

SOCIO-CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN THE WRITINGS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS

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In Contemporary Literary Scenario, writings of Indian Women Writers enjoy equal status with the literature of other countries. Indian women authors in particular have made their voices heard around the world and have excelled in all areas of literature in English in recent times and thereby achieved global recognition. Through their writings in English, they have articulated the role and status of the woman, illuminated literature with its value and vividness and portrayed the varied socio-cultural hybridities of women, at home and abroad. Contemporary Indian Women Writers have probed into human relationships, and most of their works deal with the mind and heart; which usually stands for the crusade against age-old established systems. In order to make the process of changes smooth and really meaningful, women writers have taken upon themselves this great task. India being a conglomeration of so many languages, religions, races and cultures, is regarded as a land of diversity. This multiplicity offers authors a great opportunity to deal with different topics. Their works deal with diverse themes like socio-cultural elements, Diasporas, regional and national themes which have universal appeal across natural boundaries.

The works of these Contemporary women writers assimilates the newly confronted circumstances and the nuanced dilemmas of the modern world. It is critical that the spirit of the era is expressed in the fiction written by the Indian woman more pervasively and effectively than in other forms such as poetry and drama. They have found the novel as a better equipped tool to deal with social reality, whatever they may intend to project. Writers like **Anita Desai, Shobha de, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapur, Kiran Desai** and some others have shown an in depth analysis of a strong feminist intent for women's issue, dealing with the various socio-cultural issues pertaining to be the chief concern of their plot. The present paper tries to analyze the Socio-Cultural hybridity of the writings of these writers through the feminist stand point.

The global development agenda should seek not only to address and monitor the elimination of specific gender gaps, but also to transform the

structural factors that underpin the widespread persistence of gender inequalities, gender-based violence, discrimination and unequal development progress between women and men. In the initial stages of the novels/stories the woman character is full of resistance but the ending usually exhibits a compromise with dominant patriarchal principles and the novels conclude with a fairy tale ending of 'happily ever after.' Elaine Showalter in her essay, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", explains this. She says, ... a theory of culture incorporates ideas about woman's body, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur. ... women's culture forms a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space. (Showalter: 197)

The writings of these women effectively describe the reactions, responses, issues and perplexities and the intricate workings of the minds of women characters. If we consider literature as a reflection of our reality, that despite individual perceptions it mirrors social manners, then women's changing roles, be they social, cultural, political or emotional, in life and literature, must not be ignored. To rectify this, and to light up areas of historical darkness we must, for a time, focus on a woman centered inquiry, considering the possibility of the existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women.

Arundhati Roy is a luminary among the contemporary women writers. She is one of the women writers who wrote about the plights of the downtrodden and the suppression of women in a male dominated world and the influence of Marxism on the lives of the downtrodden. "Despite the progress made by Indian feminist movements, women living in modern India still face many issues of discrimination. India's patriarchal culture has made the process of gaining land-ownership rights and access to education challenging." (Chatterjee: 1999) She is the only novelist, who being an activist, is constantly writing about social problems. Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize for her 1997 debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, exploring forbidden love in

Kerala and has been translated into more than forty languages. The God of Small Things in particular shows how representations of patriarchy and dominance are encountered polemically by women represented in the fiction. Roy's second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), addresses some of the most devastating events in India's modern history. The novel had a global release with enviable media hype, further indicating the notable progress in how women writing are nowadays being received by critics and the public. Her literary works mostly delineate the themes of social justice and anguish that various social groups suffered.

Anita Desai, winner of Sahitya Akademi Award as well as Padma Bhushan award for her contribution in 2014, is one of the most accomplished writers in India. She is a novelist of urban milieu and is a fine mixture of Indian European and American sensibilities. She portrays the complexities of man and women relationship in her novels like *In Custody*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and *Voices in the City*. She has delved deeply into the psychological insight of her central characters. She has been shortlisted three times for The Booker Prize. The suppression and oppression of Indian women were the subjects of her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), and a later novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975). She sees social issues from a psychological point of view and looks primarily at the intimate expressions of the inner world of her characters. She makes each of her work an honest exploration of the psychic self. 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. (Singh: 1994:98)

Manju Kapur has undoubtedly grabbed the attention of the readers worldwide, when she portrays the new woman, who are pathbreakers and who have achieved the unachievable. She appeared on the literary scene with her well acclaimed and Commonwealth Prize winning first novel- *Difficult Daughters* (1998) and was a number one bestseller in India. Such has been the popularity of this work that it has been translated into seven languages. The novelist Mukul Kesavan commands *Difficult Daughters* as "a first rate realistic novel about a daughter's reconstruction of her tremble past, hinging on her mother's story". (Suman & Chandra:1999:10) Her second novel *A Married Woman* (2002) was called fluent and witty' in the *Independent* and here, Kapur

negotiates different issues emerging out of socio-political upheaval in her country while her third, *Home* (2006), was described as 'glistening with detail and emotional acuity' in the *Sunday Times*. It explores the complex terrain of the Indian family with much insight and affection without venturing into any social, political or religious issues. Her most recent novel, *The Immigrant* (2009), has been short listed for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. According to Kapur, the root of all present evil is this tension between modernity and tradition. Thus, her novels represent the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self sacrificing women towards self assured, assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands and in this way providing medium of self expression. Her writing in English language of the cosmopolitan society gave her wings to fly.

Kiran Desai's 'The Inheritance of Loss' was published in early 2006 after the long gap of eight years, and won the Booker Prize in 2006. When talking of the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*, and of her own life, she says that the characters of her story are entirely fictional, but these journeys of her characters as well as her own provide an insight into what it means to travel between East and West. The fact that she herself lived this particular life and it was certainly not a matter of chance. It was her own inheritance. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, she talks about the pain of migration and living between the two separate nations. She touches the readers' heart via her writings especially when it comes to *Make it In America*. Dr. Shubha Mukherjee remarks, ...As intelligent writer and careful observer of human behaviour, Kiran Desai fulfils the responsibility of writing about current sensational issues. (Shubha: 1976:18)

Among the distinguished literary writers of India, Shobhaa De holds an elevated position. De is best known for her depiction of socialites and sex in her works of fiction. De published her debut novel entitled, *Socialite Evenings* in 1989. The novel explores the dynamics of elites of Indian society. In fact, the book has a semiautobiographical air to it. It highlights the decay of the social values, morality and culture. The socialites are portrayed as immoral and degenerated people who have traded their moral values for materialistic gain. The novel was heavily criticized for its controversial content, though it sold out and gained commercial success. De's literary writing journey eventually turned her into India's bestselling author. More than 17 of her novels

climbed the bestselling books charts at once. Her works have been translated into many languages. The reform and rise of women's fiction in the form of bold characters is accredited to Shobha De for her daring to voice her thoughts in her writing. Her second novel, *Starry Nights*, is allegedly inspired by two famous Bollywood off-screen couples. The book discusses the dynamics of the Indian showbiz industry. Yet again it was an instant success establishing Shobha as a distinguished writer. Her works stand as towering torch bearers of the transformed Socio-Cultural milieu of the Indian society. Jhumpa Lahiri has gained international acclaim for her writing which mostly deals with NRI characters, immigrant issues and problems people face in foreign lands. Her pen touches the soul with her simple and metaphorical writing focusing on the day to day nuances and the hidden dramas in every person's life. She gives the readers an insight into the socio-cultural issues of the immigrants. In 2006, Mira Nair directed a film based on her first novel *The Namesake*. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel, *The Namesake* describes the struggles and hardships of a Bengali couple who immigrate to the United States to form a life outside of everything they are accustomed to. It explores the concepts of cultural identity, of rootlessness, of tradition and family expectations in a lucid and elegant prose. In her fiction, memory, nostalgia, loss and longing are some of the prominent themes. Her stories tell of people who have moved countries in the hope of a better life, but past remains there as a shadow to remind them of their original roots. Her book *The Lowland* was a nominee for the 2013 Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award for Fiction. Cultural assimilation for immigrants is a complex process in which they not only fully integrate into a new country, but also lose aspects, perhaps their entire heritage too. The assimilation takes place in the novels of Lahiri on socioeconomic status, second language attainment and intermarriage. Lahiri's novels show that Diasporas are always in transformative phase. Culture and in the process lose vital aspects of their own culture.

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. (Patricia: 1989:48) The above analysis of women writers in Indian Writing in English suggests that women writers have made rapid development in the field of literature even they have gone up from difficult to tribal and rural areas too, but all of them have expressed their concerns for women and their problems. 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. They have touched the variety of subjects with a great contribution in creating awareness for the modern women all over the world. The selections of themes handled by them considering Indian environment needs an appreciation. They have boldly expressed the social inhibitions and cultural taboos laid down by the society. Indian women writers play all the roles with decency, decorum, discipline and dedication for Indian women.

It is interesting to note an opinion given by the noted danseuse Padma Subrahmanyam in a discussion on *Empowering Women of India* published in the *New Indian Express* on 25th Jan 2014. 'She said that the present Western model of individualism was creating a situation where an individual's interest was becoming more important than that of a community, resulting in the disruption of the duty-based family system. She said that in an Eastern culture like that of India, family and women were to take care of the elders, the infirm and the unemployed. But the present system of individualism in the Western society has led to a situation where it is the State that provides all the care and none in the family has any duty towards the other. Hence in this era of transformation we see a lot of Socio-Cultural Hybridity in most of the characters in works of these Contemporary Women Writers.

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