women characters reoccur with subtle changes. The first type belongs to the protagonist's mother or the mother figure, the traditional woman, who believes that her place is with her husband and family. The second type of woman is bolder more self- reliant and rebellious. She cannot confirm to mythological, submissive and surrender vision of womanhood. As radical feminist, ideology expressed, for example, Sarah's friend Nathan in the 'Dark Holds No Terror'.

2. Arundhati Roy's Writings

The other famous and renowned novelist under the study is Arundhati Roy, born in 1961 in Bengal. Arundhati grew up in Kerala; she trained herself as an architect at the Delhi school of Architecture but abandoned it in between. She believes that,

"A feminist is a woman who negotiates herself into a position where she has choices."

The International community knows Arundhati Roy as an artist with her debut novel 'The God of Small Things.' 'The God of small things' won Britain's premier Booker prize, the Booker McConnell in 1997. Roy is the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to have won this prize. Roy's major essays 'The End of Imagination' and 'The Greater common good' are available online. She is between the two Indian writers writing in English 7 who has won the Booker Prize(the other one being Salman Rushdie for his 'Midnight Children'.) Arundhati has never admitted that she is a feminist but 'The God of Small Things', reveals at many places her feminist stance and her protagonist represent feminine sensibility

Roy seems to be iconoclast in, 'The God of Small Things'. The stylistic innovations make the novel unique and bring vitality and exuberance to the novel. The novel is unique in every aspect and it is a linguistic experiment with the English language. The stylistic writings include the use of words, phrases and even sentences from vernacular language, use of italics, subject less sentences, faulty spellings ,topicalisation, deviation from normal word order, single word 'sentences,' change of word classes, clustering of word classes and a variety of other techniques. She has given prominence to ecology and subalternity as the major themes in the novel. Roy's close observations and the minute aspects in the creation of her literary skills are observed in her other works. Her two important articles on the net are 'The end of Imagination' and 'The Greater Common Good.' In the End of Imagination, Roy criticises nuclear policies of the Government of India.

3. Anita Desai's Writings

Anita Desai, the other great novelist of the Indian English fiction was born in 1937. Anita Desai is unquestionably one of the celebrated Indian - English fiction writers. She holds a unique place among the contemporary women novelists of India. She has to her credit a large number of creative works and a coherently growing readership throughout the world. She has published ten novels and other literary works of immense value. Anita Desai's women characters in her novels rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on their lives. They take the position of outsiders to fight and criticize those cultural ideologies that come in their way of becoming free individuals, self – chosen withdrawal, for these women, takes on the form a weapon for survival in a patriarchal community. Desai's women, thus, want freedom within the community of men and women , as it is the only way that will succeed in fulfilling them In fact, Desai's model of an emancipated woman , Bimala in the novel *Clear Light Of Day*, is an unmarried woman. Her married women characters like Maya in *Cry, a Peacock*, Monisha in *The City*, Nanda in *Fire in the Mountain*, and Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Become depressed, violent or self-destructive. They either lose their sanity or kill others, or they kill or destroy themselves. The nemesis of these women is not a private one but an outgrowth of the complex social context, immediate family environments and the relationships with their men. Many of Desai's protagonists are portrayed as single women. Desai does not neglect the institution of marriage or support alienation from society. Some of her women characters, like Tara in '*Clear Light of Day*', do achieve fulfilment in their marriages Instead, through Bimala, Desai points to a kind of feminist emancipation that lies in not limiting women to their traditional roles but in expanding and awakening them to several other possibilities. Their kind of life, apart from being invigorating, also frees them from dependence on men.

As Anita Desai says,

"I don't think anybody's exile from society can solve any problem. I think the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one's individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and a lack of belonging."

Anita Desai's first novel, '*Cry, The Peacock*' is concerned with its chief protagonist Maya's psychological problems. As a young sensitive woman, Maya wish to love and to live. She makes up the mind of her father, Gautama who is much older than she is. Maya is haunted constantly by the rationalistic approach of her husband to the affairs of life. Maya loves Gautama passionately and desires to be loved in return; but Gautama's coldness disappoints her. The root of the entire novel lies in the prophecy of albino astrologer, who creates a fear psychosis in Maya's mind. Anita Desai works on revealing the varying mental states, psychic observations, inner motives and existential pursuits of man. She succeeds fully in breaking non-grounds for her fictional art among her contemporary while dealing with the predicament of man and his social and moral dilemmas.

A new form of writing Novels:

Whenever a new form of writing emerges, there are a lot of changes in the society which influences it. For example, when the form of 'novel' came into the literary canon in the eighteenth century, it wasn't just the form which emerged but it represented a whole lot of people who thought the way a 'realistic' protagonist in the novel did. In Britain, the shift from epics to novels came gradually as more and more people from the working classes and women started reading. This could be related to the growing economy where goods started being available in the market, which meant that women didn't have to produce those goods at home, giving them a lot of luxury time. Reading was also considered a luxury and to show off their wealth, the aristocratic men gave a lot of free time to their women. It slowly became a status symbol. However, when women and the working class started reading, the novels had to be about something they understood. They needed a more vernacular language and a much easier content without fancied language and techniques. Result of these numerous political and social changes was the emergence of novel. The novel now had a simplistic approach and authors wrote about people from daily lives. The Indian context too has witnessed critically acclaimed novelists who brilliantly mentioned about the Indian society and showing its realistic face. One such novel which mentions about the reality of a poet's life is Anita Desai's *In Custody*. The novel was immensely popular and won The Booker's Prize as well. A Bollywood movie too, was based on this novel. In 1993, her novel *In Custody* was adapted by *Merchant Ivory Productions* into an English film by the same name, directed by Ismail Merchant, with a screenplay by Shahrukh Husain. It won the 1994 President of India Gold Medal for Best Picture and stars Shashi Kapoor, Shabana Azmi and Om Puri.

A number of women novelists have arrived on the literary scenes, they have set out making new forays into the world of women. The fiction of the nineties is dominated by women writers like Gita Mehta, Shobha De, Gita Hariharan, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukharjee, Kamala Das, Mahasweta Devi etc. among others. Mahasweta Devi, winner of Padmashree and Sahitya Academy Award, is not professedly a feminist. In her novels, the fight is not against male chauvinism, but men and women fight shoulder to shoulder against a common foe—the establishment. Her female characters symbolize abundance and motherhood. From the grueling poverty of village life, these women emerge as sources of simple strength and indomitable rural courage to their men. Some of them become legends in their lifetime.

Conclusion: the changing image of women in Indian fiction

The Hindu moral code known as The Laws of Manu denies woman an existence apart from that of her husband or his family, and since the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* in 1864 a significant number of authors have portrayed Indian women as long-suffering wives and mothers silenced by patriarchy. The ideal of the traditional, oppressed woman persisted in a culture permeated by religious images of virtuous goddesses devoted to their husbands, the Hindu goddesses

Sita and Savitri serving as powerful cultural ideals for women. In mythical terms, the dominant feminine prototype is the chaste, patient, self-denying wife, Sita, supported by other figures such as Savitri, Draupadi and Gandhari. When looking at these narratives silence/speech can be a useful guide to interpreting women's responses to patriarchal hegemony. Silence is a symbol of oppression, a characteristic of the subaltern condition, while speech signifies self-expression and liberation.

The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980s onwards assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood.

Recent writers depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to one ideal. The novels emerging in the twenty-first century furnish examples of a whole range of attitudes towards the imposition of tradition, some offering an analysis of the family structure and the caste system as the key elements of patriarchal social organization. They also re-interpret mythology by using new symbols and subverting the canonic versions. In conclusion, the work of Indian women writers is significant in making society aware of women's demands, and in providing a medium for self-expression and, thus, re-writing the History of India.