

Depiction of women in Indo- Anglian novel

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Abstract

All over the world , woman has been the focus of a large number of literary works and one would think that all that had to be said has been said over and over again .The truth , however , is that the flames have by no means been extinguished .This is also true of a country like India where women are still stru-gling at various levels . Her place in society has differed from culture to culture and from time to time , yet one fact common to almost all societies is that women has never been considered equal to man . Her domain is usually confined to her various roles in the family.

India has been home to various schools of thought and it is portrayed in their understanding of woman . According to one school ,a woman is the best gift of God to man .She is called Lakshmi , the goddess of wealth and prosperity . The second school holds the view that the best way to reach God is to avoid woman . Swami vivekanand once pointed out to an audience of American women. "In the west the woman a wife. The ideal woman in India is motherhood.... that marvellous unselfish all suffering ever forgiving mother. The wife works behind the shadow. "

In Indian classical literature , a good woman always been synonymous with a good wife and good mother.She has been compared to 'Sita' and 'Sati Savitri' .With the passage of time ,women's position declined .Poet's inspiration ,man's source of energy ,apostle of love,beauty incarnation ,the great Indian woman who was once respected as 'Lakshmi','Anna-purna','Durga'and 'Sarswati',was brought to such a downtrodden position in the medieval India that she is not able to keep her head high even in independent India .She is still a prey to cruel systems of society .On the subjection of women K.M. Panikkar observes:

"undoubtedly women in ancient India enjoyed a much higher status than their descendents in eighteenth and nineteenth century. . . . kept vigorously secluded behind the purdah in many parts of India ,denied facilities of education and compelled under a system of child marriage ,atleast among some of the higher classes ,to maternity when their sisters in other countries were in schools,and kept under subjection during marriage and forced to live a life of misery during widowhood .Indian women in the beginning of the nineteenth century were probably among the most backward of their sex all over the world."

Feminism in India can be traced to the days of Raja Rammohan Rai .He raised his voice openly against the discrimination and all sorts of injustice and cruelties .He founded Brahma Samaj and started a

movement for their emancipation .It tried to liberate them from all kinds of social bondages . About the role played by Brahma Samaj K.M. Panikkar observes:

“ The Brahma Samaj led the movement for emancipation .The ancient Rules of purdah were broken and Brahma women moved freely in society :but this was but a false dawn as it was in far advance of the popular opinion .As even the educated classes generally showed a disinclination towards the emancipation of their woman folk ,the movement for their uplift was slow in taking shape.”

The emancipation of Indian women was a by product of Gandhiji's non-cooperation movement.He brought a sea change in the Indian scenario by making woman politically and socially aware. A strong current of national political consciousness brought forth women in large number into the political mainstream . The independence struggle paved the way for women out of the hearth and chimney nooks into the life of the nation .It gave them opportunity to realise their potential. He had high ideals of marriage and motherhood and insisted on treating women as an individual not a sex symbol. Gandhiji summarized his views on women's rights in marriage as follows:

“ If the husband is Brahma ,Vishnu and Maheshwar,so is his wife .
A wife is not servant .She is a friend with equal rights ,a partner
In dharma.Each is a guru to the otherhusband and wife have
equal rights in what either earns .The husband earns with the wife's help ,even if she does not do more than cook for the family
A wife has the right to live separately from her husband if he
ill-treats her.... In sum, i do not admit any any difference between
men and women except those created by nature which all of us can
see.”

He never liked women's confinement to domestic work only .He was aware of the fact that there was a source of immense untapped power in the womanhood of India .When he started his non-co-operation movement he encouraged them to come forward ,defying all social taboos ;sacrificing physical comforts and denying the validity of all restrictions which had been enforced against them ,to take up every kind of work connected with the national movement .their participation in the battle of freedom gave them their position of equality without their having to fight for it separately .

The National council of women in 1921,All India women's conference in1927 and 1930 protested against the feudal forces which kept Indian women under subjugation .

Sarojini Naidu who was in the forefront of the Indian freedom struggle did much to free Indian women .It was in 1920 that the power of vote was first given to women in cochin and Travancore and 1921 in Madras presidency. Many laws passed after 1947 like the Hindu Marriage Act and Hindu Succession Act 1956

,Dowry Prohibition Act 1961,Medical Termination Act of Pregnancy Act of 1971 etc. gave a wide spectrum of rights to Indian women.

Women who had to be confined to the four walls , started to move out in every field of life-academic,political,economic etc.These changes led to the emergence of a new image of woman-an emancipated woman. The most significant of these changes of V.V.Rajendra Prasad writes:

“ The emergence of the individualistic social order ,the rise of the middle class ,spread of education ,the development of printing and spread of journalism ,the birth of the age of reason and the liberation from tyranny of custom and blind faith ,the emancipation of Indian woman;and all the great social and socio-economic reforms which sought to usher a new era of freedom and justice.”

With the change in social scene woman comes forward to raise voice against iniquity ,injustice and oppression . This female awareness led to the launching of feminist movement in the sixties not only women writers like Anita Desai,Nayantara Sahgal,Sashi Deshpande, Jai Nimbkar,Sobha De,Kamala Markandaya, but male writers like Tagore, M.K.Anand, R.K .Narayan ,Manohar Malgonakar etc. dwell on tortured womanhood. Bankim Chandra observes:

“in all societies the women are backward compared to men;it is the selfishness of men which accounts for it ;men are physically stronger,and they are therefore the doer;women are consequently subjected by physical powereven the wage earning servants maids have some freedom ,but the wife and the daughter and the sister had none.”

The early Indo-Anglian novelists presented ideal Indian woman as a traditional ‘Sita’ type.Woman doesn’t occupy an important place in most of Anglo-Indian novels of this period.In Rudyard Kipling’s Kim there is hardly any Woman character .In Forster’s A passage to India Women are sketched ,not drawn . In Richard Collins The Slayer Slain Mariam,the heroine ,defiant of her father ,is pictured as a woman of virtue .The Indo-Anglian novels of this period present woman as romantic ,charming ,cultured,graceful,wise,courageous-such stuff as dreams are made on.

Mulkraj Anand ,R.K. Narayan ,Kamala Markandaya and Manjeri Isvaran,present woman in the traditional image of ‘Pativrata’.She is an object of pity and has no will of her own .To suffer in silence is her only life .In Anand’s ‘Coolie’,Laxmi,wife of Hari lives in subhuman surroundings but sticks to her husband without grudge or grumbling .Markandaya in Nector In Sieve presents Rukmani as a dumb and docile wife who bears no malice towards her husband despite his extramarital involvement with Kunthi .Manjeri Isvaran presents Jagadamba as silent sufferer raped by the cart driver ,she feels guilty of adultery ,a crime for which nothing sort of suicide would constitute adequate atonement . R.K .Narayan’s The Guide presents Raju’s mother as innocent ,native women ,a mere shadow of her husband .She is bewildered to hear Rosie has come along without an escort:

“ How courageous you are !In our days we wouldn't go to the street corner without an escort .And I have been to the market only once in my life when Raju's father was alive.”

In the later novels ,Sita type was replaced by the emerging new women .She is no longer a Damayanti.She is Draupadi or a Nora or Candida or a Joan of arc .Social reformers like Raja Rammohan roy,Pandit ISwar Chandra Vidyasagar and political revolutionaries like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru lent her a new dimension. In the phases ,the writers depicted the experience of women in the context of the values of the East and the West .Tagore's Damini is the symbol of feminine strength ,a women who throws a challenge to the orthodox Bengali society through her remarriage .Yet Tagore,s women remains 'half- human and half dream.Virginia woolf's remark as to women seems justified :

“Imaginatively she is of the highest importance .Practically she is completely insignificant some of the most inspired words ,some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall upon her lips ;in real life ,could hardly spell and was the property of her husband”

Similarly B.Rajan is of the opinion that a cow stands higher than a woman in Hindu hierarchy.

The works of woman writers gave a distinct dimension to the total picture of women in the family and the society .True ,the new women in the works of woman writers try to protest but the psychological odds against which they fight are peculiar . Regarding her treatment of woman Shobha De remarks:

“I did write with the great deal of empathy toward woman .Without waving the feminist flag,i feel very strong about the woman ,I feel very strong about the about the woman,s situation.”

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