A Glimpse of a few Indian Women Novelists and their English Fiction

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Traditionally, the work of Indian women writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. One factor contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women write about the enclosed domestic space, and women’s perceptions of their experience within it. Consequently, it is assumed that their work will automatically rank below the works of male writers who deal with ‘weightier’ themes.

Additionally, Indian women writers in English are victims of a second prejudice, vis-à-vis their regional counterparts. Since proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intellectual, affluent, educated classes, a frequent judgment is made that the writers and their works, belong to a high social strata, and are cut off from the reality of Indian life. The majority of these novels depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife, this sub matter often being considered superficial compared to the depiction of the repressed and oppressed lives of women of the lower classes that we find in regional authors’ writings.

Indian women writers have garnered critical praise for their scintillating literary prowess and making social issues a key part of their work. Indian women authors writing in English such as Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and Anita Desai have earned international renown- Saudha Kasim.

Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. Indian English literature has developed over a period of time and writing in English did not start in a day. It took many years and several distinguished personalities to bring the present status and distinction to Indian English literature. Indian literature is not only about novels, it is also about poetries and short stories. Before the rise of novels, several women writers composed songs, short stories and
small plays. It is still believed that women are the upholders of the rich Indian tradition of fables, story telling and more. In the mid-nineteenth century, more women started to write in the English language. With the passage of time, English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns. Women novelists have incorporated the recurring female experiences in their writings and it affected the cultural and language patterns of Indian literature. They have brought a stylized pattern in the whole context of Indian writing. Nowadays, people enjoy reading the anglicized novels presented by the new age women writers.

In the past, the work by the Indian women authors has always been undervalued because of some patriarchal assumptions. Indian societies gave priorities to the worth of male experiences. In those days, women used to write about a woman’s perception and experiences within the enclosed domestic arena. On the other hand, male authors used to deal with heavy themes. Thus, it was assumed that their work would get more priority and acceptance in the society. During the 18th century, these factors led towards the decline of Indian women writing. And with all these factors, production of women’s literature declined further. In the 19th century, more and more women actively participated in India’s reformist movement against the British rule. It again led to the women’s literature. At that time, their write-ups mainly concentrated on the country’s freedom struggle. Over the years, the world of feminist ideologies began to influence the English literature of India.

In the 20th century, women’s writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature. Today is the generation of those women writers who have money and are mostly western educated. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related with women as well as those issues that exist in the society since long. These books are thoroughly enjoyed by the masses and the publishers make easy money out of them. The
publishers feel that the literature actually survives because of these types of bold topics and commercials used by the women novelists. They describe the whole world of women with simply stunning frankness. Their write-ups give a glimpse of the unexplored female psyche, which has no accessibility. The majority of these novels depict the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife.

Since long, feminism has been used by the women novelists. Their novels reflect that the present age women have realized that she is not helpless and is not dependent. They feel that a woman is an equal competent just like a man. Today, a woman has also become a direct money earner and she is not only confined to household works. The women of modern era think on different lines and that is what is depicted in the novels of the Indian women authors. These facts are incorporated by the women writers. Indian women writers explores the feminine subjectivity and applies the theme that ranges from childhood to complete womanhood. Through their novels they spread the message of what actually feminism is, which actually is very broad. These women writers say that feminism means putting an end to all the sufferings of a woman in silence.

Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today’s male dominated world as the main theme of their books. For instance, some of the novels of Anita Desai like ‘Voices in the City’ and ‘Where Shall We Go This Summer?’ she has portrayed the complexities between a man and woman relationship. She has tried to explore the psychological aspects of the lead protagonists. The women novelists try to create awareness that this is the time to proclaim with definite precision. In India, the women writers are doing very well and their contribution is immense.

Indian English writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. This great poetess charmed the readers with her writings. Feminism themes have also been used by authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta. Regional fiction theme has been aptly used by Kamala Das, Anita Nair
and Susan Viswanathan. Novelists like Kamala Mrkandaya and Anita Desai captured the spirit of Indian cultures and its traditional values. During the 1990’s India became a popular literary nation as a number of women authors made their debut in this era. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti Namjoshi and Anuradha Marwah Roy used realism as main theme of their novels. The list of Indian women novelists also comprises popular names such as Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Malati Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Ruth Jhabvala, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more. They are known for the contemporary approach in their novels. The novels of authors like Namita Gokhale or Shobha De are really out-spoken. Most of these female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Basically, these are the novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations. Unlike the past, where the works of women novelists were given less priority and were actually undervalued, classification of feministic or male writings hardly makes any sense today. Majority of the Indian readers comprising both male and female read the novels of the Indian women authors with certain expectations. They look for some "Indian-ness’ in the write-ups. Only the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way.

Works Cited