

Reflection of Women in the Writings of Indian Women Novelists

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Abstract

Indian Women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity and raises their voice against subjugation of women, gender discrimination, sexual autonomy, the cultural conditioning, the pattern of marriage of the system of male chauvinism present in the society and the unutilized potential of women character in order to establish an identity. Indian women novelist have carved out an immortal place for herself in the annals, not only of Indo-Anglian but of whole English Literature.

Keywords: Indian Women novelists, marriage, human relationship, self-identity and cultural conditioning.

Fictions by Women Writers contribute major segment of the contemporary Indian Writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basic of discussions. Indian Women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. In the mid-nineteenth century, more women started to write in English. They have incorporated the recurring female experience in their writing and it affected the cultural and language pattern of Indian literature. In the past, the works by the Indian women novelist have always been undervalued because of some patriarchal assumption. In those days women used to write about women's perception and experience within the enclosed domestic arena. On the other hand male writers used to deal with heavy themes.

In the nineteenth century, more and more women actively participated in India's reformist movement against the British rule. It again led to the women literature. In the 20th century women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. Today is the generation of those women whose novels consists of the latest burning issue related with women as well as those issues that exists in the society since long. They describe the whole world of women with simply stunning frankness

Novelists like Anita Desai, Kamala Markanadya, Nayantara, Sahgal, Ruth Prwar, Shobha De and Manju Kapur have portrayed woman as an individual rebelling

against the traditional role, breaking the silence of suffering, trying to move out of the caged existence and asserting the individual self. This woman is trying to be herself and yet does not wish to break up the family ties. The New woman suffers from many weaknesses and impediments. New awareness or identity alienates a woman from her man. Meena Shirwadkar observes:

An aspect of new woman - women protagonists project an image of Indian woman like a frustrated woman, angry wife, in the process of asserting her individuality, may leave the family or turn to another man other than husband, thus shattering the prime rule of chastity in the individual code. (77)

Anita Desai is one of renowned Indian English novelist who have tried to understand closely the state or condition of her female characters. The most prominent themes in all her novels are the hazards and complexities of man-woman relationships and the establishing of individualism. The novel Cry, the Peacock expresses Maya's desire to live life to its full but as soon as she moves away from the protection of her father, the harsh realities of life bewilder her. Excessive father-daughter love and Maya's cry for love and understanding in her loveless marriage with Gautama is portrayed in the novel. In Voices in the City, Monisha also suffers from feelings of emptiness within as well as without and she sets herself afire to reach the core of intense feeling. Her relationship with her husband is characterized only by loneliness and lack of communication. Monisha finds her life a virtual imprisonment as there is no escape for her and finds one's identity as meaningless. Sarah, Adit Sen's English wife in Bye-Bye Blackbird, wants sincerity and emotional equilibrium in life. She revolted against parental authority and married an Indian and Sarah has to pay a heavy price for marrying Adit. To maintain peace and order in the house, she prefers not to argue with Adit. Fire on the Mountain takes a step ahead in voicing the multifarious aspects of the tortured life of a woman. The novelist reveals the social, economic and personal problems of women through the protagonists - Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ila Das who are correspondingly analyzed for their respective search for "self" for they seek the security and fulfillment

of love in society. Thus, Desai is primarily concerned with the fate of married woman in Indian society and their protest mostly turns into frustration, loneliness and detachment as their search for identity never ends due their human relationships in which they get entangled.

Kamala Markandaya's novels successfully described the problems and plights, yearnings and aspirations, failures and weakness of the women character who are represent as ideal Indian woman. In *Nectar In A Sieve*, shows the parent-child relationship between Rukmani and her parents in a very touching manner and also a husband-wife relation of Nathan -Rukmani facing the challenges of life strongly and patiently where Rukmani act as the backbone strength of Nathan in the time of disorder and chaos. *A Silence of Desire* projects the impact of silence on the human relation particularly husband-wife in different arena considering the sensibilities and complexities of the relationships of Sarojini and Dandekar . Hence, the theme of Kamala Markandaya's novels analyzed their intricacies rather comprehensively mutual fulfillment and growth depends upon deep understanding of each other and loving each other. Her novels also help the readers in understanding certain basic problems of life in a rather better manner in order to explain and analyse human relation.

Nayantara Sahgal is a champion of the Indian woman's quest for self-fulfillment and various other issues associated with it. In *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal explores the place of a woman in Indian society before marriage, through the character of Nita. Nita is the young beautiful daughter of Dr. Narang. He is a queer blend of Eastern and Western cultures but he treats his daughter in the most traditional manner. He imposes severe restrictions on the movement of his ambitious daughter. Later her parents do allow her to take up a job, but for a very different reason. Kalyan, a Minister, had offered the job and they simply didn't have the heart to refuse a Minister's offer. But Nita looks for something more than merely a job; she strives for independence and her individual identity. In *A Time to be Happy*, Maya endeavours to flutter her wings for a flight of her own, though heavily pressed down by the taboos and conventions of orthodox Hindu society. The novelist shows Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* suffers immensely because of the duplicitous and callous attitude of Inder but her revolt is directed towards Inder and not towards marriage. Simrit in *The Day in Shadow* experiences more misery and unhappiness in marriage. Nayantara Sahgal through in her writings shows the suppression of women is due to the fact that man wants to keep power in his hands and the women's quest for self-fulfillment implies

a challenged to a rebellion against man's power.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala mostly deals in her novels with the theme of marriage in Indian scenario and domestic or social problems faced by Indian middle-class women even in the post-independent era. In her first novel *To Whom She Will*, Amrita and Hari, the two major characters show the contrasting opinions about the institution of the arranged marriage. The central theme of the novel is arranged versus romantically based marriages. In the end of the story Hari marries Sushila- the girl chosen for him by his family and Amrita marries Krishna Sen Gupta, of her own choice. In *Esmond in India* Jhabvala has introduced the theme of mixed marriage and also demonstrating a clash between traditionalism and modernism. Gulab, a beautiful Indian girl gets engaged to Amrit, Esmond is an Englishman stays as a guide for tourists in India. But as both Gulab and Esmond like each other they got married. In the initial phase of their married life, they appear as a happy couple but later on Esmond behavior turns rude and cruel to his wife. Gulab opinions as regards to an ideal marriage are headlong when she gets a clash with her husband. *The Householder* totally revolves around the conjugal life of the newly married couple Prem and Indu who get united in the wedlock of arranged matrimony. Thus, the matter of obedience or oppression in the matrimonial has also been artistically presented in Jhabvala's novel whether it is arranged or love marriage.

Being a woman, Shobha De is more interested in the predicaments of women. She presents the vital reality and makes us aware of the miseries of women and injustices done to them by their counterparts in the patriarchal society. The central theme of the novels of Shobha De is realistic picture of the plight and predicament of suffering women who have to bear the brunt of male domination. Her women characters are always seen searching for their individual identities. De's protagonists are not meek and submissive for example Karuna and Anjali in *Socialite Evenings*. *Starry Nights* depicts Aasha Rani's suffering due to exploitation by men and her dissertation her husband Jay. In spite of a number of horrible experiences of sexual exploitation and humiliations she is not discouraged and disheartened . Finally, she overcomes all the cruel realities of life and joins her family at Madras with her own identity and new existence. *Sisters* deals with the themes of family especially the sister relation , self-assertion and marriage. It is the story of the two sisters relations, Mikki and Alisha, daughters of Seth Hiralal. Mikki herself gets trapped in marriage with Binny Malhotra who is a true representative of patriarchal system The fall of Mikki is complete when finally her

husband Binny Malhotra goes in for a divorce. Strange Obsession is a masterpiece by Shobha De. The story revolves around the lesbian relationship between the two women called Minx and Amrita. The lesbian relationship between Amrita and Minx shows the emerging reality of the new modern woman who finds sexual satisfaction with persons of the same gender. De's novels represent the new Indian woman's voice. A 'New woman' is in search of self-identity, seeking liberation in all walks of life, replacing the traditional image of Indian woman. The need for women to seek their identity is message in her novels.

Manju Kapur occupies a unique position among her contemporary as the foremost Chronicles of feminism in India Kapur, has penned down five novels. Kapur's novels depict the plight of women, their struggle for basic rights, their quest for identity and survival. With education they become aware of their self-reliance. She has basically written about women, their marriage, and life thereafter. Her female protagonists are caged in the prison of marriage and human relationship and are trying to fly freely in the society. Although they struggle immensely but their wings are cut with the sword of tradition and norms. Manju Kapur's first novel *Difficult Daughters* is a tale of protagonists struggle for career and identity against the dominant ideology of domesticity. She realistically depicts women of three generations focusing on *Virmati*. It is a story of a woman torn between family duty, the desire of education and illicit love. *A Married Woman* explores Astha's longing for a purpose in her life other than being a wife and mother against a vividly realized backdrop of Indian sectarian politics and deals with lesbianism. *Home* deals with Nisha's search for a home which is a search for a place for shelter and security. Nisha acts as a rebel and takes up the path of economic independence which she is sure will lead to her liberation and assertion of her individuality. In the novel, *The Immigrant*, Kapur explores the special challenges faced by immigrant wives, like that of Nina and the way a young woman's life already pressured in professional and reproductive terms becomes even more impossible balancing act inside a foreign culture. Her next novel *Custody*, depicts the theme of marital discourse and disintegration of family through the couples like Raman-Shagun and Suryakant- Ishita. Manju Kapur in her novels highlights the inner turmoil and sufferings of the females of the urban middle-class family who are struggling to establish themselves with their own independent identities in the patriarchal set up of which they are part and parcel.

Thus, a variety of shades of women's mind and plight are

reflected through Indian women novelists. Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity and raises their voice against subjugation of women, gender discrimination, sexual autonomy, the cultural conditioning of the system of male chauvinism present in the society and the unutilized potential of women character in order to establish an identity. According to Chris Weedon, "The nature of femininity and masculinity is one of the key sites of discursive struggle for the individual....The struggle which begins at birth and which is central to upbringing and education" (Weedon:98).

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as the silent sufferer and upholder of the tradition and traditional values of family and as the society has undergone a tremendous change and is no longer presented as a passive character. The fight for individual autonomy remains an unfinished combat. As Sarla Palkar remarks that these are the, "Victims of patriarchy and also of their own silence." (Palkar:163) Indian Women novelists depicts the struggles of their protagonists who oscillate between tradition and modernity, duty and desires, family and self, suppression and independence. The woman characters are subjected to internal conflict which is a continuous procedure to her conditioning which is challenged by education and experience. They face external oppression from patriarchal forces that oppose formal education, job or marriage of one's choice. They make all efforts to assert themselves. Indian women novelists have carved out an immortal place for herself in the annals, not only of Indo-Anglian but of whole English Literature.

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