



## The Growth of a Woman Centered Approach in the Literary Works of Modern Indo-English Feministic Writers

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### Abstract

From the ancient times, India has predominantly been a patriarchal society where man had a prominent place in every field of life leaving woman as a fragile creature to depend upon him for each and everything, from her existence to her sustenance. In such circumstances, a woman's struggle in a male dominated society can be but easily fathomed. She was considered good for nothing when it came to do something challenging, intellectual or artistic. Schooling or reading and writing were not something she was capable for. Her only responsibilities were to give birth to the babies, to rear up them and to look after chores. Belongingness to such a rigid and narrow minded social system, it was hardly conceivable that women were able to think, study or able for decision making, could express themselves in the form of speech, novel, poetry, or storytelling, or art etc. Ajitkumar Sinha has rightly quoted that "Women in India are, by and large victim of social, economic and political exploitation". (1) The present research paper traces the paradigm shift where a woman emerges despite all hindrances to hold her own identity in personal and professional life. Here the Indian women writers have expressed the role and position of women through their writings in English, have enlightened the literature with its quality and vividness. Truly, it has represented the culture, history, and all the varied elements necessary for the enrichment of the literature worldwide.

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**Key Words:** A fragile creature, own identity, paradigm shift, patriarchal society, writings in English

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(1) Sinha Ajit Kumar, *New Dimensions of Women Empowerment*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd., 2008, p. xxvii.

### Modern Indian literature

The dawn of the new era of modern Indian literatures began in the late nineteenth century. In the writings of that particular period, the impact of Western civilization, the rise of political consciousness, and the change in society were perceptible. Many authors made a praiseworthy synthesis between Indianization and Westernization in their search for a national ideology. In the meantime, the Indian feminism too advanced by the stimuli of Western feminism, however it took somewhat a different route from that of the West. All these attitudes were combined to bring about the renaissance in 19th century India. Antonia Navarro was of the opinion, "The majority of these novels depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife, this subject matter has often been considered superficial compared to the depiction of repressed and oppressed lives of women of the lower classes". (2)

During that period, social reformers also advocated for female education in India, believing that social evils could only be eradicated through the education of our girls and our women. Consequently, Indian women writers gave a new dimension to the Indian literature, in that they vented their deep seated feelings by way of art and literature. Contemporary writers like, Anita Desai, Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kamla Markandaya, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Krishna Udayasankar, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhati Roy etc. have challenged the society for metamorphosis of women's status.

Indian writing in English is now gaining its ground rapidly. Indian women writers started questioning the prominent old patriarchal domination. Now they are no longer puppets in the hands of men.

They have shown their worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing it even today without any hesitations and hurdles.

Today, the works of Kamla Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Geetha Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai and Manju Kapur and many more have left an everlasting effect on the minds and memories of readers of Indian fiction in English. An outstanding and major development in modern Indian fiction is the growth of a feminist or women centered approach, which seeks to project and interpret experience, from the view point of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. 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.

(2) Antonia Navarro-Tejero, Modern Indian women writers in English, (www.literature-study.online.com as on 24.04.2016).

The image of an Indian woman 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, searching for identity; and 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 self 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 articulated in their expression than the woman of the past was.

Ruth Pravar Jhabvala's first novel 'To whom she will', (1955) and her later novel 'Heat and Dust', (1975), Santha Rama Rau's 'Remember for the House', (1956), Rama Mehta's 'Inside the Haveli', (1977), Gaeta Hariharan's 'The Thousand Faces of Night', (1992), Kamla Markandya's 'Two Virgins', (1994), Shashi Deshpande's 'The Dark Holds No Terror', (1999) are some of the leading women writers writing in Indian English literature.

### **Pioneer feminist women writers in India**

Last four decades have seen the emergence of significant feminism in Indian English literature to begin with so talented and fabulous authoress Shashi Deshpande.

### **Shashi Deshpande and her literary works**

Shashi Deshpande is the second daughter of the famous Kannada dramatist in Karnataka and Sanskrit Scholar Shiranga. She finished her graduation in Journalism at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Mumbai and served 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 has been a winner of the Sahitya Akadami Award for her novel 'That Long Silence'. Her third famous novel is 'Roots and Shadows'.

She has portrayed objectively a new female face with subjective experiences with a geocentric vision. She reflects on the problems and concerns of a typical middle class Indian woman. Her writings are rooted in the culture to which she belongs. Her remarks are sensitive to the common everyday events and experiences and give an artistic expression to something that is ordinary 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.

The role of fury and destiny are playing as main themes around which Deshpande weaves her tale. She explains role of fury in her words,

*"I thought of Puradars's line, the hour strikes and I was terrified. I stopped believing in the life I was leading, suddenly it seemed unreal to me and I know I could not go on."* (3)

Shashi Deshpande's simple yet powerful prose reads like a grandmother's tale that pierces deep into our heart and settles. Somewhere in her writings, the use of omniscient narration teases the reader as the

speaker forces events but is not to share until time and plot unfolds it. Her 'A Matter of Time' and Salman Rushdie's 'Fury', both novels have been woven around the theme of existential fury.

An another underlying theme in Shashi Deshpande's novels is human relationships especially the ones that exists between father and daughter, husband and wife, between mother and daughter. In all relationships, a woman occupies the central stage and significantly, the narration also 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 firmly believes that her real worth and true 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. The third type of women characters are the women in between neither traditional nor radical in their ideas and practice. For e.g. Indu in 'Roots and Shadows', leaves her husband to seek refuge in her ancestral home. Being

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(3) Dr.Gunjan Sushila, 'Deshpande Shashi , Roots and Shadows- A feminist Study' Ed. Amaranth Prasad, Swroop Book, 2009, New Delhi, pp. 129

a woman herself, she sympathizes with a woman. As Shashi Deshpande clarifies in one of the interviews about feminist approach in her writing,

*"If others see something feminist in my writings, I must say that it is not consciously done. It is because the world for women is like that and I am mirroring the world."* (4)

Her another novel 'A Matter of Time' is a continuity of her exploration into the many facts of the feminine experiences in her literary writings. Here she has dealt with 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 relationship an Indian woman shares with her man is homered with silence, absence or indifference. The pain of disintegration of the family troubles Aru, who considers 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.

### **Anita Desai and her novels**

Anita Desai, great novelist of the Indian English fiction, born in 1937, is undoubtedly one of the celebrated and genius Indian - English fiction writers. She bears a unique position among the contemporary women novelists of India. She has to her credit a large number of creative works and a coherently growing readership worldwide. She has published more than ten novels and other literary works of immense literary worth and value.

Women characters in her novels come to rebel and have protest against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential or to live on their own terms, irrespective 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 which work as hurdles and obstacles in their way of becoming independent individuals, in gaining their self respect as well as self identity. Her women, thus, desire freedom within the community of men and women, as it is the only way that will succeed in fulfilling them. In fact, Anita Desai's model of an emancipated woman, Bimala in the novel 'Clear Light of Day', is a single woman. Her married women characters like Maya in 'Cry, the 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

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(4) Deshpande Shashi, Interview with M Rati,

themselves. The nemesis of these women is not a personal one but an outgrowth of the complex social context, immediate family environments and the relationships they bore with their male members of the family.

Many of Anita Desai's protagonists are portrayed as a single woman. She doesn't ignore the social institution of marriage or support aloofness and keeping oneself away from the society. Some of her women characters like Tara in 'Clear Light of Day' has achieved fulfillment in her marriage life instead, through Bimala, she points to a kind of feminist emancipation which lies in not limiting a woman to her traditional role but in expanding and awakening her to several other possibilities and opportunities. Their kind of life, apart from being invigorating, also frees them from dependence on men. Bimala, through her individual freedom, exemplifies Simon De Beauvoir's description of an independent woman in her book 'The Second Sex' where she asserts that,

*"Ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumble; between her and the universe, there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator."* (5)

Anita Desai, definitely, sometimes advocates for a desirable and positive adjustment with the familial as well as social relationships firmly required on the part of an Indian woman for leading her social life successfully and smilingly. In her writings, she has truly revealed that,

*"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."* (6)

Anita Desai's first novel, 'Cry, The Peacock' mainly concerns with its chief protagonist Maya's psychological problems. As a young and sensitive woman, she desires to love and to be loved, but she is haunted constantly by the rationalistic approach of her husband to the even so common as well as so delicate affairs of life. Maya loves Gautama passionately and desires to be loved in return; but his coldness and passivity disappoints her. Anita Desai works on revealing the varying mental states, psychic observations, inner motives as well as existential pursuits of man; too. She fully succeeds in breaking non-grounds for her fictional art among her contemporaries while dealing with the predicament of a man and his social as

(5) Simon De, Beauvoir, 'The Second Sex', Cambridge, London, 1949, p.76

(6) Anita Desai, 'Cry, The Peacock', (New Delhi: Orient paper backs 1995) p.120

well as moral dilemmas. Anita Desai like Kafka successfully unfolds the existential traits of a man in an Indian society. She smartly analyses a man in action in order to reveal his hidden motives behind the facial reality of his conscious mind.

### **Kamala Markandya's literary works**

Another, having a superb literary genius, and having a huge popularity, renowned novelist of the modern Indian fiction is Kamala Markandaya, born in 1924. She wrote under a pseudonym 'Purnaiya'. She was a graduate from Madras University. She moved to Britain after India got freedom. She is known for writing about cultural clashes between Indian urban and rural societies. Kamala Markandya has published her first novel, 'Nectar in a Sieve' (1955). It was the best seller and has been considered a notable book by the American Library Association. Her other literary works are 'A Silence of Desire'(1961), 'Possession'(1963), 'Some Inner Fun'(1965), 'A Handful of Rice'(1966), 'The Nowhere Man'(1972), 'The Rising'(1973), 'The Golden Honey Comb'(1977) and 'Pleasure City'(1982).

Kamala's 'Nectar in a Sieve' deals with a strong hero character by the name of Rukmani. As she narrates her story, her readers are involved in and are moved by her pain. Losing her sons and seeing her daughter who has become a prostitute, Rukmani still stands firm and strong. Rukmani and her daughter Ira display suffering throughout the novel. Rukmani works hard and is devoted to her gentle husband. Rukmani has boldly faced poverty, famine, and divorce of her barren daughter, the deaths of her sons, her daughter's prostitution and finally her husband's death.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the above discussed studies of Indian women's writings in English show us that our women writers have expressed their deep concern for Indian women and their problems. The variety of subject matter and the themes touched upon by them has been a huge and fabulous contribution in creating

awareness for the modern women all over the globe. The variety of subjects beautifully woven and handled by them considering Indian environment is worthy to be appreciated. A feminist novel for India is not a novel which a woman writes just because she is a woman and knows how to write it. Instead, it is written by the one, who has understood as well as very well felt wholeheartedly a woman both as a woman and as a person who is often pressurized by the all kinds of visible and invisible, external and internal forces, by the one who is not easily swept away by feminism. It is from these notions and perceptions one should view a huge and fabulous contribution of women writers of the nineties like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Mehta, Gita Hariharan, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Vasudev, Kamala Markandya, Arundhati Roy and so on. Undoubtedly, it is understood that they have performed a daring job in exposing the fallacies of the male dominated society and letting the public beware of the various atrocities heaped upon women who dared to cross the various rigid boundaries that were laid on them by society.

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