

WOMEN'S WRITING IN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The American Dream is that any man or woman, despite of his or her background, can change their circumstances and rise as high as they are willing to work. This quote by Fabrizio Moreira holds good for men but for women this dream poses many challenges before it is fulfilled. Women are multifaceted and perform a significant role in society. Across the world women have their challenges to face in this man's world. In India women are considered as the goddess from the ancient time however, it is also true that they are not treated as goddess. Considering them as goddess alone is not enough, it needs positive continuous effort and participation of both men and women to really bring women empowerment. Initially women were confined to domestic chores and kept within the four walls of the house. Gradually women started getting educated and as the rate of literacy in women increased there has been some progress. Women since ages have expressed their feelings, thoughts, anger, experience and anxiety through their writing not only in English but also in other languages. . This paper is an attempt to explore the various genres of women's writing across the world to understand the life of women and also the manner in which they were portrayed in literature. This paper also tries to make a comparative study of the writings in India with other countries both in the past and present in an attempt to know how successful we have been in achieving women empowerment.

KEY WORDS: Women empowerment, literature, Legislations, challenges, transitions, achievements.

INTRODUCTION:

Women play a considerable position in our society from their birth till the end of life. Even after playing all her roles in an proficient manner in the modern society, she is considered feeble because men are still well thought-out as the strongest gender of the society. Even after lots of consciousness programmes, rules and regulations in the society by the government, a women's life remains more convoluted than a man. She has to take care of herself and family members in performing various roles of daughter, sister, daughter-in-law, grand daughter, wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, etc. In spite of her family responsibility she is able to come out and do job for bright future of own, family and country. Though this has taken tremendous amount of time and effort.

Women's literature is writing done by women as has often defined by publishers. Though obviously this is true, many scholars find such a definition reductive. The reason that makes the history of women's writing so interesting is that it has created interest in many ways and it is a new area of study. The tradition of women writing has been much ignored in the past due to the inferior position women have held in a male-dominated society. It is still not to no purpose of to see literature classes or anthologies in which women are greatly outnumbered by male writers or even entirely absent. The obligation of women's literature, then, is to classify and create an area of study for a group of people marginalized by history and to explore through their writing their lives as they were while occupying such a unique sociopolitical space within their culture.

FINDINGS:

During the initial days of literary history, women were themselves the only champions as they expressed their life and feeling through their writings and the readers were also majorly women. To take a glimpse of the beginning and growth of women writings, here are a few writers whose contributions had a great impact in women literature. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication on the Rights of Women* is a landmark discourse that showed the way for many women after her to not only publish their works but also to engage in the overall significant discussion surrounding the issue of women_in_literature. Occasionally there were men who spoke out alongside women. Some of the first recorded attempts to note women's contributions to literature were catalogs published in the eighteenth century and were written by men. *Feminead* by John Duncombe and *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain Who Have Been Celebrated for their Writing or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts, and Sciences* by George Ballard are two such manuscripts.

Still for the most part, the majority of people interested in reading and responding to works written by women were other women. One prime example of this is *The Female Advocate: A Poem Occasioned by Reading Mr Duncombe's Feminead* by Mary Scott. The poem was Scott's first publication and is notable because it praises other women writers publishing at the time, including children's writer Sarah Fielding and Anna Laetitia Barbauld, a writer whose political opinions eventually led to her being blacklisted after she published an inflammatory poem on her disagreement with the British Empire's involvement in the Napoleonic wars. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is often considered a driving force behind this movement, it presents an argument on the necessity of both a metaphorical and literal "room" for women's literature within the literary tradition. The book also served as the inspiration for the literary journal *Room*. The journal was launched specifically to publish and promote works by female writers. In recent years a greater emphasis on inter sectionality has encouraged exploration into the relationship between race, gender, religion, and class to even further prove the importance of the acknowledgment of the place of marginalized groups in literature. Such works exemplify the need for acknowledgment and activism

prove that there is a place for this dialogue and that a room of one's own benefits not only women, but the literary tradition as a whole.[1]

The past two and half decades of research and textual recovery have overturned the convention that women wrote out any ambition, mostly namelessly, and concentrated on 'feminine' concerns like the family and the home. Instead, an understanding of the period which sees Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Jane Austen as only the familiar of a host of writers has become standard. And as these writers have been brought back into notice, everything has changed: our understandings of literary history, our understandings of culture and the manifold relationships between writers and their societies; our understandings of not merely the limitations but the distortions of a canon that reads the development the birth of the novel and poetry solely through a small group of male writers have all changed.[2]

Women's literature has often been defined by publishers as a category of writing done by women. Though obviously this is true, many scholars find such a definition reductive. What makes the history of women's writing so interesting is that in many ways it is a new area of study. The tradition of women writing has been much ignored due to the inferior position women have held in male-dominated societies. It is still not unheard of to see literature classes or anthologies in which women are greatly outnumbered by male writers or even entirely absent. The onus of women's literature, then, is to categorize and create an area of study for a group of people marginalized by history and to explore through their writing their lives as they were while occupying such a unique sociopolitical space within their culture.

Women writers themselves have long been fascinated in tracing a "woman's tradition" in writing. Writers like Mary Scott, Mary Hays, Virginia Woolf and others works were published which exemplified the impulse in the modern period to explore a tradition of women's writing. Woolf sought to explain the absence of women and soon attention turned to finding and reclaiming 'lost' writers. Trade publishers have also focused on women's writing and from 1970 onwards. a number of literary periodicals dedicated to publishing the creative work of women emerged. Dedicated presses such as the second party press and the Women's press saw a large number of collections and anthologies of women's writing being published by both trade and academic press.

Further, women writers cannot be considered apart from their male contemporaries and the larger literary tradition. Recent scholarship on race, class, and sexuality in literature all the more complicate the issue and militate against the impulse to posit one "women's tradition." Considering their educational insecurities and the constricted notions of the properly 'feminine' in social and literary behaviour women faced." Using the term "women's writing" implies, then, the belief that women in some sense constitute a group, however diverse, who share a position of difference based on gender.[3]

Indians are lauded globally for their writing, whether it is Rabindranath Tagore for 'Gitanjali' or Salman Rushdie for his book 'Midnight's Children'. The success of Indian writers has reached such an extent that women authors are also breaking into the field in a major way and making us proud with their wonderful writings.

Here is the list of some of the top women writers in India who are appreciated globally for their work:

1. Arundhati Roy: one of the most celebrated authors of India, best known for her novel 'The God of Small Things'. The novel talks about how small things in life can affect people. One of the bestselling books at that time which won the 1997 Booker Prize for fiction and she was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 2006, for her collection of essays, 'The Algebra of Infinite Justice' but she refused to accept it.
2. Anita Desai: is one of the most reputed writers of India and was nominated for the Booker Prize at least three times. She was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award in 1978 for her novel 'Fire on the Mountain' and the Padma Bhushan in 2014 for her contribution to Indian Literature. Her stories have an exemplary implication that strikes the human heart besides being humorous at the same time. The author has also won the British Guardian Prize for her novel, 'The Village by the Sea'.
3. Jhumpa Lahiri: has gained international acclaim for her writing which mostly deals with NRI characters, immigrant issues and problems people face in foreign lands. Her pen touches the soul with her simple and metaphorical writing focusing on the day to day nuances and the hidden dramas in every person's life. In 2006, Mira Nair directed a film based on her first novel 'The Namesake'. Her book 'The Lowland' was a nominee for the 2013 Man Booker Prize and the National Book Award for Fiction.
4. Kiran Desai: She is known for her book 'The Inheritance of Loss', which talks about the pain of migration and living between the two separate nations. She touches the readers' heart via her writings especially when it comes to 'Make it In America'.
5. Shashi Deshpande: is an award winning Indian novelist best known for her book 'That Long Silence'. She won the Sahitya Akademi Award for the novel 'That Long Silence' in 1990 and the Padma Shri award in 2009.

Modern women writers face the challenge of being unaccepted in the literary world, often having to prove the worthiness and importance of their works, being categorized in ways different to men, and still have been subject to unethical remarks. Such struggles not only reside in women writers in America, but also in China and Greece, where the literary art still remains a male practice. Although women now have more freedom to write, many of their struggles are similar to those of the 19th century women writers.

Tess Hardwick debut novel, *Riversong*, is labeled women's fiction. Fortunately for novelists, there are as many varieties of readers out there as there are writers. women's popular fiction, genres like romance, cozy

mysteries and chicklit, are labeled as less important, or the writer, as less skilled than those writing literary fiction. Sure, those who write in these genres may never win the Pulitzer but it does not mean that their writing isn't as good. A well-crafted story is still well-crafted no matter the genre. Compelling descriptive writing still draws the reader in, no matter the genre. Fully developed characters make you believe the story is real, no matter the genre. And yet...As a writer in the women's fiction genre, when asked in writer's circles, and even at her own book signings, what 'kind of book' *Riversong* is, she felt apologetic, as if the book I worked over for years, is somehow not 'important' enough.

Riversong is about an ordinary woman thrown into an extraordinary situation, just like so many of them in real life. The way she gets out of it, is heroic. And yes, there's a love story too, which apparently is decidedly unliterary. This is ironic, when you consider most of us are in a love story of our own and if we're not, we certainly want to be. Genre fiction, commercial fiction, is important. It entertains, it moves, it illuminates the human experience. *Riversong* is Women's Fiction, literature that reveals the intelligence, resilience and courage of women [5]

CONCLUSION:

During the Progressive Era 1890 to 1920, woman struggled to change the definition of womanhood in profound ways. At issue was the right to vote, to wear modern clothes, to be free from corseting, to work outside the home, and to have a place in the world beyond the domestic sphere. By 1900 the "new woman" had emerged; these modern women were attending college, getting jobs, agitating for the right to vote, rejecting traditional domesticity, proudly asserting themselves in public, and in general, becoming an integral part of popular culture and invading its literature as well.

Through the genres of regionalism and realism, women writers concentrated on the domestic details of women's lives in order to explore the powerful relationship between women's development and the society that created them. In regionalism, women established a congruous, and sometimes utopistic, relationship with the land as their thoughts, feelings, and struggles were reflected in the natural world around them. Heroines in realist novels were often set adrift in cityscapes, their fates tied to the whims of capitalism and patriarchal control. Women writers of regionalism and realism commonly used romantic and domestic plots to explicate not only women's position in the home, but in the world at large.

Writers attempted to depict life in an objective manner and created stories that often focused on the details of everyday life. At the turn of the century, this society created a generation of women, indulged and sheltered, who are disconnected from the world beyond the usual. Many writers condemn the society for making women ornamental and useless, while simultaneously depict them as sabotaging themselves through an acceptance of the definition of women as decorative objects.

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