

Dr. P. Pandia Rajammal
Assistant Professor of English
Kalasalingam University
Krishnankoil, Tamilnadu, India

Space for Women in Indian Women's Writings

Abstract

The present paper tries to analyse the study of selective works of Indian writers in English with a purpose of exploring the space for women in patriarchal society. Indian English writings by women attempt to tussle with living realities of women of various strata of society and endeavour to project life in all its complexities. Women writers have proved themselves as silent protesters. They have given vent to their feelings of protest in their poetry. In pre-independent India, Toru Dutta, Sarojini Naidu and a host of other poets produced the best kind of poetry. Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt have written poetry on their surroundings. Kamal Dass pours out her sensual longings, frustrations, humiliations and triumphs in her poems.

Keywords: patriarchal, frustrations, humiliations, sensual longings, patriarchal

Introduction

In a patriarchal society, men and women's relationship faces polarization due to the stereotypes which helps to understand them. Male is occupying a central position in the social organizations, so that they draw a marginal line to the female. Male tendency like ruling and controlling over female brings them to think in terms of parameters of superior. It attributes the less privileged characteristics to women. These are the manifestations of the prejudiced attitudes of people promoting negative evaluation of the other sex. These notions evolve in society through family, education and media which make women the victims of the oppression strategy. Society puts down the patterns of life for a woman even before she takes birth by conceiving identity for her. It confines her existence through divisions between the general conception of men and women defining her as feminine as opposite to the masculine.

Woman has not been defined as a subject in her own right. The western culture has a different feminine perspective and development. There is much difference between Western culture and Indian culture as it reflects through dress, attitudes, cultural behavior and family structures. Feminist movement also immersed in the freedom struggle in its initial stages. Freedom struggle liberated women from conventional, social constraints and gave them constitutional rights. More women were joined in the freedom struggle. These women were educated, economically independent and supported their families.

In the early 20th century, women took other women for granted and focussed their attention on male dominated spheres. In the Indian families of that period, father was the central figure who controlled female members in the family. Likewise, a male child plays a dominant role. In the Indian society, men have the supremacy power in the family. Women are marginalized through cultural institutions and religious rituals. Feminist movements have been trying for removal of marginalization. Thus the strong wave of feminism in 1960s and 1970s helped theorize a woman's discourse. In the modern times, we have great political leaders like Kasturi Bai, Sarojini Naidu, Indira Gandhi who took leading part in making India free. Women like Tara Bai, Rani Durgaavathi, Jhansi Rani Laxmi Bai are also examples of emancipated women. A critic Elizabeth Hard Wicin wrote, "Virginia Woolf had a feminine mind different from the masculine" (p 172). Women since ages have been under man's subjugation and her attitudes have changed under the influence of masculine standards. Now she has to find out ways of her own, without yielding herself any criticism. Woman should be able to live her own life. Woman has been living in darkness of ignorance since many years but now she is moving towards light by her education. Indian English writings by women attempt to tussle with living realities of women of various strata of society and endeavour to project life in all its complexities. Women writers have proved themselves as silent protesters. They have given vent to their feelings of protest in their poetry.

Women poets in Indian Writings

In pre-independent India, Toru Dutta, Sarojini Naidu and a host of other poets produced the best kind of poetry. Toru Dutta, a pioneer of Indian English poetry, whose first years of writing poetry were about the family, orthodox Hindu community, Indian epics and mythologies. Her poems are more than mere poems of action and character. Her heroines like Savitri and Sita display a feeling of revolt. Toru Dutta observes feeling of women. Sarojini

Naidu looks into the buried and broken heart of woman. Iyengar says, “She sees there a new vision of the chained mother and vowed to break the bonds” (p19). Sarojini Naidu’s collections of poems namely, *The Golden Threshold* and *The Broken Wing* consist of sensitive beauty and the beauty of holiness. She is a patriotic poet. Freedom struggle is the main motto of her poetry.

Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt have written poetry on their surroundings. But Gouri Deshpande’s *Beyond the Slaughter House* provides her disinterest in Hindu ethos. It is the duty of Hindu woman to bear children. But Gouri rejects babies. She was able to differentiate the hierarchy between male and female and come out with the injustice she faces in the society. Kamala Das is the most aggressive poet. She articulates the hurts that she receives in an insensitive and male-dominated world. Her poems in *Summer in Calcutta* and *A Dozen Poems* describe the heat of summer, urban sophistication and the contrast between desire and spasm. She pours out her sensual longings, frustrations, humiliations and triumphs in her poems.

Indian Women Short Stories Writers

In 1898, Kamala Sathianadhan has made the beginning of the short story in English by the Indian writers. In Anita Desai’s collection of short stories entitled, *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* (1978), she pleads for an attitude of moderation and adaptability of changing in the virtue of her characters. With her, the Indian short story attains a maturity state especially through her psychological portrayal of the inner self. In 1970s, the contribution of female authors has increased. Many critics draw their attention to the literary depiction of the modern Indian women’s problems by means of psychological, emotional, social or economic nature. Most of the women writers preferred short form of narration to express their ideas. Life of the middle class people in India seems to offer the opportunity, challenge and the material means to a woman to write her own stories. The experience of life seems to have been more predictable to them because of their own traditional role in the family and society. Thus female writers chose their themes within the confines of the clearly drawn ‘sphere of women’. In the stories of 20th century, a woman is given primary importance and her relationship with man, especially with her husband.

In Raji Narashimhan’s *The Last Embrace*, the narrator’s wife decides to leave him. Similarly, their daughter decides to live her own life having turned her attention from home

towards her lover. In Joshi's, *A Village Story*, a woman leaves her husband to take up teaching in a village. When he visits her to cajole her into coming back home to him, she sends him away. In Sunit Jain's *The Landing*, telling about a woman's and her children's return from the United States to India leaving husband behind in search of a meaningful life. In Shashi Deshpande's *Rani*, a young woman makes love to her doctor, while her husband is dying. Having married her lover, the past to the woman seems a closed chapter not meant to disturb her decision to live a new life. These stories show that the authors are not so much concerned with the analysis of their heroines' past experience and tribulation. They are very much interested in portraying a woman's deliberate act of liberating herself. These writings attempt to define a new and anti-traditional image of the role of women. The women writers depict the destruction of woman's innocence and her attempts to reveal her inner self also.

Indian Women Novelists

There were feministic elements in the novels written by men and women but after 1950 feminist novels started becoming more prominent. Shanta Rama Rao's *Remember the House*, Attiya Hussain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Nayantara Sahgal's *The Day in Shadow*, Bharati Mukherjee's *The Tiger's Daughter*, Mrinalini Sarabhai's *Thus Alone is True* and Anita Desai's novels are the prominent ones. They discuss distinctly the day to day problems such as marital disharmony, sex, divorce, extra-marital relationship, role conflict and problems of working women. Anita Desai's *Cry the Peacock* brought out with great sympathy, the unexplored space of female psyche- her anger, maladjustments and psychotic disorder. In this novel, Maya loses her sanity at the detached and apathetic attitude of her husband. Driven to schizophrenia and the non acknowledgement of her unflinching and excessive love for life depicted through her intense emotional responses to the nature around her, she ends up killing her husband and taking away her own life. In patriarchal society, the matrimonial world is the ultimate world for a traditional woman that gives happiness and success. This kind of concept has interiorized since her childhood. An environment of alienation and loneliness can prove to be disastrous not only for her but for other members as well.

Kamala Markandya in *A Silence of Desire* deals with the agony of the female protagonist Sarojini who is seen coping with the male hegemony and patriarchal dominance in her domestic sphere. Her husband named Dandekar, a clerk in a government office has

double sets of values for himself and for the women. For him, a wife is an asset and an inevitable property in the household with no personal demands of her own. Seeing from Dandekar's view point, his marital life is an ideal one, a picture of harmony and peace in the company of a perfect woman as his wife who is uncomplaining. Nirod Banerjee comments "an excellent cook... who gives him pleasure after fifteen years of marriage" (vii). Sarojini's secret visits to a swami, punctures the conventional image of an Indian woman. Dandekar suspects her of extra marital relation and as if to maintain his crumbling sense of masculinity ignores children and his work. Towards the end, he realizes his mistake and learns to respect the true worth of his wife as a subject.

Shashi Deshpande in novel titled, *The Dark Holds No Terror* makes her female protagonist Saru, a doctor by profession, share her mental agony for the sadistic sexual behavior of her husband, with her father as she comes to meet him after the death of her mother. Unlike the conventionally image of the mother-daughter relationship, Saru's mother had never loved her daughter. She had never forgiven her for the childhood incident regarding the drowning of her younger brother in the village pond on the day she accompanied him. Saru comes back home to negotiate with the guilt, fear and emotional turmoil she has been undergoing as a daughter and the wife of a person called Manu, whose unexpected brutish behavior during the nights that seems to be the projection of his insecurity as a male at the better social and professional placing of his wife, has left her confounded and traumatic. Saru's physical distance from her husband and sharing her grief with her father at her parental home ease down her mental and emotional anxiety, cleanse her vision and help her emerge stronger and more confident to face life back home.

In Nayantara Sehgal's *Storm in Chandigarh*, Inder punishes Saroj for having relation with a man before marriage by making her feel ashamed and an easy prey of his domination. The pious nature of marriage succeeds in commenting on the denial of physical desire in women by society. In patriarchy, female body associated with the concept of honour, becomes an easy property to exercise all kinds of control over her. Jasbir Jain writes, "Men want to possess not only their present but also their past; thus feeding the ancient myths of the virgin bride and the virtuous wife" (p126). Arundhati Roy is the luminary among the contemporary women writers. She is one of the women writers who wrote about the plights of the downtrodden and suppression of women in a male dominated world and the influence

of Marxism on the lives of the downtrodden. She emerged as a beacon of light to the Indian women writers. She got the overwhelming reception with the *God of Small Things*.

Conclusion

In the contemporary Indian Literary scenario, Indian women writers in English reflect the truth of Indian reality. They bear numerous responsibilities in the world of literature. They execute with self-confidence as sociologists, novelists, essayists and travel writers. They have also become the only negotiators to mediate the social and cultural problems of India. All the post-colonial and postmodern predicaments are wrestled to demonstrate a high level of self-consciousness, cultural issues, sexual harassment, philosophical and frustration of innocent women in the contemporary Indian society. Their intellectual insights, theoretical and textual experiments have interpreted the complex colonial and post colonial situations. By shattering the stereotypes around women lead a great service in providing space for the real women to grow and bring their potential to light.

Works Cited

M.K. Bhatnagar(ed), *Twentieth Century Literature in English*, Volume III.

Srinivas Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, Sterling Publishers Pvt Ltd.

Nirod Banerjee, *Kamala Markandya: Critical Study*, (Allahabad, Kitab Mahal, 1977).

Jasbir Jain, Nayantata Sehgal in Pier Paolo Piciuccio (ed). *A Companion to Indian Fiction in English* (New Delhi, Atlantic, 2004)