



Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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Portrayal of Women by Women Writers in Indian Fiction: A Brief Study

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Abstract

Globalisation improved information network, increasing security risk factors, adaptation strategies and other factors that characterize the new millennium have enabled categorizing the expatriate writers as early expatriate writers like Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai and millennium writers like Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Indira Ganesan and a host of other expatriate writers who have altered their world view, nationalistic affiliations and multiple migration. A new dimension of the diaspora has resulted in changing the aesthetic sensibility of three writers. According to Debjani Banerjee: The dominant strains of tension in the literary works of the diaspora arise from a perceived conflict between the old and the new country. The Diaspora dramatizes discontinues links between India and America, between the Indian national / cultural identity and the Western nation space.

Keywords: Globalisation, cultural identity, post-independence period, melo-dramatic narrative, feminine psyche

1. Introduction

Fiction is perhaps the most fascinating form of literary genre which enjoys an eminent position amongst the Indian writings today. Imported into India in the second half of the nineteenth century from the west, it has continued to flourish over the decades for a period of nearly two centuries. According to several scholars, the Indian novel owes its origin more to the western models than to the classical Indian tradition. M.K. Naik observes: One of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction, for though India was probably the fountain-head of story-telling, the novel as we know the form today was an importation from the west (1984,99).

2. Status of Women

Women writers have made their mark in Indian fiction in English. As early as 1870s, Toru Dutt wrote two novels namely *Bianca* (1878), an unfinished romance in English and *Le Journal Mademoisella d'Arvers* (1879) in French. However, only towards the closing phase of the Second World War did women novelists of quality begin to emerge enriching Indian fiction. "Status, if seen as a derivative, the result of a pattern of relationships between Men and Women-a pattern composed of images they have of themselves and each other-certainly cannot be evaluated by quantifiable measures. Status for one set of women have now or in the past; to others what men have, and to a third what attributes they think men would respect. Status really lies in the eyes of the beholder." The idea of equality between men and women, though it must be acknowledged that patriarchal norms still prevail, came to India early and even be traced back to the vedic period when women could choose their own husbands, be educated, assist in religious life, etc. The educated, bourgeois, urban Indian women living in a patriarchal system is not necessarily, unlike her Western counterpart, in search of complete independence from members of her community though she may chafe at the restrictions imposes on her. The male Indian attitude to women has always been ambiguous. Women are simultaneously placed on a pedestal and denigrated. This double perception of women has always been a source of conflict. One evident example of this lies in the Durga-Kali cult. While Durga is the soft face of the goddess, Kali can in no way be considered a goddess to be domineered but to be feared. Furthermore, the traditional Indian male/female relationship is more complex than the western one. This should become evident from the study of female characters in the works under discussion. Malashri Lal offers an Indocentric approach to feminist critics in which she designates three spaces: the interior space, doorway poise and exterior adjuncts. The first is the household, which, unlike the western assumption, is a public rather than a private place, with the codicil that intimate relations remain forbidden territories (although as we shall see, Attia Hossain often transgresses this rider). The house acts as a metaphor for tradition, roots, etc. The second space is the threshold itself. Here a women is exposed to an awareness of what has traditionally been regarded a male preserve-the world of professional enterprise. The possibilities offered by this world conflict with her conditioning (for example) The third conceptual space is the world beyond home, a world of isolation where she has to create her own world without the support System of women who accept the patriarchal arrangements. This space leaves a women open to a constantly critical public gaze. Failure can lead to humiliation and a return to the inner space, suicide or madness.

3. Emergence of Women Writers

The emergence today of such creative Women artists, marks a significant development in the growth of Indo-Anglian fiction. N. Radhakrishnan highlights this interesting development, drawing our attention to quite a few women writers: The most significant development in the history of Indo-Anglian literature of the Post-Independence period is the emergence of a powerful group of women writers. Santa Rama Rao, Anita Desai, Mrs.Sahgal, Nargis Dalal, Veena Nagpal, Jai Nimkar, Maya Balsa, Padmini Sengupta and Venu Chitale are prominent among them (1984,166). However, the problems of the suffering Indian wife were presented as early as 1864 in the first Indian English novel *Rajmohan's wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, which presents a melo-dramatic narrative dwelling mainly on the trials, a long-suffering, middle class Hindu wife undergoes, in the hands of her domineering, callous husband. Since then, it is the image of women that has continued to draw considerable attention from the writers of Indo-Anglian literature. In India the Post-Independence period, the conventional and traditional-bound society gradually began to evolve along more radical lines due to the spread of education. The average Indian women became more and more conscious of her status and rights as an individual and began to develop considerable social awareness. Some of these hypersensitive and highly individualistic women defied male domination and became increasingly vociferous in registering their protests. The image of the emerging 'new' women in literature is no longer that of a silent sufferer, but a courageous individualist engaged in a constant quest of her own identity. R.K. Narayan's novel depicts a wide range of women characters from the conservative to the rebellious. His novel *The Dark Room* presents the contradictory demands of tradition and modernity made on the female protagonist Savitri. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar rightly calls the novel 'a study of domestic disharmony' (1985, 370). By the side of female protagonist, Ramani, her chauvinistic husband, stands as a colourless foil. Eventually, Savitri expresses her righteous anger in unequivocal terms, by quitting her husband's house as Nora does in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. In two of his later novels *The Guide* and *The Painter of Signs* R.K. Narayan presents through Rosie and Daisy, the new emerging woman in India walking out of her unhappy marriage finding fulfillment in her own profession or career. Similarly, Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Gauri* portrays Gauri as a defiant protagonist who is even driven to the point of deserting her home in protest as she finds it impossible for her to bear her husband's taunts any longer. Likewise, Kamala Markandaya is very much aware of the impact of the socio-economic forces on contemporary woman. In her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani the narrator - heroine is also a Mother of sorrows. She receives shock after shock: for example, her husband Nathan's infidelity, her daughter's sacrificial going on the streets to save the family from starvation, the death of the child Kuti, the ejection from the house (1985, 438). Sarojini, in Kamala Markandaya's *A Silence of Desire* is torn between tradition and modernity. For centuries, women have been subjugated and ill-treated by male-dominated societies in India and all over the world. Woman has been forced to work for the interests of Man at all costs, expelled of her soul, mind and self and reduced to lead a vegetable life, simply giving birth and bringing up children. Talking of woman M. Kumaraswamy Raju says, Designated "Weaker Sex", hypocritically "fair sex" she is pilloried on the altar of marriage and family and this predicament of hers has not changed. Attempts to improve the lot of women by reformers and government legislation resulted in checking exploitation to a degree but the evil persists (1993, 78). There is historic evidence to prove that in India, women occupied a dignified place in society at the dawn of civilization, especially during the vedic age (2500 B C to 1500 B C) and the later vedic age (1500 B C to 500 B C) known as the age of the Brahmanas and the Upanishads. S.K. Ghosh makes the following comments on the history of Indian Women: Glimpses about the position of women in ancient India can be found from the Vedas-the bedrock of indo-aryan civilization (2500 to 1500 B C):the age of Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads (1500 B C to 500 B C):The age of Sutras, Epics and Smritis (500 B C to 500 A D) and the age of later Smritis, commentators and Digest Writers (500 A D to 1800 A D) (1989,1).

4. Indian Writing in English

Indian Writing in English or Creative writing in the English Language by Indians is, in its own right, an accepted genre with the history of nearly a hundred and fifty years. The term "Indo-Anglian" was given popular currency by Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar. Today the corpus of English works by Indians is called Indian Writing In English. All said and done," Indian English Writing" as Dr. Anand has declared, has come to stay as part of world Literature. Although it is a class by itself, the garden variety of English Literature is deemed to be a part of the larger phenomenon known as Commonwealth Literature. The variety of Literature includes all the literatures in English, of the countries, one ruled and colonized by the British. Women write differently from men. Men weave objective constructs, they write about affairs of state, they write about war, and business, and espionage, and their sexual encounters. Women write, and usually read, about themselves. Indian Writing especially in English mirrors these concerns. Women the length and breadth of the country are writing books for and about themselves. Kamala Markandeya and Nayantara Sehgal bespoke a different age. "Nectar in a Sieve" was a traditional view of womanhood. Representative of later generation, Anita Desai is a cerebral writer who does not radically question the conventions of her time and class. Kusum Sawhney, Shobha De and Manjula Padmanabhan replicate different calibrations of intellectual activity, probably in ascending order.

5. Conclusion

Of course it is absurd to suggest that women write only about themselves. Of course men read women novelists and vice versa. But women's lives are still rhythmic in a way that those of men are not. As the creatrices of life, as walking wombs, women know and experience the pulse of life differently from men. Disparities of intellect and talent are overridden by a shared trauma, by the sheer overload of expectations with which the contemporary feminine psyche has to contend.

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