

Literary Scapes of Urban India in the selected fiction of Nikita Singh

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Abstract

With the turn of the millennium, it has been noticed that life has become fast-paced, from bullock carts to steam engines and from cars to bullet trains. Mirroring to this transition, one can notice that the Indian literature has transformed itself to go hand in hand with the modifications of the prevalent society. It is observed that there is a sudden surge in the writings of many accomplished women writers of India, who have announced themselves by their colloquial style of writing. Their predecessors canvassed their female protagonists as struggling individuals whose stories were generally woven around dull and dingy settings, such as old mansions of countryside, ancient villas, manor houses, etc. On the contrary, the Post-Millennial Indian women writers have brought a new flair not only to the thought process of the female protagonists, but also to the literary scapes of the asphalt jungle. This gives an ultra-modern look to the settings of the fictions, which assists in reaffirming the mindset of the characters. Another striking feature of their writings is the use of virtual space as a dwelling place of today's generation. All these aspects have been examined by the researchers in Post-Millennial Indian women writer, Nikita Singh's fictions - Love @ Facebook, Accidently in Love and After All this Time.

Keywords: Post-Millennial Indian women writers, story settings, literary scape of urban India, virtual space, Nikita Singh

The women writers of India have stood as the fourth pillar of the Indian Writing in English over a great span of time, right from its germination to its escalation into a Brobdingnagian structure. During the formative years of the Indian Writing in English, it was the young mind of Toru Dutt, which paved a new pathway for English novel in India and this legacy was shouldered by the latter generation of women writers, like Kamala Markendaya, Amrita Pritam and others. These writers wove the lives of their protagonists intricately depicting various colourful landscapes of India, stained with the horrors of partition and presented a tattered picture of the lives of Indian women in the divided land. Going ahead, the genre of novel writing got a changeover in the hands of Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Nair, etc., who painted a dull and stodgy image of the society. On the other hand, in the last two decades, a literary paradigm shift is seen in the

depiction of the story settings. Post-Millennial Indian women writers like Preeti Shenoy, Madhuri Banerjee, Nikita Singh, Saavi Sharma, Anuja Chauhan, Ira Trivedi, etc. have nailed the art of portraying urban scapes. In their writings, one can easily notice the wide spectrum of new vistas in the contemporary settings of Indian city life, which is vibrant and dynamic and equally visible in the personalities portrayed in the fictions.

Nikita Singh is one of the most known faces in the literary fraternity of the Post-Millennial era. She is a graduate in pharmacy from Indore, who moved to New York for a Masters in Fine Arts in creative writing. She has as many as 14 books in her kitty and she is one of the bestselling novelists of India in the current times. She is known for her reader-centric writing, which brings her novels close to the readers' hearts. Her fictions are like neighbourhood stories, which one can easily identify with. Through her writings, she paints a candid canvass of the present urban Indian scenario, which the readers easily resonate with. Her characters and their surroundings are painted with great simplicity and serenity. This leads the readers to get romanticised and sink into her skilfully penned scapes. Her candidness strums the strings of the readers' hearts and leave them craving for more such content from her.

In the present research paper entitled A Depiction of Literary Scapes of Urban India in the Selected Fictions of Nikita Singh, a Post-Millennial Indian Woman Writer, the researchers have tried to highlight the urbanised panorama of the story settings, which go in tandem with the female psyche of the protagonists. They are trying to shed light on the classic features of an Indian English fiction, which are depiction of beauty of the country and its culture and tradition, but now in a much modernized manner. The story-setting becomes a catalyst in propagating the diverse and rich culture of India, in spite of it being in its most modern age. The novels of this writer speak volumes about the liberated souls of today's female protagonists, who are shown as strong decision-making individuals as opposed to the old traditional marginalized ones.

In the fiction, Love @ Facebook (Singh), the story is woven around Vatsala Rathode, who is a 19-year-old college

student, who loves to mingle with her best friends, Ankit and Jaanvi. While Vatsala is fond of fast racing cars and is proud to be a citizen of Ranchi where Dhoni lives, she is just like any other small town girl, but not like the typical girls. Vatsala is seen at her college campus and canteen having fun with her friends. She is also seen in classroom attending classes with her best friends. There are instances in the fiction which portray the perfect modern-day college culture. College campus is a perfect setting for today's generation. As the story goes ahead, we see Vatsala hanging out in the virtual alleys and encountering a strikingly handsome hunk over the Facebook platform and she seems to be completely smitten by him. A trail of messenger chats representing Vatsala's true self and also her hidden desires to woo this boy, Ronit Oberoi, a VJ, are seen floating throughout the fiction. It is a common trend these days that young people are seen hanging out in this virtual space sharing their minds and hearts to friends and to even strangers. Such virtual scapes have come out as a new literary scape, where characters are divulged and the story takes shape. It is evident how today's generation is dependent on the virtual world such as Facebook for their interpersonal interactions. In the real world, we see Vatsala and her friends going out shopping in busy market areas. This is where the youngsters love to move round. They find their solace in the humdrums of these market places. Similarly, the pub culture comes into picture. Young generation is full of energy and weekend parties mark as their life's inseparable part.

It is a hideout where they prefer to be as they celebrate the joy of their youth while drinking the potion of life. These scenarios are well displayed in this fiction, where Vatsala and her friends are seen enjoying at one such location. Also, weekend getaways are a favourite trend seen in the current times, which is another literary scape to escape from the daily hustle-bustle. The characters are seen going away from the routine to these beautiful outskirts for some respite and enjoyment in the lap of nature. The story settings are described in such a fluid manner that the readers get engrossed and get a feeling of being a part of the story, which is so close to life, relatable, hence enjoyable. Ultimately, after all the virtual and real world tussle, Vatsala ends up confessing her love towards her real world best friend, Ankit and finally giving up on her virtual world crush, Ronit.

In the next fiction, *Accidentally in Love* (Singh, *Accidentally*), a sequel to *Love @ Facebook*, we meet Chhavi Mukharjee, who is a model settled in Mumbai, struggling to get big banners in her kitty. The story begins in a studio apartment shared by Vatsala and her, which is a typical living scenario of a metro-life. We see both the girls working for

Metro News and the story setting here is not typical of what is seen in the traditional Indian English writings. The sets are not dull and gloomy, but full of life and light. Chhavi is a strong girl and knows how to keep her integrity intact when her self-respect is at stake. On one occasion, she encounters a certain casting couch producer, whom she bashes verbally and storms out proving her mettle. Later she meets a successful handsome photographer, Tushar and a steaming chemistry between the two begins there. In this fiction, the author has depicted lavish hotels and pubs where the couple dwells and spends their time together. She has also made a vivid description of the corporate offices and workplaces where Chhavi and Vatsala are seen doing their parts. Later in the story, Naitik Mittal surfaces as Chhavi's manager, a high-end perfectionist, who helps Chhavi build her career, but on his own terms. While the story takes its turns and twirls, the author steers the readers through a myriad of discos and pubs, such as Club Escape, where the protagonist is seen mingling with other characters. Here the metro life is delicately handled and the story then tiptoes to the strict ad-shoots where the models are supposed to give their best to be a part of the modelling world, else be thrown in the streets, unemployed. In this urban set-up, where alcohol and weed consumption is a common sight, Chhavi's story waltzes away to a no-strings-attached relationship with Tushar, which is the most common relationship status quo of today's generation. The couple is found spending their time going out for dinners at the Blue Frog hotel and later on spending time in their car and ending up in hotel rooms. They also take road trips to scenic natural surroundings, such as the one to the Powai Lake.

There also is an outrageous description of a high-end wedding reception where Chhavi is supposed to go where she would get a chance to meet many modelling industry people and root for new projects. We also see the protagonists touring the gym, trying to get fit, one of the most essential things in their to-do list. While Chhavi and Tushar are having a time of their lives, soon they are in a fix, trying to save their relationship, which is sabotaged by Tushar's project at Malaysia which warrants him to travel and stay there for the most part. Chhavi too struggles to make up her mind for staying separated from him for such a long time. Around the same time, we also see Vatsala and Ankit having a difficult time in their relationship, as Ronit joins the scene and there is a total faux pas. Chhavi and Vatsala emerge as strong female characters, who do not compromise on their choices when it comes to profession or choosing a suitable partner. At the end, after a lot of heartbreak, everything falls in place, when Tushar decides to stay back at Mumbai, buy a house

and pursue his photography career there, only to be with Chhavi. The story glides from busy Mumbai streets to a quiet apartment, from modelling studios to corporate offices, from clubs to hotel rooms and from gyms to quiet nature getaways, which are in sync with the present era.

After *All This Time* (Singh, *After all*), another bestseller by Nikita Singh, takes the readers on a journey with Lavanya Suryavanshi, a young girl from New Delhi, working hard at New York's largest law firm, PSM, trying to make a good impression on her mentor. This is yet another composition from the writer, which draws parallel from the modern life of today's youth. With intricate fluidity, the writer takes us from lavish corporate office premises to the Times Square and then hops to the Indian urban neighbourhood. The landscapes change with the emotions of the protagonists. At times she is seen working overtime at her office, fetching coffee from modern cafes like Starbucks and getting ready for meetings in the office boardroom and at other times, she is seen going around the streets of New York watching the street performers and splurging money for helping the needy. Although Lavanya is an intelligent and independent girl, she is initially portrayed as an escapist, who struggles to confront the reality and therefore steers herself away from any circumstances that make her uncomfortable.

The memories from her school days haunt her where the secret of her desperation lies, the reason why she doesn't wish to return to her parents' house in India. Another character, Shourya Kapoor is introduced, who is Lavanya's long lost school best friend, whose story is narrated parallelly to hers. His past life with his girlfriend, Deepti includes their college and canteen life. He is a graduate from UC Berkeley with an internship at a finance company in Fremont and who then settles with SQ Inc in Berkeley, in the beautiful bay area. When Lavanya learns that she is HIV positive, her whole world comes crashing down and she wishes to run away. She tries to calm herself down but is unable to do so. Finally, she decides to return to India, after seven long years. While she is keeping this medical condition of hers aloof from her family, she is seen struggling to find any peace at home and driving on the Indian roads is making her go insane. She accidentally meets Shourya at a supermarket in New Delhi and from there the story takes off. Shourya is suffering a heart-break and is in India for his sister's wedding and that's where the long lost friends unite for an intriguing journey together. The author has taken real efforts describing Lavanya's house and her room. Later on the two best friends are seen solving each other's misery and checking off items from Lavanya's bucket list. While Shourya is hustling with his sister's shopping and visits to modern

boutiques for the wedding dress fittings, both Shourya and Lavanya spend time together unravelling the past and making plans for striking out Lavanya's wishes.

One of those wishes of Lavanya is colouring her hair red, for which she goes to a snobbishly posh salon and forces the hairdresser to give her the desired colour. Later she is seen visiting a dingy tattoo parlour. As we go ahead, we see that the author has managed to bring out the hidden personality of the protagonist. Lavanya finally tells her parents that she is HIV positive and she is immediately taken to AIIMS where it is declared to her that since she is in the second stage of the disease, she can be treated. Later, Lavanya and Shourya plan to go on a road trip to Agra and Rishikesh on a 1000 cc sports-bike. The author has described the beautiful Mughal architecture and lush green lawns of Taj Mahal. Later as only five days are left for Shourya to return to the US, they plan to go to Goa. At their halt in Mumbai, they go to see Salman Khan's house and enjoy the Marine Drive breeze while relishing on tasty Mumbai wada-pav. Finally, they reach Goa. By giving the description of these places, the author shows the readers the beautiful landscapes of India in an aesthetic manner.

In the Post-Millennial era, with the advent of Facebook in 2004, a completely new virtual realm got evolved, where young minds over the world can get connected through gadgets working on their fingertips. The author designs the formation of the virtual space in a story setting in such a manner that the characters get drawn towards it. The Post-Millennial writers especially the women writers have made use of virtual space as a new narrative environment to explore the forbidden lanes of their minds, which have remained Subaltern in the clamour of the city life. The chat narratives engineered by these authors are somewhat of an epistolary form of writing which resembles one of the Victorian styles of writing from authors such as Jane Austin, Bronte sisters, etc. These chat narratives serve as a bridge between the readers and the characters of the fiction and it acts as a relief from the monotonous narrations. These small chat narratives act as a window through which readers can peep into the personal space of the characters. Another aspect of these narratives is that with a very little use of words and space, one can understand the psyche of the character brilliantly. The social medial chats which have been a part of the narrative in the writings of Nikita Singh, give a vivid panoramic view of the thought process of the female characters.

In the present research paper entitled *A Depiction of Literary Scapes of Urban India in the Selected Fictions of Nikita Singh, a Post-Millennial Indian Woman Writer*,

the researchers have brought forward the newest arenas for depiction of spaces in the story settings of the Indian Writing in English, where the panoramic portrait of urban India has been sketched on the literary canvass, which talks about the campus life, life in a metro city, pub culture and the most raging of all the hideouts of cafeterias, etc. Another space which the researchers wish to highlight in the paper is the virtual space and a new form of storytelling through virtual conversations in fiction writings. This gives the readers a peep into the minds of the characters. With the portrayal of this virtual space in the writings, the augmented reality and the true feelings of the characters get amalgamated in the form of a script. It is interesting to conclude that the paradigm shift in the story settings symbolizes a modern era, while preserving the glorious and varied landscapes of India.

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