



## Emergence of Indian Women Writers and their status in Indo-Anglican literature

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*English education was introduced to India in the 19th century, serving as an ideological force behind social reform and control. Indian English Literature has developed over a period of time and writing in English did not start a day, it took many years and several prominent personalities helpful to bring the present status and distinct place to Indian English literature among world literature. With the passage of time, Indian English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing pattern. Literacy spread rapidly and women begun to utilize the power of the pen. But it was very difficult path, as the women had to break through years of male dominance, taboos and beliefs that had heavily impregnated the society.*

*Women writers have interpreted the recurring female experiences in their writings and it affected the cultural and language patterns of Indian literature. The Indian women writers expressed the role and position of woman through their writings in English, have enlightened the literature with quality and vividness. Majority of the Indian leaders read the works of Indian women writers with certain expectation and on the women fiction authors of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way. The work of Indian women writers is significant in making society aware of women's demands and desires, and in providing a medium for self expression and in this way, rewriting the history of India. The feminist criticism has become a vital aspect in literature in contemporary society and the female perspective, expressed through women's writing of all kinds is considered to be more than a valuable connective to an all male view of the universe. Women writers like Jumba Lahari, Manju Kapoor, Kiran Desai, Shobha De and Arundhati Roy have written novels of magic realism, Social realism and regional fiction, and benefited from the increasing attention their fictions have received National and International awards. Undoubtedly, it is understood that they have perceived a good job in exposing the fallacies of the male-dominated society and letting the public beware of the various rigid boundaries that were laid on them by society.*

**Key Words:** *Feminism literature, feminist criticism, female perspective, male-dominated society*

### Emergence of Indian Women Writers and their status in Indo-Anglican literature

English education was introduced to India in the 19th century, serving as an ideological force behind social reform and control. Indian English Literature has developed over a period of time and writing in English did not start a day, it took many years and several prominent personalities helpful to bring the present status and distinct place to Indian English literature among world literature. Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan And Mulk Raj Anand tried their best to give new identity to Indian Writing in English. With the passage of time, Indian English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing pattern. K.R.Srinivasa Iyengre has rightly pointed out:

When an Indian writer of fiction uses a learnt second language like English, he is actually recording a kind of half-conscious translation (from mother tongue to English) that has taken place in the mind. Most of our writers are bi-lingual, some equally proficient in English and mother tongue, some more

in one than in the other. The background and situation are usually Indian but character may often be drawn from bilingual milieus. The need for expressing the values, verities and heart-beats of one culture in the language of another poses its own problems and there is doubtless the inner urges to render in English the rhythms, idiosyncrasies, images, idioms and proverbs of the local speech. (Kankariya:2001:28)

Literacy spread rapidly and women began to utilize the power of the pen. But it was very difficult path, as the women had to break through years of male dominance, taboos and beliefs that had heavily impregnated the society. The conflict between two opposite sexes has been going on from the primitive period to the present times. The first part is a critique of Women's writing in general and the other part indicates Women's contribution to Indian Writing in English particular. Generally, it is said that Women's Writing in English is about three hundred years old when Jane Austen's novels were published and her novels became part of popular literature during the second decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before Jane Austin, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* dealt with the theme of slavery, race and gender. Her poems are based on the story of a sexual encounter told from women's point of views in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* explores male writers like Milton, Pope and Rousseau.

Women's Writing in India is about 2600 years old but it is really started with women questioning the images of women presented by male writers and seeking to combat them through their writing and bringing in a more humane and cultured way of conduct and behavior. Before women emerged as a major literary force, men created women in their perspective, prescribing norms for women to follow and displayed patriarchy that insisted on preserving sexual inequality between men and women. Women's writing emerges in shape by creating new opening for female novelists and writers to bring female literary tradition. It is just time that the literary world accept women writers as writers of, for and by humanity rather than pigeonhole them into separate category as though their writing are only about women and concerned with expressing their angst, distress, concern and anger at their plight but now women writers have expanded their visions wider and they have taken issues facing present humanity such as Environment, Energy, Equality, Justice, Human Rights, Water, Peace, Racism, Violence, Fundamentalism, Religious, co-existence issues concerning us as human beings. As Chaman Nahal opines his views regarding feminism in India:

Both the awareness of woman's position in society as one of disadvantage or in generality compared with that of man and also a desire to remove those disadvantages. (Nahal:1991:17)

A woman 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 are educated and conscious of their right and privileges demanding their proper place in society. Indisputably, recent years have witnessed the impact of western feminist theories put forward by writers like Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1952), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970). Under these influences the Indian women writers have successfully made an attempt to break the literary and social norm of the past. They explore deep into the psyche of their characters and also herald a new concept of morality. At the outset 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 depth analysis proves a strong feminist intent, for women's issue pertains to be the chief concern of their plot.

Women writers in Indian can no longer be claimed as the exclusive property of India only but their talent and art belongs to the whole universe. Indian Women writing in English begun with writers like Sarojini Naidu, known as the nightingale of India, represents her honest and heartfelt concerns about the situation of India. The themes of feminism has been used aptly on national and regional level by the

authors like Nayantara Sahgal, Rama Maheta, Kamla Das, Anita Nair, Susan Viswanathan, Dina Maheta, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukharji, Indira Goswami, Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Manju Kapoor, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more. Let us have a look at the contribution to literature Indian women have made.

Arundhati Roy is one of the most popular writers in India, Indian women's writing hit a new high when Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize for her 1997 debut novel, *The God of Small Things*, exploring forbidden love in Kerala and has been translated into more than forty languages. She was born in 1959 in Shillong, India, and studied architecture in Delhi, where she now lives. She has also written several non-fiction books, including *Field Notes on Democracy*, *Walking with the Comrades*, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, *The End of Imagination*, and most recently *Things That Can and Cannot Be Said*, co-authored with John Cusack. Roy is the recipient of the 2002 Lannan Foundation Cultural Freedom Prize, the 2011 Norman Mailer Prize for Distinguished Writing, and the 2015 Ambedkar Sudar award. Roy's second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), addresses some of the most devastating events in India's modern history. It has enjoyed a global release with enviable media hype, further demonstrating the remarkable progress in how women writing are received by critics and the public. Her literary works mostly delineate the themes of social justice and anguish that various social groups suffered.

Nayantara Sahgal, the daughter of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, is one of the contributors of Indian Writing in English. She, and as such was close to the seat of power right through independent India's tryst with governance and the Indira years too. Her book *Rich Like Us* (1986) won the *Sahitya Akademi Award* for English. The setting for this novel is New Delhi, particularly one month after the declaration of the Emergency. It is an ironic, tender and exquisitely crafted study of India and its people in the aftermath of Independence. It includes many individual histories, and many voices, in one - a compelling and vivid tapestry of India's past and present. Above all it is the story of Rose the Cockney memsahib, a family that neither wants nor welcomes her. In Nayantara Sahgal's tale, with its humour and tragedy, is mirrored some of the grandeur and folly of the Indian experience itself. Her fiction deals with India's elite responding to the crises engendered by political change; she was one of the first female Indian writers in English to receive wide recognition.

Shashi Deshpande is a novelist and short story writer who began her career with short stories and has by now authored nine short story collections, twelve novels and four books for children. Three of her novels have received awards, including the *Sahitya Akademi Award* for *That Long Silence* (1989). Some of her other novels are *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *A Matter of Time*, *Small Remedies*, *Moving On*, *In The Country of Deceit* and *Ships that Pass*. Her latest novel is *Shadow Play*. Many of her short stories and novels have been translated into a number of Indian as well as European languages. She has translated two plays by her father, Adya Rangacharya, (Shriranga), as well as his memoirs, from Kannada into English, and a novel by Gauri Deshpande. Apart from fiction, she has written a number of articles on various subjects - literature, language, Indian writing in English, feminism and women's writing - which have now been put together in a collection 'Writing from the Margin.' She has been invited to participate in various literary conferences and festivals, as well as to lecture in Universities, both in India and abroad. 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. This has led readers to call her a feminist writer. She has often complained against this title. She deals with the themes of geo-centric vision, feminine sensitivities, gender differences, predicament of Indian women placed between contradictory identities through her works. She has focused on the psychological suffering, 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. She won the *Sahitya Akademi Award* in 1990 and awarded Padma Shri in 2009.

Anita Desai, winner of *Sahitya Akademi Award* as well as Padma Bhushan Award for her contribution in 2014, is one of the most accomplished writers in India. Arundhati Roy's mother says,

Arundhati is a born talker and a born writer. While, she was studying in school, it was a problem to find a teacher, who could cope with her voracious appetite for reading and writing. Most of the time, she educated herself on her own. I can remember our vice-principle Sneha Zaharias resorting to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a text for the little fourth grade.( Roy:2005:32)

She portrays the complexities of man and women relationship in her novels like *In Custody*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and *Voices in the City*. She has explored the deep insight into psychological aspect of her center characters. She has been shortlisted three times for The Booker Prize. The suppression and oppression of Indian women were the subjects of her first novel, *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), and a later novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975). *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) was criticized as relying too heavily on imagery at the expense of plot and characterization, but it was praised for its poetic symbolism and use of sounds. *Clear Light of Day* (1980), considered the author's most successful work, and is praised for its highly evocative portrait of two sisters caught in the lassitude of Indian life. Its characters are revealed not only through imagery but through gesture, dialogue, and reflection. As do most of her works, the novel reflects Desai's essentially tragic view of life. *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) takes as its subject the connections and gaps between Indian and American culture, while *The Zigzag Way* (2004) tells the story of an American academic who travels to Mexico to trace his Cornish ancestry. As Anita Desai says,

I don't think anybody's exile from society can solve any problem. I think the problem is how to exist in society and yet maintain one's individuality rather than suffering from a lack of society and a lack of belonging. (Singh: 1994:98)

Desai also wrote short fiction—collections include *Games at Twilight, and Other Stories* (1978) and *Diamond Dust, and Other Stories* (2000)—and several children's books, including *The Village by the Sea* (1982). *The Artist of Disappearance* (2011) collected three novellas that examined the collateral abandonment and dislocation wrought by India's furious rush toward modernity. Her daughter Kiran Desai won the Booker Prize for the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006).

Another renowned novelist of the modern Indian fiction is Kamala Markandaya born in 1924-she work under a pseudonym Purnaiya Taylor. She was a graduate of Madras University. She moved to Britain after India's Independence and is known for writing about cultural clashes between Indian urban and rural societies. Markandaya has published her first novel, 'Nectar in a Sieve' (1955)!. It is a bestseller and considered a notable book by the American library Association. Her other works are *Some Inner Fun* (1965), *A Silence of Desire* (1961), *Possession* (1963), *A Handful of Rice* (1966), *The Nowhere Man* (1972), *The Rising* (1973), *The Golden Honey Comb* (1977) and *Pleasure City* (1982).

Kamala's 'Nectar in a Sieve' is about a strong hero, character by the name of Rukmani. As she narrates her story, the readers are involved in her pain. Losing sons and seeing her daughter became a prostitute, Rukmani still stands strong. Rukmani the main character and her daughter Ira display suffering through the novel. Rukmani works hard and is devoted to her gentle husband. Rukmani has faced Poverty, famine, and divorce of her barren daughter, the deaths of her sons, her daughter's prostitution and finally her husband's death.

Manju Kapur undoubtedly arrests the attention when she portrays the new woman, who is inclined to take the road not taken and walking on their own road. She appeared on the literary scene with her well acclaimed and Commonwealth Prize winning first novel- *Difficult Daughters* (1998) and was a number one bestseller in India. Such has been the popularity of this work that it has been translated into seven languages. The novelist Mukul Kesayan commands *Difficult Daughters* as “ a first rate realistic novel about a daughter's reconstruction of her tremble past, hinging on her mother's story”.(Suman & Chandra:1999:10) Her second novel *A Married Woman* (2002) was called fluent and witty' in the Independent and here, Kapur negotiates different issues emerging out of socio-political upheaval in her

country while her third, *Home* (2006), was described as 'glistening with detail and emotional acuity' in the Sunday Times. It explores the complex terrain of the Indian family with much insight and affection without venturing into any social, political or religious issues. Her most recent novel, *The Immigrant* (2009), has been short listed for the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature. According to Kapur, the root of all present evil is this tension between modernity and tradition. Thus, her novels represent the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self sacrificing women towards self assured, assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands and in this way providing medium of self expression. Her writing in English language of the cosmopolitan society gave her wings to fly.

Kiran Desai was born in India in 1971; she lived in Delhi until she was 14, and then spent a year in England, before her family moved to the USA. She completed her schooling in Massachusetts before attending Bennington College; Hollins University and Columbia University, where she studied creative writing, taking two years off to write *Happenings in the Guava Orchard* (1998). She first came to literary attention in 1997 when she was published in the *New Yorker* and in *Mirror work*, an anthology of 50 years of Indian writing edited by Salman Rushdie - *Strange Happenings in the Guava Orchard* was the closing piece. In 1998, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, which had taken four years to write, was published to good reviews. *The Inheritance of Loss* was published in early 2006 after the long gap of eight years, and won the Booker Prize in 2006. When talking of the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*, and of her own life, she says that the characters of my story are entirely fictional, but these journeys (of her grandparents) as well as my own provided insight into what it means to travel between East and West and it is this I wanted to capture. The fact that I live this particular life is no accident. It was my inheritance. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, she talks about the pain of migration and living between the two separate nations. She touches the readers' heart via her writings especially when it comes to *Make it In America*. Dr. Shubha Mukherjee remarks,

...As intelligent writer and careful observer of human behaviour, Kiran Desai fulfils the responsibility of writing about current sensational issues.(Shubha:1976:18)

Among the distinguished literary writers of India, Shobhaa De holds an elevated position. Being a novelist and a columnist, she contributed profusely to South Asian literature. She was born as Shobhaa Rajadhyaksha on 7th of January 1947. She grew up in Maharashtra and was raised by a Saraswat Brahmin family. Shobha completed her early education from Queen Mary School, Mumbai and later received a degree in psychology from St. Xavier's College of Mumbai. Her first career choice was modeling which she pursued for some time and had proved herself as well. In 1970, she switched her career to journalism. Shobha offered her editorial skills to renowned magazines like Stardust, Celebrity and Society. Her column for The Times of India named 'Politically Incorrect' earned great praise. In her columns, she comments on various issues ranging from social, economical to political dynamics.

De is best known for her depiction of socialites and sex in her works of fiction, for which she has come to be known as the "Jackie Collins of India". De published her debut novel entitled, *Socialite Evenings* in 1989. The novel explores the dynamics of elites of Indian society. In fact, the book has a semi-autobiographical air to it. It highlights the decay of the social values, morality and culture. The socialites are portrayed as immoral and degenerated people who have traded their moral values for materialistic gain. The novel was heavily criticized for its controversial content, though it sold out and gained commercial success. De's literary writing journey eventually turned her into India's bestselling author. More than 17 of her novels climbed the bestselling books charts at once. Her works have been translated into many languages. The reform and rise of women's fiction is accredited to Shobha De for her daring to voice her thoughts in her writing. Her second novel, *Starry Nights*, is allegedly inspired by two famous Bollywood off-screen couples. The book discusses the dynamics of the Indian showbiz industry. Yet again it was an instant success establishing Shobha as a distinguished writer. Her other book named Spouse – *The Truth*

*About Marriage* surveys the institution of marriage in the urban society. Over twenty thousand copies were sold on its first day of official launch.

Jhumpa Lahiri was born on July 11, 1967, in London, England, to Bengali parentage. She published her debut in 1999, *Interpreter of Maladies*, winning the Pulitzer Prize. She published her first novel, *The Namesake* in 2003 and returned to short stories with the No. 1 New York Times best-seller *Unaccustomed Earth*. Her novel, *The Lowland* (2013), was partially inspired by real-world political events. Lahiri has gained international acclaim for her writing which mostly deals with NRI characters, immigrant issues and problems people face in foreign lands. Her pen touches the soul with her simple and metaphorical writing focusing on the day to day nuances and the hidden dramas in every person's life. In 2006, Mira Nair directed a film based on her first novel *The Namesake*. Her book *The Lowland* was a nominee for the 2013 Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award for Fiction.

The above analysis of women writers in Indian Writing in English suggests that women writers have made rapid development in the field of literature even they have gone up from difficult to tribal and rural areas too, but all of them have expressed their concerns for women and their problems. The image of women in fiction has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to earlier novels, female characters from the 1980s onwards assert themselves and defy marriage and motherhood. They have touched the variety of subjects with a great contribution in creating awareness for the modern women all over the world. The selections of themes handled by them considering Indian environment needs an appreciation. They have boldly expressed the social inhibitions and cultural taboos laid down by the society. Indian women writers play all the roles with decency, decorum, discipline and dedication for Indian women. However, beginning with Kamala Markandaya right up to 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, analysing and discussing the real status and factual roles of contemporary Indian women. As Patricia Meyer Specks remarks,

There seems to be something that we call a women's point of view on outlook sufficiently distinct to be recognizable through the countries.(Patricia: 1989:48)

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