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New woman in post-colonial women's writings

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Abstract

Women are the essential and integral part of society. The theories of feminism given by Simone De Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter and Betty Friedan changed the position of woman worldwide and gave rise to the writings about issues related to women. Post-colonial women's writing includes the impact of feminist movements, the practical issues of women, man-woman relationship, and quest for their identity, treatment by society and women's expectations and view on that treatment. In post-colonial India, women writers placed their women in the context of changing societal view and scenario. Indian women accepted the patriarchal system of Indian society. They are playing as well as sacrificing their best roles that assigned to them by society. They are willingly allowing themselves to be dominated. Expanding education, job opportunities, modern thoughts from western countries, feminist movements are changing the mentality of women for themselves and forcing them to rebel the old custom of getting suppression.

Keywords: Feminism, quest for identity, patriarchal system, societal view, suppression, practical issues

Introduction

Women are the integral part of human society and world. Each culture has its own features regarding the treatment with women. Actually it is different from age to age but there lies one fact which simply presents a common view, that women have never been treated with equality to man. They are suppressed and subjected by man. An ideal woman's image is featured with the values like gentleness, dependency and submissiveness according to the society. Feminist movement has changed the position of women rapidly, which gave rise to the writings about issues related to women. The phase is important for many reasons. It is a materialist and historicist approach that includes the practical issues of women, their relationship with education as to understand the terms of English is another task to deal. Women write differently from men. They write about themselves.

As far as the feminist criticism is concerned, it can be divided into two types- the first kind is "woman as a reader", who is called as "the feminist critique" according to Showalter's analysis. It consists of the female consumers who give their hypothesis and grounded inquiry which probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. Over the past decades the readings and observations of the writings of women centric novels, there has been evolved the second type of feminist criticism, where woman has come forward as a writer.

The first generation of women writers depicted the women characters in traditional outlook and designed her to life. The women writers were under the influence of the British writers as these women writers tended to imitate, although some of them focused on the romantic idealization and reformative enthusiasm as the option for others. They do not consider men alone responsible for all the sufferings of women. They acknowledge the men themselves as victims of the social things. The women writers tried to keep their feminist thought within bounds in order to be realistic to that era.

Indian woman has numerous facets; she may be kind, sensitive, intelligent, jealous, patient and protective. Throughout the Indian history she has been identified with the mythical figures such as Sita, Savitri, Lakshmi, Saraswati and Durga. Even the early male writers idealized the images of women in the ancient form of women. The fact is that the writer writes under the influence of social milieu. The conditions of India are very different from western world, so the novelists took the issues from different aspects and levels. A few writers portrayed women as the victims who are ruined on account of extreme poverty like Kamala Markandaya. Whereas there are some other novelists who stated that the problem of women is not economic but psychological and those writers presented women educated and affluent section of society.

If we notice Indian society analytically, we find that the institution of joint family demands a lot of adjustment from a woman.

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Like Anita Desai pictures the troubles and the experiences of newly married girl, which she faces and the experience may embitter her life. These kinds of situations are reflected in our writings of India, as Western countries do not have such conditions in their society. Indian women desire economic freedom more than sexual one, as it often subjects them to male tyranny. Barring a few tracks, like Shobhaa De and some other women novelists of that tribe of writing talk about sexual freedom and discussed a frank discussion.

Women's approach is far different in east from west. Women in west equate identity with men and demand for independence. In India, earlier women desired for mere co-operation. Although in 21st century there came an aspect among them, to assert themselves as autonomous human beings. In the post-colonial and post-independence era many women writers made female protagonists in their novels. They presented their femaleness according to her class, upbringing and the circumstances of society near around her, with her treatment and dealing with it. They used the image of frustrated women in their works sometime, which can be treated as a symbol of discontent arousing within the heart of any ordinary Indian woman. One of the most pressuring problems confronted by the modern Indian women is the desire to find and get self- fulfillment. Women writers portrayed more realistically the inner struggle of women to find balance between tradition and modernity.

Earlier novels have shown their women suffering natural calamities, as famines, flood, economic hardships etc. Kamala Markandaya has a different repertoire of women characters in her fiction. Her women show patience and forbearance under tortuous circumstances. Ira the daughter of Nathan in *Nector in a Sieve* (1954) is such example. She shows all her affection to her younger brother when her husband rejects her for barrenness. She starves for his brother in famine and even when finds everything she has as insufficient, she does not even hesitate to sell her body. Her mother Rukmini is so devoted to her husband that after hearing her husband's infidelity remains silent. Another work of her *A Handful of Rice* (1966) is about the story of urban poor life. Nalini also has courage like Rukmini to face odds. *A Silence of Desire* (1961) deals with man- woman relationship. *Possession* (1963) and *The Nowhere Man* (1972) deal with the problems of cultural differences between East and West faced by women. In *Some Inner Fury* (1955) she talks about the conjugal arguments and rifts. Kamala Markandaya presented that women are so burdened with the problems of their routine life that they do not get time to think about their own identity and independence. She led her women characters to find solace in the maxim of love, pride, compassion and sacrifice.

Anita Desai is comparatively a different kind of novelist and writer in the treatment of themes and characters of her work. Her characters mostly suffer from their inner battles from outside influences. The central stage is mainly about the unhappy and unfulfilled woman who tries to resolve the inner battles of her. She presents woman's frustrations, expectations from their life and partners. Monisha in *Voices in the City*, Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer* feel frustrated and suffered as they do not consider themselves suitable to play the traditional female role. They seek a high degree of emancipation in the society which binds its woman with conventions and this leads to intense psychological pressures and mental disorders. Although these women frilled in their quest, still

they protested and appeared realistic and human.

Nayantara Sahgal writes mostly in autobiographical nature and fictionalizes the factual and emotional things in her works. Kusum in *A Time to Be Happy* (1968), Saroj in *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), Rashmi in *That Time of Morning* (1967) try to manage and maintain their bad relationships. They try to balance it with their personal aspirations. Sahgal uses marriage as the beginning of unending and painful suffering instead of using it as happy ending of one's life. Her novels present the picture of ordinary woman suffering mental torture and intense pain due to their unhappy marriages. Sahgal depicted virtuous and innocent woman who aspires for freedom and compassionate world. One can notice that Nayantara Sahgal's works present the appearance of "New Woman" who appears as a century behind from the New Woman of West.

The Indian Diaspora Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Bharati Mukharjee saw women in different ways and are known for their remarkable works in English, specially the characterization of women characters. They visualized women who feel alienated from the women in western world. Apart from them Dina Mehta, Geeta Mehta etc. can be counted in serious novelists. They highlighted the dilemma of the modern Indian woman. Their characters shattered the myth of clinging, dependent and weak woman, who are not bounded to the limited feminist perspective. Ruth Praver Jhabvala presented the theme of marital dissonance through her ladies such as Mrs. Kaul in *A Backward Place* (1960) and Amrita in *To Whom She Will* (1955).

Veena Paintal gave voice to the frustrated middle class woman. Roshini the central heroine of her first novel buries all her wishes to become an ideal life, as Premlata in Kamala Markandaya's *Some Inner Fury*. Charisma in *An Autumn Leaf* (1976) is a rebel with her own views over love and marriage.

Shashi Deshpande's first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* presented her character Sarita in a way where she disobeys her mother and becomes a doctor, disobeys caste and marries outside. Her relationship with her mother is also sharpened beautifully here. Her major concern is to picture the conflicts between the patriarchy and traditional values on one hand and individuality and self-expression on the other.

Manju Kapoor's novels have the reflecting elements of gender differences and biased behavior, marginalization, man-woman relationship, individual desires, rebellion and protest. The works highlight the societal as well as institutional obligations and how the characters challenge the patriarchal mechanism and control over woman in their own way.

Shobhaa De is famous for depicting the sexual mania of the commercial Indian world and society. She portrayed the human psyche and its secret depths very precisely. The acute character portrayal, her saucy racy, the women of her novels' attitude towards the society and its norms invoke vivid images and compel her reader to identify herself with the characters and various situations. She exposed the moral break down of modern contemporary Indian society in which the forsaken woman wants to fly freely in the sky of her aspirations and liberty. De in her specific way talked of many feminine issues such as changing moral values, marital dissonance, desire of power, fame and money etc.

Her new woman wants their own recognition as they are ambitious, independent, and aggressive and use men for their own purpose. Marriage for them is a source to serve and gain their desires. Her new women are bold and protest against the established patriarchal rules of the society. She artistically used her narrative technique according to the desired content presentation. Her works' chief characteristic is the articulation of the urban female voice. She tried to arouse the society from its old slumber and set standards to motivate society to emancipate Indian women from violence and oppression in all its manifestations. She created her characters who needed to rebel social oppression which negate and undermine individual power and one's own will. Jhumpa Lahiri represented her own culture in which she herself was brought up. She talked about the culture of migrant Bengalis who had migrated to the U.K. and U.S.A. in early seventies. This Diaspora segment was educated and affluent still rooted to the culture. Her women characters are suffering from the so called identity loss in the alien countries. Her women use to do their household duties in their traditional attires that made their life limited to the expected kind of Indian society. Their migration is not from their will or curiosity but a result of their husband's choice and obligations. These women remained silent and bear the pain of nostalgia to lead a happy married life. Her portrayal of the women of her novel shows the themes of love, communication barriers as, incompatible relationships, cultural differences and loss of identity she presented the clashing cultures from a feminine sensibility. Her characters teach the lessons of equality and humility which motivates their readers to accept the good of the past and awake modern women's desires, feelings and feminist standpoint. Arundhati Roy's feminist novel "The God of Small Things" presents the condition of women in a cultural milieu. The novel is suffused with feminine sensibility; the structure is in the sense how Luce Irigaray uses it. Irigaray links feminine discourse with the structure of the female genitals and uses the differences between the sexual organs as symbols of the masculine and feminine characteristics of a discourse. The women writers imitated the structure of the male discourse according to her but it is against their nature even if one talks about the narrative of "The God of Small Things", it is authentically feminine narrative. The word "divorced" is spelt as "Die- vorced" which is like a form of death. Even when the female visitors come to see Ammu after her return as a divorcee, divorce is at least metaphorically, a form of death in the reactions of the ladies. Ammu is a woman who loved "not wisely but too well" but still crushed down by the patriarchal love laws that lay down. Arundhati Roy, portrayce women struggling in the male dominated society. Ammu struggles to rise but she is humiliated. Since Ammu killed in her struggle, she appears as the real forerunner of coming feminism. Namita Gokhale portrayed her women characters in a very distinctive way that truly reflects an Indian woman's life. The oppressive mechanism of Indian society and women's struggle are highlighted in Gokhale's writings. Women are discriminated and they do not want to stay as glamorous dolls. They are self-reliant through their education who nurtures their desires to be independent. The women rebel against the set patriarchal norms not in silent way but boldly and in an outspoken way who are very determined towards their wills. In "Shakuntala: The Play of Memory" she tried to investigate her thoughts about women regarding their

own oppression and independence with picaresque image of Shakuntala. Her Shakuntala wants to lead her life on her own terms. Gokhale depicts that a lady isn't to be treated merely as unusual toy or an object of delight, but to be treated as equivalent to men.

The writer pleads that the discrimination against woman must stop and so they take up the issues related to the status and position of women in India. They portrayed the woman of contemporary India who wants her rightful place alongside her male counterpart in Indian society and does not want to conform to the traditional image.

Now day's writers dwell and depict both the diversity of women and the diversity within each woman, rather than limiting the lives of women to a fixed characterization form. The works of women writers in 21st century provide instances of a whole range of attitude towards the imposition of conventional tradition. They played their part significantly in providing a medium of self-expression and making aware to the Indian society about the demands of women, and thus they significantly contribute in the re-writing of Indian history.

Women writers assigned women characters as central figures and given new dimensions to the image of women in society. Whatever the reason is, it might be their insight into women's problems, their reactions and responses to it, sometimes the complexities of their emotional outbroken sentiments and involvement. The heartbeat of the woman is felt and sympathized with. Women writers portrayed an accurate picture of the modern woman with her hopes, aspirations and frustrations and created an insight to understand the dilemma of the modern women. The modern literature and the women writers are trying to portraying a new social order which is not downgrading women but wishes them to be autonomous being. Although some of the modern writers are facing crisis of values, as they come under the effect of new ideas so they respond it sensitively. The Indian women novelists of the post-independence era such as Ruth Praver Jhabavala, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Shashi Deshpande presented new woman's struggle to establish her own identity to get individual importance and self-satisfaction. They depicted that how the violent circumstances surround the sensitive women. This lead them to reject the established social norm that became outdated according to the present situations. These women are prepared to face all the hurdles, rejections and their target to gain a meaningful life. In the beginning of the story of the novels these women characters use to appear as the sufferer or the victims of the social obligations and when the novel advances they become aware of the declining and blooming identity of themselves. These novels present how through self-dependence and quest new woman comes out of these evil norms.

Indian women novelists achieved a permanent remarkable recognition in English fictions, and got national as well as international awards. They tried their best to change the male dominated mentality and free woman's wings. They included the female experiences in their works which affected the cultural patterns of literature of Indian writings. Their write up contains no accessibility. They depicted that the women of modern era can think on different lines. In post-colonial India, women writers placed their women in the context of changing societal view and scenario. Indian women accepted the patriarchal system of Indian society. They are playing as well as sacrificing their best roles that

assigned to them by society. They are willingly allowing themselves to be dominated. Expanding education, job opportunities, modern thoughts from western countries, feminist movements are changing the mentality of women for themselves and forcing them to rebel the old custom of getting suppression. They are not courageous enough to deny to their assigned and expected roles. Still at the same time they want to make their own status and individual identity. Women writers of the era understood their pain and desired as well as tried to portray their characters in such way that can justify the contemporary social situations and female psyche at the same time. It helped in exploring women's psychological view. Post-colonial era put forward the western feminists' theories of such as by Betty Friedan (*The Feminist Mystique*, 1963), Simone De Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1952) etc. It resulted the Indian women writers to break the shackles and old social norms of Indian society. They not only presented the psyche of Indian women but presented a new concept of morality also.

Literature is the best platform where any issue or problem can be highlighted. We can notice in past two three decades when Indian women's writing is increasingly spreading its wings and exploring new ways of presenting their thoughts with acceptance of the challenges of delineating and analysing the status and factual roles of Indian women. The themes are about the existential struggle to establish the identity of Indian women. In last two and three decades burning issues related with women are explored. They deal with the themes of feminine subjectivity and from childhood to complete womanhood. Thus the women's writing in India contributed in the uplifting women's position in society as literature reflects society.

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