

## THE ROLE OF INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS IN THE LEVITATION OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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### ABSTRACT

*Indian women writers have given a new direction to the Indian literature. They have made an everlasting mark in the field of English literature to change the point of view from the long hold of male over them. Now we can see a new awareness in women in all walks of life. Since ages women have been the point of acrimonious remarks. All the negative views find place in the form of myths, stories, legends and history. "A man's life without a woman is like a flower without fragrance, a ship without a rudder or a body without spirit." A woman plays a pivotal role in her family. Both man and woman are congratulatory to each other. Women are showing their spirit in every field, and in some respect, far better than the men. Now, women are not a marionette in the hands of men. They are equaled efficient like men. Our Indian English literature has gifted numerous enthusiastic women novelist as Arundhati Roy, Shashi Nayantara Sahgal, Rama Mehta, Geeta Mehta and many more. All of these female novelists are famous for their bold point of view that they tried to reflect through their novels. Their contribution not only flourishes the English literature but also colored the life of women in particular. In a nutshell, it can be said that their novels focused on the women characters as a protagonists who are isolated in the male dominating society. So that in general their contribution is commendable.*

**Keywords:** *Indian women writers, Indian Literature, Indian Classical Literature, English Novels, Ivory Towers.*

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### Introduction

Literature always bears its social significance and it cannot be and should not be preserved in ivory towers. In Indian English literature, all the contemporary issues get highlighted and writers strived to document all that they observe around them and conceptualize and crystallize in their writings. Time and again, issues related to gender have been discussed by many authors but the role played by the women writers in this direction is worth appreciating. Women Writing in English in India appears in the mid of the 19th century. Indian women writers have given a new direction to the Indian literature. They have made an everlasting mark in the field of English literature. Most of the women writers have tried to change the female point of view from the long hold of male over them. Since ages women have been the point of acrimonious remarks. All the negative views find place in the form of myth stories legends and history. The Bible says:

"Then the Lord God made the man fall into deep sleep, and while, he was sleeping, He took out one of the men's ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him."<sup>1</sup>

Feminine or feminist issues transcend all limits of geography and provide wherever the issues of gender become pertinent. Women writers reflect feeling of marginality and in return express their revolt against the purely masculine world. As women started writing in English; poems, stories and novels all came together frequent and dubious.

Women are an integral part of human civilization. No society or country can ever progress without an active participation of women in its general development. Although the place of woman in society has differ from culture to culture and from age to age, yet one fact is common to almost all societies is that women has never been considered equal to men. Her status largely depends on the simple biological fact that she is the bearer of children whose care is her responsibility and her sphere is usually restricted to the familial roles. On the whole it can be said that from ancient times women is continuously trying to find a place in this orthodox society. Both men and women are congratulatory to each other.

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"A man's life without a woman is like a flower without fragrance, a ship without a rudder or a body without spirit"<sup>2</sup>

In Indian classical literature a woman is always shown in relationship to man. The husband and wife relationship is given more importance than the daughter, father, sister, brother and mother relationship. Since ancient time, a good woman is always synonymous with a good wife. A good wife must be chaste and loyal like Sita or Savitri.

Feminism has been artfully handled in the massive work of English novels in India. Feminism is defined as cultural, economic, and political movements that are focused towards establishing legal protection and complete equality for the women. Indian women novelists have used a modest attempt for evaluating the real social scenario.

There are several Indian novelists who produced their novels that revealed the truth of Indian societies and how women are being treated here. There are numerous novels in English literature of India that appropriately sketch the real status of women in Indian societies.

"In childhood female should be dependent on the father, in youth on her husband and after the death of her husband on her children, in olden aged their son or daughter in law. If she has no sons or the near kinsmen of her husband; if she be left on kinsmen on those of her father; if she has no paternal kinsman on the sovereign, a woman must never seek independence."<sup>3</sup>

Today, women are not the puppet in the hands of men. They have realised that they are not helpless and weak but are proficient like men. They have become self dependent and earn money equal to the men and they are not restricted only to household works. They have set their identity in almost every field. In India we have a number of women writers in English such as Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Shobha de, Bharati Mukherjee, Kamala Markandeya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Geeta Mehta, Rama Mehta and many more. They tried their hand almost every genre of literature. Their writings have to some extent changed the mentality of males. Basically, their novels are the novels of protest and outburst of emergent and contamination. They explore the feminine subjectivity and apply the theme that ranges from childhood to complete womanhood. They spread the message of what feminism actually is by the help of their novels. Most of the female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their works.

Arundhati Roy is one of those Indian women writers who have won Booker prize for her novel "*The God of small things*" in 1997. In her novel, she made use of the women characters. Arundhati Roy has her own supposition on society and has convincingly made a stamp for herself in the scholarly field by this novel. "The awareness of women that they belong to subordinate group; that they suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural but it is socially determined that they must join with the other women to remedy these wrongs. Victimization of women or gender oppression has extended from life to literature."<sup>4</sup>

"*The God of small things*" is a classic Indian novel by Arundhati Roy. She tells the story of a fractured family from the southern state of India, Kerala. In the novel, the female characters will not give themselves a chance to be confined in the guidelines and law set by an amazing moderate society. "*The God of Small Things*" is a family saga narrating the story of four generations of Syrian Christian family. The domination of male over female is portrayed through the characters like Baby Kochamma, Mammachi, Ammu and Rahel followed in the Indian society from generations to generations which is countered well in the novel. Ammu is the center character of the novel. She is the daughter of Mammachi and mother of Rahel and Estha. She became a victim of male dominated society. She had been humiliated by her father, betrayed by her husband, insulted by the police, made destitute by her brother, not cared by her mother. All these characters followed the idea of patriarchal society which has not given Ammu a right to live as a daughter, wife, sister and a citizen in the society.

Shashi Deshpande began her writing with short stories that later developed to novel writings. There are five novels to her credit: "*Roots and Shadows*" (1983) the Thirumathi Rangammal prize for the best novel of India. Shashi Deshpande's novels are concerned with a woman's quest for self. She has projected this aspect of Indian women with more sensitivity and instinctive understanding as she belongs to this category. Her novels deal with the Indian middle class women suffering, frustration, social agitations, and their stillness as a means of communication. To Aristotle, "Women is an inferior to men".

The protagonist of "*Roots and Shadows*" is a young woman who has rebelled against the authoritarian and traditional joint family. Indu left home as a teenager to study in a big city, and is now a journalist; she has married the man of her choice. But she realises that her freedom is illusionary; she

has exchanged the orthodoxy of the village home for the conversation of the "smart young set" of the city. Indu returns to the family home after an absence of twelve year when her great aunt a childless widow dies, leaving her money to Indu. As the heroine takes charge of her legacy, she comes to realize the resilience of the village who had dismissed as weak. G. S. Amur has aptly remarked: "women struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother and most important of all as human being in Shashi Deshpande's major concern as a creative writer and this appears in all her important stories."<sup>5</sup>

Anita Desai is one of the most powerful contemporary Indian novelists in English. She is more concerned with thought, emotions and sensation than with action, experience and achievement. Desai's portrayal of man - woman relationship has been situational. Man - woman relationship seems of particular interest to her for the most of our early novels she writes. She focused on the predicament and modern women in this male dominated society and destruction at the altar of marriage. Anita Desai is widely recognised as the pioneer of psychological novel in modern Indian English literature. The eminent characteristic of her work is her art of the portrayal of characters. She examines the psychological inner working of women and presents their reactions.

Desai's very first novel "*Cry the Peacock*" is about Maya, who is unable to relate emotions to her husband Gautama. Anita Desai has tried to unveil the inner truth of the post-modern age through the female protagonist. In the male dominated society, Maya hardly enabled to get adjusted with her family, her husband Gautama, who is much older than she. H. M. William's approach appears to be act that "*Cry the Peacock* is a disturbing first novel, mostly takes the form of interior monologue delineating the tragic mental breakdown of young Indian women Maya."<sup>6</sup>

"*Cry the Peacock*" is a family play mainly concerned with the theme of mental disorder between husband Gautama and wife, Maya, the novel is about Maya's cry for love and relationship in her loveless wedding with Gautama. Anna Lowry Weir, a remarkable critic rightly accesses the character of Maya in term of man-women relationship through Indian ethos and culture. In this way, in his critical estimation the critic suggests: "Maya is an Indian, and thoughts have an Indianness, despite their disturbed state. She reflects an Indian weather, Indian flora and fauna, Indian religious and mythical figure."<sup>7</sup>

Anita Nair has been a very serious Indian English women novelist who has depicted different aspects of women's life especially the middle class women's life in her novels. She classifies herself as a storyteller, writer of literary fiction; a writer who tries to blend literature and story from generic point of view and absolutely not feministic. According to Elaine Showalter:

It was through the the women's liberation movement that we began to draw connections between our own work and our own lives, to note the disparities between the identifications and ambitions that had attracted us, along with thousands of other women, to the study and teaching of literature, and the limited and secondary roles granted to fictional heroines, women writers of female scholars. Feminism spoke to our lives and our literary experience with the fierce urgency of a revelation or a great awaking."<sup>8</sup>

"*Ladies Coupe'* is a very powerful novel delineating feminine sensibility. It deals with such issues which ask fundamental questions that not only shake the ideological ground of men's patriarchal role in a traditional society, but also imply the existence of an alternative reality. Put differently, the novel questions whether the role of Indian women as a representative of other women living under oppressive of patriarchal system in relation to culture resistance should be restricted only to their roles as a wives and mothers. In such a world woman's role is limited to reproduction regardless of her own desires and needs.

The Brahman heroine Akhila, whose life has been taken out of her control, is 45 years old 'spinster', daughter, sister, aunt and the only provider of her family after the death of her father. Getting fed up with these multiple roles, she decides to go on a train journey away from her family and responsibilities, a journey that ultimately make her a different woman. She tries to change her life and family slightly. Neither she is free to realise her goals, nor to translate her dreams into realities. Akhila, with sans husband, children, home and family, is dreaming of escape and space. Hungry for life and experience, aching to content, she sets out for a journey.

Kamala Markandaya occupies a distinct position among Indian women novelist in English. She is regarded as "an unquestionably the most outstanding"<sup>9</sup> of the post world war second period in India. The observation of Indira Nityanandam that "the first important women novelist to enrich Indian fiction in English was Kamala Markandeya."<sup>10</sup> She has observed the Indian women very closely and found that they have continued to be feminine without much radical change in their outlook ever after

independence. She rendered a fictional representation of how Indian women have internalized the act of suppressing and hiding their likes and dislikes for the sake of substance of the social institutions of marriage and family in her third novel "*A Silence of Desire*" which Iyengar considered as to be " her most ambitious novel."<sup>11</sup>

"*A Silence of Desire*" is woven around what Amar Nath Prasad describes as unfolding " of the layers of the spiritual reality and mystic vision of India." <sup>12</sup> In the smooth going family life of Dandekar, a crisis takes place. He observes that his wife pays visit to a mysterious person without his knowledge. As a result, he begins to suspect his wife's fidelity towards him. He begins to watch her moments secretly and he comes to know that she visits a god-man regularly. He suspects that his wife has got liaison with the god-man. Later he learns the truth that she has got a tumor in her womb and goes to the god-man as a devotee with the faith that it is through spiritualism she would be cured of the tumor. Therefore, she had refused to follow the advice of the doctor to get the tumor removed through surgery.

Dandekar moves earth and heaven to persuade his wife to undergo the operation in vain. He decides that removing the god-man from the town once for all is the only way for him to release his wife from her obsession with the belief that the god-man alone would save her life from the infection of the tumor. After many unsuccessful efforts he seeks the help of the collector, who gets the god-man removed from the town and his wife yield to his pressure and under goes the operation. The narrative ends with Dandekar's satisfaction that he has restored his family by rescuing his wife not only from the tumor but also from the blind faith in spiritualism. In "*A Silence of Desire*" Kamala Markandaya tries to show how man continues to gain edge over woman and how woman could not become independent even after the nation had attained independence through the episodes of Dandekar- Sarojini couple.

Women writers in India are moving forward with their strong and sure strides, matching the pace of the world. We see them bursting out in full bloom spreading their own individual fragrances. They are recognized for their originality, versatility and the indigenous flavor of the soil that they bring to their work. Nowadays, people enjoy reading the anglicized novels presented by the new age women writers. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related with women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long. Our women writers have grappled with complex issues such as sensuality, servility, subjugation and society. They have handled them with a sense of balance, never disregarding our Indian traditions, yet discovering that there is more in the offing. Women writers in India can no longer be claimed as the exclusive property of India. Their work and their art belong to the world. Majority of the Indian readers comprising both male and female read the novels of the Indian women authors with certain expectations. They look for some "Indianness in the write-ups. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way. In India, the women writers are doing very well and their contribution is immense.

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