

Search for Identity in the Writings of Postcolonial Indian English Women Writers

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India's search for her own identity began after India's Independence. Modern or postcolonial women writers penned the features of search for identity in their literature. Many rights have been imparted to women by our constitution like right to equality, right of opportunity, right to education and right of expression. Women's problems were raised by the makers of constitution and rights equal to men were provided to women on all fronts. In spite of all the efforts taken up by the makers of the constitution the condition of women has not changed much. A country like India where Goddesses are worshipped, women have to face humiliation and harassment at home and at workplace and a girl child is considered a burden on the family.

In India we find that women are worshipped on one side and enslaved and treated badly on the other side. Women are expected to remain in four walls of their homes in India. Women's condition is in accordance with the quote from the Tennyson's poem 'The Princess' "Man for the field and woman for the hearth, man for the sword and for the needle she, man to command and woman to obey."

The women in rural areas suffer more than the women in urban areas. Women struggle for their rights. Women have been bearing male dominance since time immemorial. Women are an integral part of human civilization. For the progress of society or country, active participation of women is needed. Position of women has differed from one place to another, one culture to other but the fact remains that women have never been considered equal to men. Women have always been a victim of male domination, discrimination and oppression. A vast majority of women have reconciled to this life.

Nowadays women are becoming aware of their rights. Women have realized that the patriarchy has to be discouraged in the rapidly changing society. Today's woman has gathered the courage to express her feminine sensibility. Today we celebrate 'Women's Day', 'mother's day' etc. to show the change in women's position and this celebration has not been able to change the male dominated mentality of the society.

Postcolonial Indian women writers have created a literature of their own portraying women in changing social scenario. It is a fact that Indian women accepted the patriarchal supremacy and surrendered to their traditional roles but with the increase in education and better job opportunities have created awareness of rights and privileges among them. Education is exposing the Indian woman to a new set of values and economic independence which has put the women in conflicting state where they are bound to their traditional roles and don't have the courage to walk out of their boundaries. This flux of Indian women has been portrayed realistically by the post-colonial Indian women writers.

Modern Indian woman has started protesting against patriarchal society. She is trying to prove that she is free and liberated. Literature has always been the best medium to advocate ideas since it is the only medium transcending all barriers of time and space. Indian women writers have depicted their suffering and pathetic experiences which they have faced. Indian women writing in English became a prominent ground for expressing their feelings and problems. Women writers started questioning the rules made by patriarchal society.

Women writers have started expressing their point of view regarding feminine consciousness. They have explored different psychological aspects of women related problems. Many Indian women writers like Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Nayantara Sahgal etc. have made a difference in English Indian literature. Indian women writers in English, putting abundant input in Literature, are exerting to get a place in society. Post - colonial Indian women writers have expressed in their works their frustrations and suppressed feelings in the patriarchal setup of the society. Women writers of India are trying to create awareness among women by producing variety of works. They are trying to present a true picture of Indian culture,

tradition and history. Their contribution cannot be ignored. Unlike earlier writers the post-independence Indian women writers with their sense of identity are creating their literature describing current problems and issues related to women. Rashmi Bajaj has rightly said, " We have here increased social consciousness, a strong awareness of identity as women, championing of women's cause, problems of alienation and identity crisis."

The women writers like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee and Nayantara Sahgal present the problems of women and issues of society after colonial period. They write about the struggle of woman, man-woman relationship and identity crisis in their novels. Women writers of 1960's have questioned traditional mode of narrative. The Indian English women writers are achieving new heights in the post-independence era. Their passion for individuality is making them break new ground for them. They are setting new trends in the society.

These writers delineate the sufferings and pains of the women in combined families. They explore the themes of exploitation, hypocrisy, traditional expectations and obligations to society and identity crisis. Anita Desai portrays the protagonist Maya's struggle to live in the society in 'Cry the Peacock'. Nayantara Sahgal in her novel 'This Time of Morning' writes about narrow minded Indian society.

1970's witnessed a new dimension in the writings of women writers which helped them to bag many prestigious awards. Ruth Jhabvala won the Booker prize for her novel 'Heat and Dust' (1975) which describes continuous struggle of female characters for the existence in the society. Indian women writing gained maturity of language, style and themes. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande write about the problems and issues faced by middle class family. During this period women characters are seen in search of self-realization and identity.

Shashi Deshpande's novel 'Roots and Shadows' portrays middle class women and her characters rebel the traditional norms." I had almost forgotten this breed of women since I left home. Now seeing them was like discovering a new world. Each one of them, riddled with ignorance and prejudice and superstition, was a world of darkness in herself."(p. 116) Shashi Deshpande's protagonists reject the tradition and custom of society and are self-aware, self-developed and self fulfilled. She gives central stage to women and writes about female consciousness.

Another famous novelist Manju Kapur writes about the female who wants to escape the traditional norms. Manju Kapur's protagonist are well educated and independent and undergo a struggle to find their real self. She emphasizes the problems of patriarchy. Revolt is not easy for a woman as her psyche is structured around different principles. Manju Kapur's women characters have a transitional phase in their life and they want to break the traditions and move on to new paths. The change is theoretical as they lack boldness and courage in reality.

Another creative Indian woman writer who represented the pathetic and sad situation of women is Anita Desai. She very realistically brought out the inner feelings of the female protagonists. She has very nicely portrayed the sadness and struggles of women in patriotic setup. Her autobiographical work 'Clear Light of Day' (1980) tells us about the atmosphere she lived in. Characters of Anita Desai have a desire to rebel against patriarchal society. Her female characters face many problems to get their lost identity.

Anita Desai being a feminist writer depicts the topic of women's freedom in her writings. Her female protagonists long for freedom. She writes about the women characters who challenged the condition which abused them. Her female protagonists declared themselves as autonomous human creatures. Her female characters are sensitive single and thoughtful, leading a life of confinement and depression, longing for self-emancipation and self-pride. In most of her novels Anita Desai portrays inward desire of her female protagonists through monologue.

Another notable post - colonial writer resisting the traditional mode of women representation in literature is Bharati Mukherjee. Bharati Mukherjee searches for the root of gender and identities. In her novel 'Desirable Daughters' she portrays the problems faced by women in present society. Tara protagonist of 'Desirable Daughters' is a portrayal of new women taking a stand to create the space of liberty to women. Bharati Mukherjee takes up the issues of female who migrate to foreign countries. Her female protagonists explore the possibilities of freedom offered to women in foreign countries. The women characters are bold, assertive and they venture out to fulfill their dreams and desires. Her protagonists move out from domestic barriers and cross geographical limits of the country conveying the message to adopt new culture and be a part of it. Transformation is reflected in her novels which comes with migration from one country to another.

Arundhati Roy's 'The God of Small Things' portrays resistance against gender oppression. Ammu, the female protagonist of the novel rebels against social structure. Her tragic story arouses the sense of pity from

beginning to the end. Her tragic story begins in her childhood as she had to endure unbearable experiences. Ammu and her mother Mamachi suffered cruelty of her father Pappachi who used to beat Ammu and her mother. Ammu was not permitted to gain higher education as her father thought that college education is not useful for a girl.

She has to help her mother in household work and wait for her marriage. She was frustrated because she was deprived of Higher Education. Ammu shows her courage by marrying a man of her choice and eventually divorces him when her choice proved wrong. The novel 'The God of Small Things' shows miseries and sufferings of women who bear the brunt of male domination. Roy shows the struggle of woman for getting some pleasure and happiness. Murari Prasad has apply remarked that "Ammu's rebellion against maternal and marital conventionality and finally, her liason with dark-skinned and untouchable Vellutha...Her rebellion on her 'quest for identity'."

Another famous figure in this tradition is Kamla Markandaya. Kamla Markandya's female protagonists make sacrifices for their family members and they raise their voice for the benefits of others. Rukmani her female protagonist in 'God of Small Things' opposes tannery in the village. She blames outsiders of moral degradation of the villagers. When her family moves to city she works hard with her husband to increase their earning. She is in real sense, an empowered women who never allows anyone to restrict the voice and gets her hussband's support in this. Kamala Markandaya creates different female characters giving them strong character and personality without hurting the ego of a man. Kamala Markandaya's female characters are never negative or powerless. Her novels deal with themes related to women.

Many Indian women writers fight and challenge the victimization of women promoting the feminist mode of writing. This stimulated the sword to get self-identity through their writings. These women writers challenged the system of patriarchal rules and regulation. For highlighting any issue literature is the best tool. Post-independence Indian Women writers have made a constructive contribution particularly in past few decades. Their contribution is undoubtedly great and increasing continuously.

Post-colonial women writers have dealt with themes related to women and society and they have rightly taken up cudgels against women's exploitation and genetic, racial, social and cultural suppression. These women writers have rightly proved that they are integral part of human civilization. For progress of a society or country an active participation of women is necessary. Postcolonial writers have very nicely handled the changing image of women in modern and postmodern era from traditional portrayals of endurance and self-sacrifice towards self-assurance making society aware of their demands.

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