

## INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS AND FEMINISM

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### Indian Writers in Nineteen Nineties

The nineteen nineties has been a most momentous decade for the Indian novel written in English, an advent grade decade which brought about significant changes in literary discourses. The novels of this time were of great success with universally acclaimed and were given prestigious national and international awards. They clearly evidenced our steady march towards the globalization of the Indian Writing in English, particularly 'The Indian English novel'. Therefore, it is time to evaluate and interpret the major works of the major writers of this decade.

Scholars and critics of contemporary literature, interrogate the outstanding works of Arundhanthi Roy, Amit Chandhuri, Vikram Chandra, Vikram Seth, Githa hariharan, RajKamal Jha, Pankaj Mishra, Sunny Singh, Salman Rushdie and Manju Kapur though most appropriate but diverse critical strategies and try to bring out the best in them. The contested sites of Indian English, the shape of the future literary criticism have been nicely carried out.

Indian Women Novelists can be said to be highly conscious of the women's liberation movement. By and large they have portrayed women and their stories with consciousness of the injustice being meted out to women by society. These novels have a feminist undercurrent. Usually these novels have a woman as the central character. If we look at the fictional female characters, a large number of them rebel against the existing social set up. They discard the idea of being submissive, suffering and sacrificing. "Rebellion is no easy process. It demands determination and a will to stand by the cause of rebellion at any cost". These come up to paying the prize of their rebellion rather than submitting and dying through suffocation".

Awareness on the writer's part of the individual needs of women like self-fulfilment and identity formation have resulted in these novels in patterns of alienation, communication gap, broken relationships and identity crises. Women in the of Nayantara Sahgal are liberal and unconventional. Saroj in "Storm in Chandigarh" refuses to succumb to socially acceptable norms of feminine behaviour. Ruth Jhabvala as a major woman novelist is less concerned with the personality development of her women; she is attracted by the double standards of Indian women in general. She can be said to have dealt with distortion of modernity and women's liberation. Shashi Deshpande is one novelist who is raising like a star feminist among women novelists of India. Her women are educated, self-conscious and sensitive. Their revolt against the rigid social and family set up comes out of necessity. In her novels like *That Long Silence* and *A Matter of Time*, Deshpande has subtly and accurately described the silence which has been thrust on Indian women for centuries.

Anita Desai's importance in Indian fiction in English is indeed great. She has touched the nuances and subtleties of fiction hitherto unknown in Indian fiction in English. A feminist reading of her novels reveals that almost all her women are not only liberated but go much beyond to the region of psychological and philosophical depths.

So it is with almost all women portrayed by Desai. Her concern does not lie with radical feminism and women's liberation. She lives and paints a scene where women can be presumed to be liberated.

All these novelists seem aware of the negative aspects of illogical feminism. Loss of moral values is not women's liberation. Breaking and destroying social harmony and institutions is not the purpose of this movement. Women's liberation is a state of mind.

An analysis of the novels by Indian women novelists with a feminist view reveals that these novelists have written with immense concern and understanding for their female characters. The hidden and suppressed world of Indian women comes to full light in these novels. It will not be wrong to call these novelists the powerful forerunners of Women's liberation movement in India.

Anita Desai Writes Literature cannot be torn away from the fabric of life as though it were a decoration or an excrescence it is woven into it. Inextricably, "Virginia said of the working classes: "Genius is not born of laboring, uneducated, servile people and that is all women have been in Asia for a very times".

Mostly the writers have carved out feminism as a struggle for women's identity and their fight against male domination and also defending equal rights to those of men. The writers have shown feminism as freedom and upliftment for women. Through their characters in the novels the writers show the violence penetrated upon women and also their struggle for seeking identity in a male dominated society. The writers like R.K. Narayan, Kamaia Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Shoba De, Mulk Raj Anand, Naargis Dalai have dealt with the theme of feminism. Each of these authors has chosen various aspects of feminism and discussed theme in their fiction. These writers trace out the live feminism through the experience of their characters.

Thus Kapur has stressed the unjust treatment meted out to women in her novels. She is one of those novelists who express the denial of freedom and right to women, especially in the traditionally male-dominated society. Women are restricted and suppressed even by the individuals who lead them to have physical torture and mental crisis in the end.

Manju Kapur has thus presented in her novels the predicament of sensitive women characters, who find it very difficult to adjust in the present mechanical and urbanized setup. The novelist's language and theme also reveal the meaningful correlations between psychic conditions of the characters. Mrs. Kapur is primly concerned with the fated of married woman in Indian Society today. Her women become victims of the traditional modes of existence without a strong terrarium, which makes them intensely, conscious of their lack of identity. Their protest mostly turns into frustration, for an Indian girl woman is

brought up to passive, meek and obedient. With this kind of orthodox background she tries to depict the oppressive and unfeeling conjugal bond.

After the Second World War the history of Indian women novelist got a new track, a new vision. In this period, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala are unquestionably the most outstanding personalities in the field of social and artistic novels.

Kamala Markandaya has written *Nectar in a Sieve* under the impression of feminist movement, rises in Europe, in France and in the U.S. The heroine of the novel *Lady Caroline Bell's* depicted by the novelist quite different to the women in some of her novels. In *Nectar in a Sieve* the heroine Rukmani is humble, submission and devotional to her husband that his illicit relationship with another woman, Kunthi, and even the deaths of her sons fail to reveal an indignant remark from her. She is presented as an apt Indian Hindu helpmate. Rukmani is an average woman, worships her husband as God. She says; "it was my husband who woke me - my husband, whom I will call him Nathan, for what was his name although in all the years of our marriage I never called him that, for it is not met for a woman to address her husband except as husband." (*Nectar in a Sieve*).

Rukmani is branded in society because she cannot bear a female child. She is not entitled to approach a doctor for help because she is a woman. She has to live with her "fate". However, Rukmani asserts herself and her individuality when she goes to consult the western doctor Kenny for medical aid. Her visits to Dr. Kenny are to be treated as an assertion of her freedom in the face of patriarchal norms.

Kamala Markandaya showed that under conventional role Rukmani can perform her other role as a human being not through alienation and obsession but through expansion and sharing a deeper self-awareness can be accomplished. The novel also portrays the suffering, struggle thoughts, and feeling of the women.

Maya, in *Cry, the Peacock* is a spoiled and pampered daughter of a wealthy Brahamin and is married to Gautama, an older man, in sensitive, pragmatic and rational lawyer who fails to understand her sensitive nature. She suffers from father obsession and looks for the typical father image in her husband. Childless, with an uncaring husband, she is lonely and loneliness is husband. Childless, with an uncaring husband, she is lonely and loneliness is the band and burden of her psyche. Later due to Maya's psychic problems, aggravated by her infantilism, drive her to a kind of schizophrenia. She delineates herself as 'body with out heart, a heart without a body' (196) Mrs. Desai *Cry the peacock* is an externalisation of interior Maya's sensibility. She is the victim of Hardian fate and providence, that is, an uncannily oppressive sense of fatality. She is so much segregated by society and astrological dilemma that in a fit of insane fury, she kills her own husband. The symbolism of the dead dog and the peacock's fighting before mating are highly suggestive.

### **Voices in the City**

*Voices in the City* deals with an account of the odyssey of two world-weary young women doomed to reside in Calcutta, the city of Kali and the city of Death. Monisha's

situation is a typical representation of the social situation of numerous young brides in India who unable to bear endless torment and provocative and pinching behaviour of the husband's family members, end up cases of bride burning, suicide or self-immolation. Monisha's relationship with her husband is characterize "only by loneliness" and lack of proper understanding. The oppressive lack of privacy, her sterility and her in laws suspicious, the absence of love and understanding in her life and the resultant loneliness within and without go to make Monisha a pathetic figure. At last she develops an incurable claustrophobia and commits suicide. She is aware of the fact that it is "a choice between death and mean existence". Her death, more than anything else in the novel, is a subject of great social significance.

Monisha's younger sister, Amla, a commercial artist with an advertising firm, has romantic dreams of rising high in her job. She decides to lead a gay life with the painter, Dharma, but her 'primeval joy' is transitory and she also starts to realize to hollowness and futility of her life. She becomes agitated as a moth" for she had submerged herself in the aqueous swaying underworld of Dharma's art.

#### **Where Shall We Go This Summer?**

Where Shall We Go This Summer? portrays the aching void in the life of Sita by probing deeper into her life as a woman, a wife and a mother. Disaster stretches out from the very beginning. Sita's marriage to Raman is already tottering on the verge of collapse, when she runs away to her childhood home, in the hope of a miracle that would save her from giving birth to her fifth child in this violent-ridden world around her. Sita and her husband behave as if they were the habitant of two different worlds. Her physical and mental plight deteriorated each day so much.

She is disgusted with "the tedium and ugliness of a meaningless life". In her journey from the Bombay to Manori, from Raman to her father, from harshness of reality to the safety of the matrix, Sita learns that life is but "a crust of dull tedium, of hopeless, disappointment. It is now a critical common place that Mrs. Desai is a novelist predominant depicting the feminine, abnormal sensibility who pictured the inner reality of Sita, the main character, who is stifled by the cruelty and callousness of urban life. Fed up the burden of children, she runs away to a small island, and persuades her husband to return.

#### **Fire on the Mountain**

Fire on the Mountain is principally the story of the two agonised cries of Nanda Kaul and I la Das. Nanda Kaul has been desperately hurt, frustrated in her earlier life as the Vice-Chancellor's wife and mother. Nanda Kaul's marital life with a selfish husband is anything but compatible. Despite being ruthlessly dominated by her husband, she performs her duty faithfully towards her family. His deliberate insults to her dignity is achieved his blatant affair with another women. Nor had her husband loved and cherished her like a queen but kept her quiet when he had affair with Miss David.

There is an intruder into the quietude of carignano in the form of llaDas. She is a piano teacher, turns social welfare worker, who breaks in violently upon Nanda Kaul's solitude. A pathetic being, she is portrayed as "an old animal that has been made to run before the hounds." She was not nicely treated by life, and all her life mobs had taunted and derided her. She is ashamed of herself and regards her upbringing as responsible for her "absurd" life. The way of her life, we are said, "was full of hazards, full of hazards". MlaDas's life has been miserable and unfortunate as is clear from various references to it.

In this novel Anita Desai presents two different characters - Nanda, and unsentimental old widow leading a segregated life like a recluse in a hill hut, and Raka, a shy, gentle and lovely school girl by nature instincts. The tragedy begins when Ilia Das, Nanda's bosom friend and a social worker is raped a strangled. This incident so powerfully overcast its dark shadow on Nanda Kaul that she makes her mind to lead a life of a saint in the lap of lonely place, far from the din and bustle of city life.

Shashi Deshpande's Novels reveals the women's quest for self, an exploration into the female psyche and an awareness of the mysteries of life and the protagonists place in it. Her first novel *Roots and Shadows* published after *The Dark Holds No Terrors* and *If I Die Today* and these novels indicate the initial quest of woman for herself. The same quest is continued in her later novel that long *Silence*. Mrs. Deshpande explains that all her protagonists are related with their "Selves". Mrs. Deshpande's women are tolerant, obedient and submissive. But a feminism awakening and upswing is all along notable in their feeling and conduct.

In *Roots and Shadows* the protagonist Indu is a middle class young girl, bora in an orthodox Brahmin family, headed by Akka, the mother figure in the novel, "left home full of hatred for the family, for Akka specially and she had sworn, she would never go back.

Indu marries Jayant without Akka's consent so she revolts against her marriage to her parental home on earth. Indu comes back after eleven years of her marriage to her parental home on Akka's consent so she attends on Akka's death and becomes inheritor of her property. In this story Indu the protagonist's self-agonise affirmation is revealed well. She does not want to remain as a puppet rather she takes decision apropos to her will.

Saru in *The Dark Hold No Terrors* has childhood trauma. Her mother has gender difference in the treatment of her son Dhruva and her daughter. In conversation her mother says "He is different. He's a boy (40). Saru hates her mother and rebels all her lip who dared to challenge the age-old traditions to marry a man of outside of her caste. Saru marries Manohar and it means to get away from her mother and her home. Thus she challenges the authority of her mother. But that love marriage between them doesn't prove to be fruitful. Her recent novel, *The Binding Vine* is a feminine novel which represents woman as a spineless, wooden creature subjected to male domination. Further Indu and Saru do not concede to perform such rituals which enhance the life span of their husbands. This objection is an implication of the autonomy and selfhood. Both Saru and Indu wed out of their race and their husband's home becomes the prisons. Saru is initially disappointed with

her husband Manohar. Even Indu learns the 'gift of silence' from her wedding and meets with deception. They both see marriage only interns of the dark rooms where terror awaits them. The visit to the parental home is like the rites of passage, the home they discarded becomes the very place of refuge. But the epigraph of the novel "you are your own refuge" presents its story.

### **That Long Silence**

In *That Long Silence*, Shashi Deshpande makes an aesthetic plea to free the female psyche from the conventional male control. In short, almost all the literary venture of Shashi Deshpande revolves round the pathetic and heartrending condition of women in a male dominated society.

Kamala Das, a major Indian poetess, has written some books of poems i.e., **Summer in Calcutta**, *The Descendants* and *The Old Playhouse* and other poems. She has attracted international attention by virtue of her bold, uninhibited articulation of feminine e sensibility along with other women poets like Gowri, Deshpande, Mamata Kalia, De Souza and others. Her anguished affirmation of independence is available in her autobiography, *Mystery*. Kamala Das's quest for identity is directly the progeny of an old social setup, oriented towards the total annihilation of the feminine personality.

Mrs. Das has projected a new to liberate the women from the bondage of slavery in man-dominated society. Her poems have recorded the subjugation of male's hegemony over females.

### **The Looking Glass**

In *The Looking Glass*, Mrs. Das portrays the nudity of the stark reality of life through physical imagery being bias less. But it is woman who offers to man the sensual pleasures of her body.

Gift him all, *What Makes You Woman*, *Long Hair*, *The Musk of Sweat Between the Breasts*, *The Warm Shock of Menstrual Blood*, *Endless Female Hungers*, and in all her works, Mrs. Das present a feminist movement through her poetry. She discovers the male - hegemony from the inner care of her feminine consciousness. Mrs. Das's personality has its irreparable anchors in sexual love and when it is refused she feels her life meaningless barren and wasteland, she bursts in the poem, *The Suicide*"

*O Sea, I am fed up,  
I want to be simple,  
I want to be loved,*

.....

*If love is not to be had,  
I want to be dead*

Nayantara Sahgal's development as a novelist carries testimony to the fact she has been walking toward a certain feminist state, so that the female's feelings do not merely provide data but are actually organized in such a way that become a practice in pullulating

consciousness and a critique of society with its unequal gender roles and the power distribution involved in them. Our attempt goes to analyse the women's position in her novels, *The Day in Shadow* and *Rich Like You* through feminine perspectives.

Mrs. Sahgal depicts the suffering of a woman in Indian society who decides to dissolve a marriage of seventeen years old. She signs the 'consent terms' of her divorce settlement without understanding their indications and when she is free from Som she turns to Raj. Simrit looks like a "liberated" woman who has the courage to change a long kinship which appears meaningless with no sense of companionship or partnership between husband and wife. Simrit does not fight alone for her survival, for her financial independence, for her self-identity.

It presents the anecdote of woman's effort to establish her personhood, of three men in their different ways aiming at success so that each becomes a metaphor for changing human values and unchanging human nature. In the present novel woman is as victim motif. The novel has data enough to present the feminine sensibility.

Thus, Mrs. Sahgal's novels raise the voice of its protagonists against the oppression of male - chauvinism and hegemony in the familial level through feminine perspectives.

Veena Paintal is an Indian novelist who does not hold much popularity but has written several novels which deal with many questions about women. Her effort for women's emancipation is strongly demonstrated through her novel,

#### **An Autumn Leaf and Spring Returns**

The Protagonist rebels against the oppression of women in a male-chauvinistic society, she feels that a spiritual relationship of equality cannot be obtained in a wedding. We see that *An Autumn Leaf* is a novel of the plight of feminine sense.

Shobhe De is modern novelist who is famous for portraying the sexual mania of the commercial world. In narration of incident she is very frank and straight forward. Like Anita Desai, she has the gift of exploring the subdued depths of women psychology. She believes that a man's personality can be judged in a true perspective only when one goes into his interior more than his exterior behaviour. Today we see that sex which is the root of all our energy, plays a very vital role in a man's life. That's why most of the novels of De analyse the various aspects of sex, a great urge of human being which appeals to most of the readers of modern scientific and commercial world where a large section of people are wildly hungry for power, wealth and sex.

In *Sexual Politics* as Kale Millett points out that patriarchy "Subordinate the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male." The women in the novel have resemblance like Negroes in the U.S. and the labour-class anywhere who are oppressed and tortured. To possess one thing is to be noted that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Afro-America society, the whites bought the Negroes as slave and treated them as possession.

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The most writers' in the new wave of realism that swept over Indian literature in the nineteen twenties and nineteen thirties was Mulk Raj Anand. As befits the ambitions of a social realist, he chose the novel as his medium, and it was the novel which was to remain dominant for Indo-Anglian writers' up to the present time. Anand saw India in terms of enslavement, caste, poverty religious archaism, saluted the enduring heroism of the poor and oppression of the women. The women that reside in Anand's world are all preys of a habit where man is ascribed the pride of place and thus allowed the socio cultural confirmation of the female banishments.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is a feminine study as well as a bildungsroman. Bildungsroman is a term borrowed from German literary criticism, literally means Formation novel. As Roalind Miles points out women writers have successfully developed a female bildungsroman as a long-overdue and necessary counterweight to the long tradition of portraits of the Artists a Young Male". *The Bell Jar* is a bildungsroman a novel depicting the early emotional developments of the protagonist, as well as a revenge play where the oppressed heroine rises from fear to fury and assumes the mantle of a vengeful Diana or Kali. The novel after publishing in America became a holy book 'Bible' for the school and college going girls, for its heroine is a pullulating artist facing the social impediments around her.

In the context of Western novels, the contemporary Afro-American literature estimates the conflict by the female protagonists with their father, brother, husband, sister society and conventional custom. The Afro-American writers vehemently participate in this context. There are many Afro-American writers viz., Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Nikki Giovanni, Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lucille Clifton, Mari Evans, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez and many others. But the intention of the chapter is to account for the emergence of the most acclaimed writers are Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall all winners of Awards. The fiction of the novelist is generally proposed by similar themes and motifs. There is usually a black heroine who is involved in quest to find a meaning identity and to survive with dignity in the society.

Walker's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Colour Purple* (1982) begins with Celie's first letter to God. She writes to God: "Dear God, I am fourteen years old I have always been a good girl". The words 'I am' explicitly suggest the irony because she is the pray, being raped by her step father. Due to this she suffers with inferiority complex. Her mind is polluted with it. She cannot enjoy the pleasures of common conjugal life. Now her oppression is so severe, intense and in natural that her two children, born out of this sexual crime, are powerfully removed from her. Her motherly breasts overflow with milk but she

finds no child to feed. Her rude father ordered her to look handsome but she wretchedly replies, "What I am sprout to put on? I don't have nothing. She is oppressed physically and emotionally, this concept of sexist abuse physically and emotionally. This concept of sexist abuse of black women is not rooted on racial ground only but this malady is also ruled in the patriarchal society.

### **The Women of Brewster Place**

Gloria Naylor scrutinizes the "Tripartite crossfire" in *The Women of Brewster Place*. Her characters struggle for their survival in an atmosphere of poverty and prejudice, violence violation and an almost crushing adversity".

Black women in America have undergone the racial obstacles for years. Ultimately, the words of Maya Angelou haunts in the mind. The Black female is caught in the tripartite crosspire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and lack of power. Thus, these novels expose the dark oppressions exercised by male against women but together with it powers the ways, the means to women to protect against their liberation. About authors' feminist views:

Shakespeare is not a feminist as Shaw appears to be, but the predicaments of female characters he depicts are equal, even better in intellect than their male counter parts. In antique time, the people have high reverence for their queen, but they do not treat their wives as equal. In the novel, Polonius takes extreme care to keep his daughter away from Hamlet for she is young and immature and seems to be influenced by Hamlet's vows, which he considers are "imploratory of unholy suits". Likewise Laertes considers it genuine to advise his sister ere he leaves for France. "It is sufficient proof of women in the Elizabethan English England where there is no equal advantage to women they were disregarded as frail and fickle minded. The English manners concerning women are no better than what persuaded elsewhere in the world. Shakespeare himself concedes this in *The Taming of the Shrew* where he makes Katherina counsel her daughter:

*"Thy husband is thy Lord, they life, thy keeper thy head, thy Sovereign.  
To Hamlet his mother is not only uncivilized but also disrespectful.*

Hamlet is cosmically known as one of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare. But Hamlet's behaviour and concern with woman has not mentioned by the critic up to now. It indicates nothing but "male chauvinism". The whole discussions are made on Gertrude's vise as the root cause of her son's tradedy. But she is as innocent as Ophelia's.

Thus we see that the queen in the tragedy suffers through unfair treatment by male protagonists.

It is not only the women writers alone focus on feminism but it is dealt also by most of the men writers too. R.K. Narayan, the most eminent writer in India, ironically highlights that every modern girl of society is sailing in the same boat. They like to have status and complete freedom in their matrimonial life. But Narayan never underestimated the strength of a woman. He sees immense potential in her as an incarnation of "Shakti". He charts the

silent anger of in womanhood at the futility and meaninglessness of female life. His care and concern for the wounded woman, is rested to the purely traditional and scriptural wisdom of yore. His famous works are *The Guide* (1958), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945).

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