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Women in English Literature Pre and Post Independence in India

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Abstract

The Indian English Literature witnessed the huge change in woman nature. We have a submissive typical Indian woman to an ultramodern heroine. In ancient 'she' was bound to the hearth and the child. Women have accepted these roles and these categorizations. The Social issue of Woman's position in the society took its roots in late 1960s in the world. For it was the need of the time which the feminine world sensed and rebelled against so called rules laid for women. The Women novelists tried to give shape to the traditional practices. This was not the direct war against the man but against the attitude. The English education in India opened the doors to the slave Indian women. The Male writers also contributed to bring back the rights of women. The contribution of the women writers fixed the novel in its proper mould and brought it in a good shape to survive in Indian writing in English. The issues like the secondary statues of women and human relationship are focused by Mulk Raj Anand. The elements of satire and irony too are found in the works of the female writers. The oppose to the male dominant society continued till the post 1980s.

Key Words: society, feminine, modernity, education, link language

The Social issue of Woman's position in the society took its roots in late 1960s in the world. For it was the need of the time which the feminine world sensed and rebelled against so called rules laid for women. As Simon de Beauvoir put it, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.... It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature... which is described as feminine." (Abrams: 89)

Though all cultures claim to praise and value the womanly qualities, one can cite an equal number of passages denigrating women while verbal praise masks their secondary position. Literature reflects these stereotypes. Women have accepted these roles and these categorizations. They glory in being ideal wives, mothers, housewives in the Indian joint-family settings, ideal daughters-in-laws as well. Here the process of socialization plays an important part. Man is seen as the norm, woman is the 'other', not merely different, but inferior, lacking personality. Their traits are distinguished in terms of polar opposites of masculine and feminine.

Indian English Literature especially the fiction witnessed the revolt of women in the pre and post independence period. In the history of Indian writing in English, the real beginnings were with the works of great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94). His published efforts *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) was in English. It gives us a faithful picture of the life of the times in however narrow a perspective, and makes us see in that picture the phenomenon of change, a change from medievalism to modernity. Mantagini, the central character is but one of the symbol of that change, for she typifies the new Indian woman seeking her release from the cruelties and tyrannies of a medieval past. She is not the usual Indian woman who accepts her husband with all his faults or wipe away as sinful as memories of men whom she has admired and respected better.

The contribution of the women writers fixed the novel in its proper mould and brought it in a good shape to survive in Indian writing in English. The English education in India opened the doors to the slave Indian women who for ages had to be content with playing only a subordinate role in the social life of the country now had opportunities for playing new roles. In this concern, Professor Karkala remarks, "They tried to tell the world the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they suffered in an orthodox Hindu world. These women writers struggled to give form and shape to their autobiographical accounts which attracted publishers both in India and abroad" (Ramamurti: 67).

The key of the noticeable success of women novelists lies in the fact that women are born storytellers and they are endowed with the gift of delving deep into the workings of human mind and heart with sympathy, sensitivity and understanding. Toru Dutt (1856-1877) is the great name in the Indian English Poetry and Novel. Both the novelist and the poet are in fact only two facets of Toru's aesthetic personality, two aspects of her genius which are mutually inclusive. Krupabai Sathianathan, Shevanthi Bai Nikambe, Swarnakumari Ghosal were another novelists who tried to strengthen their own cause and build up strong popular opinion in favour of women's education.

The wave of change about women is also felt by the male writers of Indian English. The issues like the secondary statues of women and human relationship are focused by Mulk Raj Anand. In *The Old Woman and the Cow* (1960), Gauri is the protagonist, who face the bad circumstances in her life. She is presented a rebellious Indian woman who protests against disloyalty of her husband Panchi. In the end, she stands on her own feet and never returns back to her husband. It all shows that no ground left untouched having the subject of female dishonor in literature.

In the world of Indian English Literature, the women novelists have developed a style of their own. After capturing the required space in society, they now turned to observe the other social norms and traditions. The elements of satire and irony too are found in the works of the female writers. Anita Desai in her latest novel *Voices in the City* (1965), censures the unwanted customs and traditions of our society. Nayantara Sahgal is sore at the political system and inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy. Attia Hossain in her only novel *Sunlight On A Broken Column* (1961), pulls no punches on the issues of Hindu-Muslim unity.

As novelist, Anita Desai has propound her own views. She found English to be a suitable link language, a compromise. She portrays with remarkable ease and adroitness female characters, who live in separate, closed world of existential problems and passions. All her female characters- Maya, Monisha and Sita are obsessed with the idea of death. Nayantara Saghal is the only women novelist who tries to expose the political world as it exists in India today. Her Concern is also with the bureaucrats – the I.A.S. and I.P.S. Officers. She successfully depicts the life of these men and their women and their attitude to society, their disillusionments and their desperate search for a goal in life.

In the Post – 1980 era love sex, and marriages or the failure of it are some of the leading themes in Indian English novel. Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things* (1997) contains chapters which to speak the least are outrageous. The rights of women must be preserved, the women novelist seem to say. Shashi Deshpande's Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel *That Long Silence* (1990), seeks to bring men and women on par in our society. Jaya, the heroine of the novel, recalls her married life with nostalgia. Jaya resents the role assigned to a wife in our country, who is called upon to stay at home, look after the babies and keep out of the rest of the world. She could not continue her writing as Mohan discouraged her. The protagonist think herself that, she had known then that it hadn't mattered to Mohan that she had written a good story and to Mohan, she had been no writer, only as exhibitionist.

To conclude, the writers in Indian English Literature have discussed the social issues of woman and the real place and the honor she deserves in many ways. We have female writers in pre and post independence period at one hand and the male writers who have lady protagonists on the other. Both took efforts to achieve the dignity of women in the strata of society. The education the women got is at the center. We may call it a bridge in their journey of maintaining self-respect.

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