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## Indian writing in English and women writers in India

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### Abstract

Indian women writers in recent decades have produced abundant literary output highlighting the evolution and transformation of Indian women from the innocent to the intellectual beings in society. These writers laid bare the traumas and torture most women were suffering at the hands of their male counterparts. It was more difficult for women aspiring to write in English to secure their place on the literary horizon because of numerous hurdles created by male literary dons. The present paper attempts to present how women writers in India carved their niche in the literary domain by taking up a variety of themes and winning prestigious awards at the international level.

**Keywords:** High school teachers, mental stress

### Introduction

One of the major concerns of Contemporary literature all over the world has been to highlight the plight of women, their increasing problems, their physical, financial, and emotional exploitation, and their mental anguish in the male-dominated society. In almost all countries women in all brands of fiction have been underrated and undervalued. The narratives by male writers miserably fail to explore the psychic and emotional realities of women. The status of women has been a paradox. Worshipped as a goddess and exalted as a mother, a woman is overworked and systematically subordinated. The task of deconstructing the prevalent negative images of women in fiction ultimately fell to the lot of women writers who reconstructed the distorted images of womanhood through the process of exorcising the male mind that has been planted in them.

### Contribution of women writers in enriching Indian writing in English

Women writers have contributed much to enhancing the richness and variety of Indian writing in English. Only women writers can present the psychology of Indian women in true colours, only they can become the voice of thousands of silent women and they have been successful primarily in this respect. The Indian English writers- Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, and Kiran Desai portray convincing and living women who defy traditional institutions and protest age-old iniquities, work out their problems that bedevil their survival, and triumphantly 'surface' like a sphinx. Their writings reject some of the spurious male assumptions about Indian women writing in English.

### Toru Dutt- first woman writer writing in English

Toru Dutt was the first great woman writer in IEL and was inspired by the writings of Derozio. She is one of the founding fathers of Indian Writings in English. Being tutored by the English teachers in her childhood, she could handle the English language with ease. Her writings express her frustration with the conservative and restrictive Indian society. Her diction and style remind one of the romantic school of poetry. She wrote poetry, fictional as well as non-fictional works in English. Her command of the foreign tongue shows that gender is a poor criterion for assessing literary works.

### Kamala Markandeya-Social Realism and Diaspora

Kamala Markandeya is one of the most talented women writers of Indian fiction in English. Though there is no overt feminism in her work, she tries to achieve a texture of sociological realism. With the publication of her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve*, in 1954, she began a successful career writing novels. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, she shows how hunger breeds thieves, prostitutes, murderers, and subhuman beasts. Like most writers of the Indian Diaspora, Markandeya is preoccupied with the conflict between East and West or that between tradition and modernity. She also ruminates on the contemporary Indian scene, both rural and urban, and in her fiction, she explores its economic, socio-cultural, and spiritual aspects.

**Shashi Deshpande-Quest for identity**

Shashi Deshpande is a well-known name in the field of Indian literature. She is one of the novelists whom you can read with seriousness. She is never after gimmicks. There is an earnest voice, very serious about the story being told and its manner. She is one of the writers with little posturing. Her novels usually have women as the protagonists. Her novels are concerned with women's quests, an exploration into the female psyche and an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonist's place in it. Her *Binding Vine* presents primarily the women's world. The men come into the picture only when they try to make women realize that they (Men) are superior. She states "My novels are about women trying to understand themselves, their history, their roles, and their place in this society. I have rejected stereotypes and requisitioned the myths which have so shaped the image of women, in this country". (The Times of India)

**Kamala das-failure of marriages and sexual frustration**

Kamala Das, recognized as one of India's foremost poets, has to her credit prose and poetical writings in which she highlights the plight of women caught in the morass of effete conventions – social and familial. Her English poetry has been published in Europe in French, German, and Swedish. She "wrote chiefly of love, its betrayal, and the consequent anguish, and Indian readers responded sympathetically to her guileless, guiltless frankness regarding sexual matters. Ms Das abandoned the certainties offered by an archaic, and somewhat sterile, aestheticism for independence of mind and body at a time when Indian women poets were still expected to write about teenage girlie fantasies of eternal, bloodless, unrequited love" (www.wikipaedia.com) In the poems of Kamala Das, we find a rare body and its feelings, and she seems incapable of thinking of eternal life as a bodiless existence.

**Manju kapur-Women Empowerment and Evolution**

Manju Kapur is the author of four novels. Her first, *Difficult Daughters*, won the Commonwealth Prize for First Novels and was a number-one bestseller in India. Her second novel, *A Married Woman* was called fluent and witty in the independent world, while her third, *Home*, was described as 'glistening with detail and emotional acuity' in *The Sunday Times*. *Difficult Daughters* is a wonderful saga of daughters who deal with hardships as their life is not a bed of roses. Yes, of course, this novel has a theme of love as well. The love story of Virmati and Harish impresses the readers. The story teaches us to have patience and not to stop hoping. Further, there are many minor characters in the novel without whom the story would have been incomplete. It gives us the autobiographical life of Virmati who is shown as a strong, independent and ambitious lady while on the other side, Harish is a caring, intelligent and understanding professor, life partner and lover. Their love story goes through many tests and no doubt they clear all of them.

**Jhumpa Lahiri-issues of identity, isolation, diaspora**

Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jhumpa Lahiri is celebrated for her depiction of immigrant and Indian American life, yet her poignant stories also capture universal themes of longing, loneliness and barriers of communication. Lahiri's characters are often immigrants from India or children of immigrants who deal with issues of cultural displacement, marital troubles, and issues of identity. In addition to her

sense of disorientation, Lahiri has also described a palpable sense of loss inherited from her immigrant parents and their circle of Indian American friends. She explains that her writing derives from a desire to force the two worlds to mingle on the page. She has created a specific niche for herself in the literary arena by portraying the agonies of non-resident Indians.

**Anita Desai-a painter of women's psyche**

Desai possesses an unusual but appealing talent. She has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times; she received a Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*, from the Sahitya Academy, India's National Academy of Letters. She won the British Guardian Prize for the Village by the Sea. Desai published her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock*, in 1963. She considers *Clear Light of Day* (1980) her most autobiographical work as it is set during her coming of age and also in the same neighborhood in which she grew up. In 1984 she published *In Custody* which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Her novel, *The Zigzag Way* appeared in 2004 and her latest collection of short stories, *The Artist of Disappearance* was published in 2011. In her first novel, *Cry the Peacock* (1963), Anita Desai portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl Maya who is haunted by a childhood prophecy of a fatal disaster. From her earliest novel 'Cry, the Peacock' to the latest 'Clear Light of the Day', she has frequently dealt with female protagonists and poor, young and old, single, married or widowed.

**Kiran Desai-Magic Realism and Socio-Cultural Realism**

Kiran Desai, the daughter of Anita Desai, got herself shortlisted for the Booker Prize on three occasions. Her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, was published in 1998 and received accolades from such notable figures as Salman Rushdie. It won the Betty Trask Award a prize given by the Society of Authors for the best new novels by citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations under the age of 35. Her second book, *The Inheritance of Loss*, (2006) was widely praised by critics throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. It won the 2006 Man Booker Prize, as well as the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. India's rigid class system is the main theme of the novel. Every aspect of the characters' lives is dictated by their social class. In India, it is acceptable to treat others as slaves if they are in a lower social class. The two classes do not trust each other; the upper class always suspects the lower class of stealing. Constant anger underlies the characters' everyday behaviors and keeps the two classes separated. The upper classes realize that their social position is what makes them vulnerable when the insurgents turn to violence.

**Nayantara Sehgal-personal Crisis of Elite Class**

Belonging to an aristocratic family of freedom fighters, Nayantara Sahgal has published both fiction and nonfiction. She can juxtapose the personal world of man-woman relationships with the impersonal world of fiction. Her fiction presents the personal crisis of India's elite amid settings of political upheaval. Sahgal first wrote *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, an autobiographical memoir about her youth. She then turned to fiction, often setting her stories of personal conflict amid Indian political crises. In her fourth novel, *The Day in Shadow*, the heroine is an educated divorcee struggling in India's male-dominated society. The contrast between the idealism at the beginning of India's

independence and the moral decline of post-Nehru India that is particularly evident in *A Situation in New Delhi* recurs in Sahgal's novels as *Rich Like Us*, which confronts civil disorder, corruption, and oppression while detailing the internal conflicts in a businessman's family. Two of Sahgal's later novels, *Plans for Departure* and *Mistaken Identity*, are set in colonial India. Her works of nonfiction include *Relationship, Extracts from Correspondence and Point of View: a Personal Response to Life, Literature, and Politics*. "Primarily seen as a feminist, her feminism is rooted in the larger framework of human rights of personal freedom and right to body". (Sinha 222)

### **Arundhati Roy-Painful childhood, environment, family discords**

Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize for her book *The God of Small Things* in 1997. She is also an activist who writes and speaks on issues concerning the environment, non-violence and also on human rights. She has written several nonfiction books like *The Cost of Living*, *The Shape of the Beast: Conversations with Arundhati Roy*, *The Greater Common Good*, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* and many other titles. *The God of Small Things* make one feel the anguish and pain of a mother, the sorrow of a child, the sufferings of lovers separated, the forced maturity thrust upon children, and the separation of family members. There are parts in the story, which could be completely unacceptable to some readers. However, one wonders what the outcome would have been, had untouchability never been a factor and if only everyone was treated equally.

### **Shobha de- Indian Marriages and Women Evolution**

Shobha De! *The Tsunami* in modern Indian English novels has been hailed as the champion of a new novel due to the subtle antagonism of gender discrimination in her novels. She is one of India's high-selling authors. She pens from the bottom of her heart with wholehearted appreciation and revolutionary ethos about sexual relations in the new world. De shows beyond doubt that the Indian men are high on ego and low on performance. They are mostly narrow-minded, utterly ruthless, and highly insensitive. De is a spokesman for new morality. She has a usual disregard for rules challenges old stereotypes and gives tips as to how to recognize the warning signs in a frustrated marriage and run before it is too late.

### **Conclusion**

We can say that women writers in India have dealt with a rainbow of themes. However, gender-generated crises of womanhood and the quest for identity are the dominant preoccupations in women's writings. Cutting across the boundaries of class, caste, religion and nation, women writers strongly articulate their crisis of being. Their assertive and defiant writings jolt readers out of their complacency, reorient sensitivity and sensibility, and seek to create a more democratic, equal and gender-friendly world where a woman could 'hold her own'. Women writers have, thus, played a potent role in enabling Indian Writing in English reach every corner of the world.

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