

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ENGLISH WOMEN WRITINGS: A POST COLONIAL READING

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Abstract

Women writers in post colonial India have shaped a literature of their own and they have positioned women, in the context of the changing social set-up, specially focussed upon the psyche of such women. It is a fact that the Indian women have intentionally accepted the domination of the patriarchal importance arrangements by yielding meekly to their conventionally assigned roles and permitting themselves to be subjugated. But escalating education, better job prospects and consciousness of human rights and privileges of women have affected her to ponder. Indian women today are showing a new set of standards with edification and economic sovereignty putting them in a rather inconsistent state where they want liberty while they fright their conventional role but are still not daring enough to walk out of the situation. At this juncture the woman has to redefine her status, certainly not an easy task. One strong characteristic of all the contemporary women writers in Indian writings in English is the revolutionary spirit with which they attempt to write. Time to time now they express their concealed desires and unexpressed feelings through their writings. Women writers have proved that their writings are serious as well as worth and call for consideration. To be a feminist is to be able to create a specific feminine mode of writing, fighting for the liberation of womenfolk in subjugation and all those forces within and outside the society that troubled the neat categories of the family and mutilated the feminine side of a woman. This paper will explore the representation of women in post colonial India in Indian English Writing by women where women writers always try to change the monotonous representation of the women and re-establish it.

Keywords: Post colonial reading, Patriarchy, Subjugation, Feminism

Women writers have caught the Indian women in this change and have portrayed them sensibly both psychologically as well as physically in their novels. Such literature has undoubtedly contributed to a new investigation of the position and importance of women in the contemporary Indian society. Women as a subject matter in Indian fiction in English is not something recent but the approach of the novelists is certainly different. In the novel of the 1960s women in Indian fiction were depicted as ideal creatures having various virtues,

with no concept of revolt while the later novels portray. Women as educated and conscious of their right and privileges demanding their proper place in society. Unquestionably, recent years have witnessed the impact of western feminist theories put forward by writers like Simone de Beauvoir who wrote *The Second Sex*, Bell Hooks who wrote *Feminism is For Everybody* and Kate Millet who wrote *Sexual Politics*. Under these influences the Indian women writers have successfully attempted to break the literary and social norm of the past. They investigate deep into the psyche of their characters and also indicate a new concept of ethics. In the beginning writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha de, Bharati Mukherjee and some others have denied any sort of feminist bias in their writings but an in profundity analysis proves a strong feminist objective and women's issue are chief concern of their plot.

The works of Indian English women writers like Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri are significant since they have focused on the post colonial feminist study of women in their works. These writers made society aware of the women's needs and demands and have become a medium for self-expression and declaration. In the past the works of Indian women have been underestimated and devalued on regular belief about the superior worth of the male but today they have attained the acknowledgment among mainstream of the contemporary Indian writers. The neglected women as characters in their novel attempt for better way of life mentally and physically. Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity of their own as well as to raise the voice of women in Indian traditional society. The theme is from childhood to womanhood-developed society respecting women in general. Now women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of women where she is an epitome of enduring self-sacrificing women. But now these female characters searching their identity no longer regarded as and defined simply in terms of their sufferer position.

The new generation of Indian women novelist namely, Jhumpa Lahiri, Namita Gokhale, and Manju kapur have invited much critical attention. Everyone has composed at least one novel focussing attention on the plight of contemporary women especially in their endeavour for liberation and emancipation from the direct social system. However, it is difficult to assess their position as feminist writing either Western or Indian. Nevertheless, scrutinizing their novelists adventure provides an interesting study. Being gifted with literary talent, Lahiri started writing fictions since childhood but got herself fully activated in writing after completing her college. Her debut short story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* was published in 1999, drawing the world wide appreciation and accolades along with Pulitzer Prize of 2000 for her. In 2003 Lahiri published her first novel *The Namesake* which enhanced her glory as an eminent writer. Lahiri's second collection of short stories *Unaccostomed Earth* came in 2008 and established Lahiri as one of the most popular Indian diasporic writers. The vividness of her characters makes her writing a treasure of vital significance for the readers as well as for the critics. *The Interpreter of Maladies* exemplifies it where the various characters of women fascinate the readers through their exquisite presentation. Her women characters are not the conventional, destitute and deprived always but their hues are

of different kinds. In some places they are marginalized yet in many places they are rebel with their approach where they want to weave an unconventional way of life for them.

Sense of alienation and estrangement has always been the major theme of diasporic writers and Jhumpa Lahiri's stories have this prevailing phenomenon in abundance. She not only talks about the immigrant experience in her works but also shows the psychology of her women and their cross cultural confrontation in vivid pictures. Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories are the interpretations of the meaning of hybridity and talk clearly about women experience being immigrants in an alien land. It depicts the experience of diaspora and acquaints its readers with the complexities and nuances of such an experience. The world that Lahiri portrays is set in motion against the cultural tension, anxiety and resultant dialogues that take place when two very different sections of the world. Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* abounds with male and female characters struggle to survive in the unfamiliar surroundings they are entangled in. Lahiri shows the diasporic struggle to keep hold of culture as characters create new lives in foreign cultures. The female protagonists of her stories represent first and second generation female immigrants who being submerged by the other culture and try to assimilate and as a consequence become hybrid. Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*, paint a powerful picture of life in the Indian American Diaspora. She describes the lives of the first and second generations of Indian immigrants who have settled in America, most of her protagonists being second generation characters. These characters face the opportunities and challenges of belonging to two different cultures, and must continuously negotiate an intermediate position within and between two cultures. They occupy a middle ground which could easily turn into a battle ground between the Indian and the American parts of their identities, but the characters in her stories strive to maintain ties to both cultures, identifying themselves as Indian Americans. Thus, no matter how predominantly Indian or American they feel, Lahiri's characters still retain a sense of self as Indian Americans. The continuous renegotiation of their identities can be seen in these stories, offering an interesting perspective on the stories.

In post colonial context the novels of Shashi Deshpande proliferate in female quest for identity. Her novels are usually described by female characters who attempt to find out their own identities throughout the novels. Her heroines try to find out their own selves through writing and they ultimately reach a resolution in their lives. No doubt, they are preoccupied by the reminiscences of past and feel a kind of insignificance, but near the end they understand their identities. This is one of the central needs and messages in today's world where, women are facing emptiness, a space in their lives. However, they appear to be effective apparently, but they appear to have absence in track and feel a sense of worthlessness. Deshpande's novels fit into such a situation and support females to understand their prospectives in an optimistic manner. The search for female identity has its roots in the patriarchal set up, where man is given every kind of liberty. He has the right to elect his intention. His feelings are given priority. Mistakes committed by him are overlooked and are supposed as his past, while women cannot give a little deviation from the set directions. She has to follow to social customs. Otherwise, she is supposed as a woman of loose ethics.

The finest illustration of post colonial women representation is the novels of Manju Kapur. In her novel *The Immigrant* Manju Kapur not only shows a women's journey but her emancipation is also shown through the portrayal of the main protagonist Nina. Nina is a teacher of English literature at Miranda House University College for women, Delhi. She lives at home with her widowed mother and their lives have been stylishly foreshadowed by a past of international travel and culture while her civil servant father was alive. Nina is illustrated as still youthful looking and pretty for thirty and fair-skinned with luxurious long black hair. She is well educated and earns her own income while partly supporting her mother. She is independent, cultured, well read and eloquent. To her advantage, with respect to her migration qualifications for Canada, she also speaks French.

In Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* the situation of colonial and post colonial Indian women is well portrayed. The protagonist Virmati remains in constant conflict with tradition, at loggerheads with her parents and is contemptuous towards the institution of marriage which is considered as the 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 freedom is raised. Virmati is compelled to look after a brood of younger brother and 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. Virmati 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 Virmati who is torn between her present and her past. Virmati ends up as a Professors second wife. Her conflict now extends first with her mother and then with the professor's first wife, Ganga. Virmati returns to her mother's home realising that her battle for independence was futile. The birth of a daughter completes the vicious circle. However, Virmati'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 Virmati conjures up the courage a defy traditions for the sake of her own happiness. Earlier women were exhibited in the literature according to male imagination and psychology but women writers today have come forth to portray the real picture of female psyche due to which new women have been introduced before the world with different hues.

Difficult Daughters is a story of a struggling woman Virmati of post independent era in India who endeavoured hard to study and to get married with the man of his own choice. It gives the picture ofpre independence India and life therein, especially the life of those women who were subordinated in their families and had to act accordingly. The present paper is a study of a woman fighting against her family, her lover, and society. It is a kind of historic tragedy where a daughter tries to search the reality of her mother's past through the relics of her mother's mistakes and melancholy. This is a story of young woman striving to be Independent in a pre-partitioned India, while being pulled in different directions by her older, married lover. The story is about the life of an Indian woman, from childhood to death, as it's being told to her daughter after her death. The novel also throws light on arranged marriages, expectations of women of the contemporary time. This is a story of three generations.

Difficult Daughters is a story where history of a mother is described by the daughter who wants to know about the past of her mother after her passing away. This novel begins with the funeral of Virmati and then her daughter Ida lands in Amritsar to uncover the mystery regarding the lives and peculiar circumstances leading to marriage of her parents. Set around the time of partition, *Difficult Daughters* is the story of Virmati seen through the eyes of her daughter Ida, from whom her mother's past had always been kept a secret. Virmati is a young Punjabi girl belonging to a traditional family of Amritsar. A family she defies for the love of a married professor. Because of him, she comes to value education and the higher things in life. She realizes that horizons of life are much wider than those that have been shown to her. The work of Indian women writers is substantial in making the society aware of the women's needs and demands in providing a medium for self-expression and assertion. Traditionally, the work of Indian women has been underestimated and devalued on ordinary notion about the superior worth of the male. Majority of the contemporary Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande have focused on the psychological sufferings, oppressions of the frustrated housewife whose only option was to suppress the storm within, the inevitable existential predicament of women in a male dictated society. The neglected women as characters in their novel attempt for better way of life mentally and physically. 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. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring self-sacrificing women, towards conflicts, female characters searching for identity; no longer categorized and defined simply in terms of their victim position.

Shashi Deshpande has women protagonists in her most of the works. Their behavior, perspective towards their lives and their family are shown in her works. Her women want to come out from the conventional life style and marginalized psyche. The worst thing about the stature of a woman in society has been of her presentation as a thing. In all societies she has been presented as a disposal thing which is used according to need and then thrown out. Though women are not thrown out but kept in such conditions that they remained nothing better than an ordinary thing. Women have always been supposed to be living according to the male imagination, even the women belonging to noble class have been under the impact and influence of male dominance.

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. In spite 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 phallogocentric 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 ignore due to the false notion of being “liberated”.

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”. We have witnessed a eruption of women writers who have shunned all inhibitions accepting bravely the challenge of projecting, delineating, analysing and discussing the real status and factual roles of contemporary Indian women. As discussed in the foregoing chapters, these novelists some established and some others beginning to create powerful narrative 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 perplexed or overpower their problem but in each and every case never sacrifice the bondage the norms of society, no issue how advanced they may be.

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