

## Women in Different Roles in Indian Writing in English

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### Abstract

India has emerged as a major literary nation. Female English writers too used the British Style and made their contribution in the literature. Some of the prominent female English writers are Sarojni Naidu, Kamla Das, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Amrita Pritam etc. Their writings touch multidimensional themes and have been awarded at several times. The present paper provides a brief introduction of the writings of Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das.

**Keywords:** Literary nation, female writers, multidimensional themes

English language has made prominent place in Indian societies and has become a dominant language. Though it is not an official language in various areas but its influence could be observed from the education system of India. It has been used and still is used by official businessmen and writers. In Literature its role remained active from 18th century to 21st century. The past few years have witnessed a gigantic thriving of Indian writing in English in the global market. The seed of Indian Writing in English was sown during the period of the British rule in India. Now the seed has blossomed into an ever-green tree, fragrant flowers and ripe fruits. The fruits are being tasted not only by the native people, but they are also being 'chewed and digested' by the foreigners. It happened only after the constant caring, pruning and feeding. Gardeners' like Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R.K.Narayan, Raja Rao - to name only a few, looked after the tender plant night and day. In modern time, it is guarded by a number of writers who are getting awards and accolades all over the world. Indian writers have not only 'nativized' the British language in terms of stylistic features, but also accumulated English in terms of Indianized context.

Women writers have made their contribution through great novels, poetry and prose. They have presented women in different roles, who are always trapped in contradictory situations and strive hard for liberty, space and to prove their identity.

Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das present women in new form revealing their inner world. These

writers have immensely contributed to bring in a radical change in the image of woman.

Anita Desai, the foremost Indian novelist of the post-independence era, is interested in the psychic life of her characters. She makes an attempt to reach the world of mind and pricks into the soul of the characters especially women. She, very artistically, unveils the real self of a woman which is hidden beneath the surface. Being a strong feminist writer and with her delicate feminine sensibilities, her two fold heritage has a strong impact on her writings both at the stylistic and thematic level. Desai, being a woman, comprehends the feminine sensitivity and the flimsy heart of a woman. She represents the diverse faces of feminine psyche, revealing thereby a consciousness of several deeper forces, most of which are submerged and make up the truth. She describes the image of a suffering woman, who is engaged with her inner world, her sulking frustration and the raging storm inside her: the existential predicament of a woman in a male chauvinistic society. She makes an appeal for a better way of life for women through such characters. The central characters in her novels are Indians, and she swaps between male-centered and female-centered narrative.

The first novel of Anita Desai, *Cry, the Peacock*, deals with the protagonist Maya's psychological problems. Maya, a very sensitive woman, aspires to live and to love. She decides to tie the nuptial knot with Gautama - a person much older than her. But she is unhappy and unsatisfied with Gautama's rationalistic approach towards life. She starts feeling alienated with his negation and denial. She is also haunted by the prediction of albino astrologer, who creates a fear psychosis in her mind. When astrologer tells the prophesy that one of the couple (Maya and Gautam) would die in the fourth year of their marriage, Maya gets shocked. The idea of death becomes obsession in her mind. When she informs her husband of the prophesy, he ignores it and hints like Buddha that one must be prepared for any eventuality. She enrages at his callous attitude towards the prophesy. She takes Gautama to the terrace and throws him to his death.

And then Gautama made a mistake - his last, decisive

one. In talking, gesturing, he moved in front of me ... "Gautama". I screamed in fury, and thrust out my arms towards him, out at him, into him and past him, saw him fall. Then, pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom. (39)

Unable to bear all this, she kills both her husband and herself. Thus, in the novels of Anita Desai, a woman is an introvert, and she hastens the fate to devour her rather than to allow it to take its own course.

The novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* propagates the truth of a woman's suffering and the misery to be a part of society having her own identity. Desai beautifully portrays the marriages in India and the complexities associated with them. The main focus of the novel is self revelation, and it describes the mental and emotional struggle in the life of Indian women. *Voices in the City*, another novel of Anita Desai, deals with an intelligent girl Monisha, who is deprived of freedom just like Maya. Like Maya, she longs for freedom and desires to assert her individuality. As a result, she is confronted with the antagonistic attitude of her mother-in-law, her husband, and her own father.

Anita Desai contrasts the ways of the West with those of the East in *Fasting, Feasting*, where socio-spiritual awareness results in lasting ecstasy. She gives a new dimension to the Indian novel by laying emphasis on inner reality. She delves deep into the inner world of her protagonists and exhibits the presence of the deeper forces responsible for creating the feminine sensibility. Desai also conceptualizes that feminism is never static; on the contrary, it depends, to a great extent, on the regional and socio-cultural background along with the traditions. She firmly states that the body-psyche relationship is co-dependent and complimentary in nature.

While a man is known for thoughts, action, achievement and fame and for his sacrifice of his pleasures for power and fame, a woman is well known for her feelings, moods, thought and experience. In an interview with Atma Ram, Anita Desai states that, "whereas a man is concerned with action, experience, and achievement; a woman writer is more concerned with thought, emotion, and sensation... feminine sensibilities."

Arundhati Roy is luminary among the contemporary writers. Her writings deal with the plight of downtrodden and suppression of woman in male dominated society. Her writing career touched stars with her novel "The God of Small Things" which was sold just like melons. She got worldwide fame through this novel as it deals with suppression of women. Roy surprised the world with her

first non-fictional work "The End of Imagination" in which she speaks about the nuclear tests conducted by India in 1998 at Pokhran. Roy criticised the government of Indian for conducting nuclear tests without the consent of people. She made it a national issue through her writing and take it as a challenge. She had sympathy with the people who suffered a lot due to this project. The sense of a woman's marginal but invested position within a male chauvinistic society leads her to thematic and stylistic experimentations and innovations, so as to make herself heard. Arundhati Roy's thrust is on the absurdities and injustices of social and domestic life. In her award winning novel, *The God of Small Things*, she poignantly attacks the double standards of the society that the female sex is to be protected and kept away from power while the male runs the world irrespective of its behavior. Her vehement attacks on the asymmetrical values of the patriarchal society are exemplified by intense humor, irony, and sarcasm. Almost all the male characters in the novel display chauvinistic tendencies in varying degrees. Roy was nominated for the Sahitya Academy Award for the collection of essays "The Algebra of Infinite Justice" in 2005.

Kamala Das is one such rebellious writer, who has been giving voice to the subdued identity and suppressed desires of women. A robust feminist poet, she is known for her frankness and straight forwardness. She is a confessional poet, who is bold enough to give vent to her powerful emotions. Her writings question the male domination over the female world. She is one such poet, who celebrates femininity, especially woman's body and her sexuality. Her unconventional portrayal of certain controversial issues that hitherto have been taken as a taboo in society, makes her a feminist of the most radical kind. Her major works such as *My Story*, *Alphabet of Lust*, *A Doll for the Child Prostitute*, etc. reveal a woman's painful experiences in a male dominated society. The openness and honesty, with which she projects her feminist vision, rattles many conservative minds.

Kamala Das' failure to find the fulfilment in her marriage, something every woman craves for, resulted in her unending frustration and disillusionment. This bitter experience is openly expressed in *My Story*, her famous autobiography, wherein she writes:

"Society can well ask me how I could become what I become what I become, although born to parents as high principled as mine were. Ask the authors dead and alive who communicated with me and gave me the courage to be myself."

Thus, for her, feminism is a kind of resistance against the

system of patriarchy. Her opposition with the putrid social system got formalized in the form of poetry. She gives a powerful voice to the emotions of a suppressed woman. She has an inner urge to be even with the male world. In spite of the societal and family pressures on her to conform to the established feminine role. Kamala Das strongly protests against the male dominated world and advocates for a just and favourable environment for women. She yearns for a society in which women have an identity of their own, a totally different one from their male counterparts. The society is not generous enough to give women their justifiable rights. Thus the women have to fight back and enable themselves to establish their identity. "Kamala Das embodies women emerging from the state of subjugation and bondage, and seeking to establish their identity and the self."

Kamala Das is often considered a confessional writer, as she sheds all inhibitions and openly flouts all the restrictions imposed by the society and writes about subjects which are considered taboo for a woman. She speaks about sexual desire, sexual acts, extramarital relations, description of private body parts, etc. She is also confessional in the sense that she makes her female fellow beings aware of their latent sexual desires and their dissatisfaction in their sex lives, which they easily try to suppress owing to fear of societal censure. Her honest admissions of private life and intrepid treatment of female sexuality do not have anything special about them and are perfectly in tune with the themes and nature of confessional poetry.

Indian woman writers in English have made a great contribution in the world of literature. They have excelled the global standards set by the post-colonial and postmodern writers. They are the mediators who reflect the core social and political problems. Their writings have excelled in the global literary field and their writings have achieved much academic attention. Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Kamala Das are committed writers. There is one thread that unites them together, they are in

the line of socially conscious writers. These writers have provided vivid pictures of resistance by their protagonists. They examine the conditioning of women and the reasons for their acceptance of patriarchal norms and subsequently, their inability to subscribe to any opposition. Despite the impact of the Western ideologies and the present socio-economic changes, it is difficult to sidetrack the strong cultural leanings of these authors which provide characteristic philosophical bent to their works. Women's opposition to patriarchy, violence against women and rape, childhood experiences, etc. enable them to redefine their identity and survive with dignity.

To sum up, the female protagonists of all the writers taken up for the study demonstrate ample courage and vitality to interrogate the repressive role of religion, culture, and society but desist themselves from following the paths as suggested by their western counterparts. Instead, they seek to create their own paths.

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