

# Glimpses

## Trends in Literatures in English

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## 20. Women Writers of Postcolonial Period

Prachi Patharkar

Literature is the best tool for the highlighting any issue or reiterating any position. Though constructive contribution of women in post-independent India specially in the past two or three decades has been unquestionably great and continuously increasing, yet the male-dominated Indian literature consciously ignored their sustaining role and portrayed them invariably as a 'subaltern'. However, beginning with Kamla Marandaya right upto now, in the first decade of the new millennium so to say, we have witnessed a spurt of women writers who have shunned all inhibitions accepting bravely the challenge of projecting, delineating, analyzing and discussing the real status and factual roles of contemporary Indian women. The women novelists have provided a fresh re-orientation to Indian fiction in English. Thematically, these writers have concentrated on the female population placing them in their proper context and background revealing how they suffer or prosper, win or lose. Get mentally disoriented or overpower their neurosis but in each and every case never sacrifice the bondage the norms of society, no manner how progressive they may be.

Women writers in post-colonial India have created a literature of their own, so to say, placing women in the context of the changing social scenario, specially concentrating upon the psyche of such women. True that the Indian women have consciously accepted the supremacy of the patriarchal value system by surrendering meekly to their traditionally assigned roles and allowing themselves to be dominated. But increasing education, better job opportunities and awareness of rights and privileges of women have forced her to contemplate. Indian women today are exposed to a new set of values with education and economic independence putting them in a rather conflicting state where they desire independence while they dread their traditional role but are still not

courageous enough to walk out of the situation. At this juncture the woman has to redefine her status, certainly not an easy venture. Women writers have caught the Indian women in this flux and have portrayed them realistically both psychologically as well as physically in their novels. Such literature has certainly contributed to a fresh exploration of the role and status of women in the coetaneous Indian society.

Women as a subject matter in Indian fiction in English is something recent but the approach of the novelists is certainly different. In the novel of the 1960s women in Indian fiction were depicted as creatures having various virtues, with no concept of revolt which the novels portray. Women as educated and conscious of their rights and privileges demanding their proper place in society. Undeniably, recent years have witnessed the impact of western feminist theories put forward by writers like Simone de Beauvoir [The Second Sex, 1952], Betty Friedan [The Feminine Mystique, 1963] and Kate Millet [Sexual Politics, 1970]. Under these influences the Indian women writers have successfully attempted to break the literary and social norm of the past. They delve deep into the psyche of their characters and also herald a new concept of morality. At the outset writers like kamala Marandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha de, Bharati Mukherjee and some others have denied any sort of feminist bias in their writings but an in depth analysis proves a strong feminist intent, for women's issue pertains to be the chief concern of their plot.

The more recent women may not be as prolific as their predecessors yet they also deal with themes related to women and society or more specifically the man-women relationship in their novels. Arundhati Roy in The God of Small Things visualizes the whole cultural scenario from a locus of isolation, oppression, depression, frustration and amalgamation.

The novelist infers that human identity is destroyed by the oppressive forces of society. Roy presents three generation of doubly marginalised women: First by their binding native cultural and secondly by the dominant forces of patriarchy. Women like Mammachi and Baby subordiante existence and accept male domination silently. Ammu and Margaret Kochamma who belong to the second generation react against

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the idea of patriarchy and hence are bold enough to cross the limits of sexual codes imposed by society. At first Ammu feels liberated through her marriage but is quite disillusioned when it fails and she is compelled to return to Ayemenne as a divorcee. Rahel is untouched by her divorce and as such is the new woman-a non-traditionalist, a non-conservative, liberated woman. Roy concentrates upon the sufferings of Ammu in *The God Small things*, a woman who prefers to be mute and inarticulate in a traditional setup. Inspite of her bold maiden attempt a fiction writing Roy has failed to create a model of Feminine consciousness because of her inability to write further.

The new generation of Indian women novelist namely, Gita Hariharan, Namita Gokhale, Anita Nair and Manju kapur have invited much critical attention. Each one of the four has composed at least one novel focussing attention on the plight of contemporary women especially in their endeavour for emancipation and liberation from the patrilineal social system. However, it is difficult to assess their position as feminist writing either Western or Indian. Nevertheless, scrutinizing their novelist's adventure provides an interesting study.

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: drama of Passion* is the story of Paro and Priya. It is an account of their experiences in life. Paro due to her courage and convictions becomes the symbol of emancipation and individuality. However, later paro is doomed to suffer from an atrophy of emotions and cynicism due to her unbridled freedom ending up as a disillusioned woman. Priya's identification with Paro adds to her misfortunes. The novel reflects an esoteric stratum of Indian society gaining its strength from the interplay of reality and fantasy. Gokhale's other novels also depict women characters in the Indian social setup and their varied responses to society.

Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* represents three women belonging to different generations. Devi, the protagonist cannot cope with life in India after being educated in an American University. She is forced to marry Mahesh, an insensitive man. Her miseries are manifold especially when she is unable to conceive. Mayamma, their maidservant also suffers due to her barrenness. Sita, the mother of Devi is largely responsible for her own fate. Gita Hariharan's when dreams

travel is a sort of feminist retelling of the Arabian Nights. This dark though thought provoking novel centres around the lives of Shahrazad, her sister Danyazad and their husbands.

In Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* the protagonist Vimati is in constant conflict with tradition, at loggerheads with her parents, contemptuous towards the institution of marriage which is considered to be all and end all of a girl's life especially in India. Early in the novel the issue of patriarchy which curtails a woman's voice and the boy raised. Vimati is compelled to look after a brood of younger siblings sisters while she silently craves for getting properly educated. Subsequently coming in contact with her cousin Shakuntala from Lahore she becomes aware of a vast new world outside the four walls of her house. Vimati manages to go to Lahore for further studies where her roommate Swarna lata introduces her to more revolutionary and progressive ideas. Manju kapur dwells at large upon the conflict within Vimati who is torn between her present and her past. Vimati ends up as a Professors second wife. Her conflict now extends first with her mother and then with the professor's first wife, Ganga. Vimati returns to her mother's home realising that her battle for independence was futile. The birth of a daughter completes the vicious circle. However, Vimati's inner strength and will power sustain her proving that there is more to life than depending on marriage, parents and other conventional value systems. Atleast Vimati conjures up the courage a defy traditions for the sake of her own happiness.

In Anita Nair's novel *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila, a forty-five year old income tax clerk and the protagonist of the story encourages her travel companions to share their life-stories during her journey from Madras to Kanyakumari quite like the pilgrims do in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. As Akhila listens to the various stories she tries to find a solution to a question which has been haunting her for long: "Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?" After the death of her father Akhila assumes the role of the "man of the family" for she lulls from a matrimonial tradition of Tamil Brahmins. She decides to remain single after a brief love affair with Hari, a North Indian man much younger to her. The stories of the various co-passengers' relief

to their personal crises such as loneliness, ill treatment rape, abortion, madness, betrayal and how each one coped with them. This sets Akhila thinking: the other women are merely patterns of consciousness of a single psyche. Akhila reconciles with life by coming back of Hari. Anita Nair refers to the avatar of the Devi Akhilandeshwari to insist on the many-headed but unitary subjectivity of women. Nair also confidently depicts the plurality of women's desire.

W.B. Yeats through his fantastic cyclic of the human civilization claimed that each point of change releases an unusual quantum of energy which has to culminate in something unprecedented, constructive or destructive stipulating, confidently, at the same time that every moment of flux invariably ends up in progression and betterment. Recent feminist awareness amongst Indian women novelist in English leads to a similar pattern. In a tradition-bound and conventionally conscious nation like India, any movement which focuses on the concept of women liberation or claims to champion the doctrine of right of the fair certainly amounts to a pattern of change which results in a societal upheaval of immense significance. Inspite of increasing literacy amongst women and though they are given more constitutional rights and not only contribute a great deal for general welfare but also play a major supportive role in the family and society without neglecting their conventionally attributed domestic responsibilities, the phallocentric society fails to appreciate their creative and positive contribution to the community.

Thus the Indian woman, as appropriately presented in the modern and post-modern fiction written in English by Indian women novelists behave unlike her Western counterpart in her evolution from the "Feminine" to the "Female". She is progressive and conscious of her rights like the contemporary Western counterpart, but she quickly, compromises to the fact that a woman's real position lies within the family-unit which she must sustain and protect and not ignore or neglect due to the ~~idea~~ notion of being "liberated".

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to ashokbandla, Meghraj, DnyandeV, rahul, balvirchandra, vijay, deepmala, Prakash, Gojanan, Shailesh, sudhirr

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Convener, Emerging Trends in English Language & Literatures in English

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