

# A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE OF INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS

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## ABSTRACT

India is a museum of languages and literature and Indian writing deals with projection of its social, political, religious, ethnic and linguistic aspects. The beginning of contemporary Indian writing in English gained momentum with the post-colonial literature. The post-colonial discourse has become the chief concern in English studies in countries like India. It studies the issues connected with the subaltern women. During the last two decades, Indian English Literature has genuinely come of age and there has been a marvellous improvement in the quality and quantity of creative works produced by Indian Women writers in India and abroad. Indian English fiction holds the centre-stage as fiction is the most powerful, prominent and characteristic genre of literary expression. The noteworthy aspect of these writers is that their writings match the male counter parts and hence have won laurels in India and abroad. These writers can be hailed as ‘feminists’ in the true sense of the term. Thus Indian English Women’s writing today enjoys a unique and distinct reputation, prestige and respectability in the world of canonized English studies.

Keywords: Indian literature, social, political, religious, ethnic, linguistic, post colonial, subaltern, feminists.

## INTRODUCTION

Bill Ashcroft in his seminal work *The Empire Writes Back* relates the term Post-Colonialism to the study of resistance while Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, spoke of the resistance rhetoric that emerges from rejection and separation syndrome and found fault with the western cultural institutions that were responsible for the creation of those ‘others’, the Orientals. During the last two decades, Indian English Literature has genuinely come of age and there has been a marvellous improvement in the quality and quantity of creative works produced by Indian Women writers in India and abroad. Indian English fiction holds the centre-stage as fiction is the most powerful, prominent and characteristic genre of literary expression. The noteworthy aspect of these writers is that their writings match the male counter parts and hence have won laurels in India and abroad. These writers can be hailed as ‘feminists’ in the true sense of the term. Thus Indian English writing today enjoys a unique and distinct reputation, prestige and respectability in the world of canonized English studies.

## WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF MALE CHAUVINISM

Since the ancient classical period, women were the target victims in the male chauvinistic society. The institution of marriage, family life and work patterns conveyed the idea that women should be subordinate to and dependent on man. The taboos and social customs have damaged the image of women and deprived them of their identity, freedom and independence. The male ego has used women as channel to fulfil his physical psychological and sexual needs.

Novels and writing by women and non-women emphasize the unending struggle of women in search of an identity. Thus the search for identity in the face of endless miseries and struggles become the focus of study in the writings of women novelists of the post-independence era. Juliet Mitchell in her article "*Femininity, Narrative and Psychoanalysis*" suggests that

the novel form itself arose out of woman's  
search for identity within new social structure;  
the earliest novelists, she believes are not men,  
but women examining the nature of femininity

under patriarchy (426- 30).

Accordingly Indian novels reflect women's identity as central theme. The women novelists in South Asian countries especially India deal with the changing scenario of a woman from a stereotyped image bound by traditions and conventional norms, to a new and modern woman. So Indian Writing in English can no longer be discarded as an exotic chapter in English Literature. It has to be seriously viewed in its totality of the cultural patterns emerging in the Indian literary panorama. It reflects the tradition-ridden Indian society that magnifies the Indian woman and binds her to the age-old Indian culture of being subservient to the dominant male ego.

### **RESISTANCE TO SUBJUGATION AND A FIGHT FOR EMANCIPATION**

A large number of Indian women, who benefited from English education granted by the colonisers, have attempted to express their dreams and despairs in English language, especially in the field of fiction. Consequently, many women novelists made their debut and a tremendous flurry of publication activity in the 1980s began. Most of their works deal with the resistance and repression of the marginalised and the charting and mapping of the cultural territories in the decolonised societies. Writers born after Indian Independence were pulled by the beauty of English Language. Thus the 1980s has marked what Edward Said has called, "second stage of post-colonialism". The new bunch of women writers presented the life and the experiences of women in a new language and identified them differently from the ones presented by men writers. The women writers did not approve of idealising women and the conventional role tailored for them; instead they radicalised and revealed the life of women as victims, thus challenging the male literary tradition. The common message was resistance to subjugation of women and a need for emancipation. They asserted that it is possible only when the women go into a larger world of life, free from the suffocating homes.

The post-independence period has brought to the forefront a number of noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English fiction by a creative urge of feminine sensibility. Writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapoor, Arundathi Roy, and Anees Jung etc, to name a few have achieved recognition. R.K. Dhawan in his "Introduction: Indian women novelists" remarks thus

Fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English.  
.....Through women writers' eyes we can see a different world, with their assistance we can seek to realise the potential of human achievement. In any appraisal of Indian English literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women is essential (10).

### **MOTIF OF QUEST FOR IDENTITY**

The Post-Independent India saw novelists like Anees Jung compete with great literary giants like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao, the 'trio' of Indian writing. The fiction of women paint women's quest for self identity. Their novels give a picture of an independent free thinking woman claiming her life to be her own. Their works chronicle the lives of women in India. For instance Anees Jung's fictional works revolve around the subjugation and deprivation of women's rights and freedom as a consequence of the loss of their identity.

In the works of women writers such as Anita Desai, Sashi Deshpande, Arundathi Roy to name a few, woman emerges as an individual, challenging her existential survival. Many of their characters rebel against the rigid traditional codes of the society. Their attempt is to portray the predicament of woman's success most effectively. By describing women characters with a feminist awareness, they focus their own attitude of the concept of liberation. Their writings therefore lend themselves to a feminist interpretation, which is not necessarily based on Western type of feminisms.

### **TESTIMONIES OF A NEW WOMAN**

The Indian women's writing project not just typical Indian husband who considers his wife as a machine which speed up or smoothen his day to day work, but the stereotyped images of woman as a doll, a play thing, a doormat has been transformed and the emergence of a new woman with all her might, courage and audacity has been highlighted. For them marriage is a means for their social and personal betterment. They view life with an acute sense of observation, a

keen perception and sharp sensibility. Their writings are testimonies of a new woman have moved from both subjugation and aggressiveness to a state of total equanimity and equality with a clear perception of future goals.

## CONCLUSION

So the intention in novels is to examine women's quest for identity. They believe that the increasing roles in the fields of education and employment have brought women new liberties. With the result, women's writings have arrived with the renewed strength and energy. To conclude the Indian women novelists have pictured women's search for definitions of self. Their novels testify the urge of women to fight for their identity, individual rights and social freedom. Their works are an illustration of the women's marathon struggle for seeking 'identity' in a patriarchal realm.

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