

# Women Novelists of the Twentieth Century

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*Abstract- The Twentieth century is basically the age of novel. The novel has gained an ascendancy over other forms in the modern age, and from technical point of view the progress has been noteworthy. Novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have given to the novel the scrupulous literary care formerly given to poetry and drama and have made it a work of art. Women Novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have played a vital role in the development of English Fiction. The present article tries to explore the contributions made by the Women Novelists.*

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century is essentially the age of the Novel. It is not an exaggeration to say that this literary form has almost eclipsed the other two major forms of literature-Poetry and Drama. It is true that novel witnessed phenomenal progression during the Victorian Age in the hands of Charles Dickens, Thackeray, Bronte Sisters, Meredith and George Eliot, but it could not achieve the greatness and excellence which it has attained in the hands of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Novelists. This age also witnessed excellence in the technical aspect. Novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century have given to the novel the scrupulous literary care formerly given to poetry and drama and have made it a work of art.

Women Novelists of the Twentieth century have played an important role in the development of English Novel. Round about the 'thirties' they seem to predominate the literary scene of the century. They have contributed a lot to English fiction. They continued and followed the path which Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth had left behind in the Eighteenth Century. The women novelists of this period tried to express the feminine view and tried to look at the world from the women perspective. Satirical note has been one of the predominant features of their novels. Stream of Consciousness technique has also been used in most of the novels. Virginia Woolf, Henry Handel Richardson, Dorothy M. Richardson, Miss Humphery Ward, Miss Clifford, Sarah Grand, Rose Macaulay, Elizabeth Bowen, Ivy Compton Burnet, Katherine

Mansfield are some prominent women Novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)**- She began her writing career as a contributor to literary journals and after her marriage to Leonard Woolf in the year 1912, she shared in the activities of Hogarth Press, which published the work of many rising men and advanced thinkers. She revolted against the novels of social manners as produced by writers like Arnold Bennett. Woolf has given importance to the realities of life and for the realities were inward and spiritual rather than outward and material. Her characters are seen in search of the elusiveness of these inner realities. The major purpose of Virginia Woolf was the communication through fiction of a sense of reality. In the world she created there is a deep sadness, regret and a certain coldness, for the mind and spirit of man reign here. The world she chose to describe is a limited one in which the characters live in a luminous mist. She arranged human beings in characteristic attitudes and weaved tremendous strands of thought and feeling in to a firm, recognizable poetic pattern. She was a prose writer of genius. It is in her prose style that her poetic qualities are most clearly visible. Her prose style has all the poise and charm of the cultured woman and conscious artist. She used words with keen sense of their rhythmic and musical potentialities. It is also to be noted that her style was richly figurative.

Virginia Woolf is a novelist of very narrow limits and it would be absurd to say she could not create character. The range of characters is very small. The characters she created belong not only to certain class, the upper middle class intelligentsia, but also to a certain temperament.

Virginia Woolf was quite aware of her place in the tradition of the English novel and particularly in the tradition of the women writers. She also believed that fiction is not criticism of life in any Arnoldian sense, but it is a recreation of the complexities of experience.

**Henry Handel Richardson (1870-1946)** - Like Mary Evans who published her novels under the

name of George Eliot, Henrietta Richardson published her novels under the pseudonym Henry Handel Richardson. Her novels reflect her love for Australia as she was principally interested in her native land Australia. It is quite interesting to note that her novels have a masculinity which is rather strange for a woman writer. Her novels are characterized with a deep understanding of Australian Life. *Maurice Guest*, *Young Cosima*, *The Fortunes of Richard Mobony*, *The Trilogy* are some of her well known works. *The Trilogy* is an elaborate study of the misadventures the physician hero in Australia.

**Dorothy M. Richardson (1872-1957)** was one of the prominent novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. She belonged to the school of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. In her novels she made experiments in the field of psychological analysis and carried further the stream of consciousness technique. This technique had been cultivated with success by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. In her famous novel *Pointed Roofs* she sought to represent the adventures of a young woman, Miriam Henderson from the feminist standpoint. She also tried to present social manners from the standpoint of a woman. In the novel *Pilgrimage* she presented the life story of a woman. Her method was rather descriptive than analytical. She succeeded in expounding the women's point of view. She had also been successful in presenting feminine psychology in her novels.

**Miss Humphrey Ward (1851-1920)** - She was an intellectual novelist and she worked slowly and laboriously to represent her view point in her works. Her best-known work, *Robert Elsmere*, created a sensation in its day by advocating a Christianity based on social concern rather than theology. There is plenty of religious and philosophical thought in the other novel *Marcella* too. Her book *The History of David Grieve* is also over loaded with Didactic purpose. There is little of wit and humour and intellectual elements are found in abundance.

**Sarah Grand (1854-1943)** Her novels show a lot of interest in the emancipation of women and they also aim at the betterment of feminine life. She was the one who heralded the woman movement. Her chief novels are *Idela* and *The Woman Who Did*. She is a novelist of strong intellectual force and her work is immensely appreciated by women readers. She has sketched a large number of characters in interaction with each other.

**Mrs. Clifford (1846-1921)**- Most of her novels deal with tender sentiments, no undue exaggeration is found in her novels. Her well known work *Aunt Anne* also aims at presenting pleasant sentiments. This book is the character sketch of a pathetic and a foolish woman. This woman was deceived into marriage by an adventurer who loved her only for her money. By presenting the story of this woman Mrs. Clifford showed that her concern was more towards the feelings of heart.

**Rose Macaulay (1881-1958)**- British novelist, poet, historian, journalist, literary critic, anthologist, travel writer, and broadcaster who was known for her caustic wit, satirical comedy, and, in late life, for her religious quest and in her novel *The Orphan Island* she gave satirical portraiture of Victorian Society. The Foibles and weaknesses of modern society are exposed in her novel. In a succession of her satirical novels, she tried to demolish the follies and pretenses of several generations. In her novels *Dangerous Ages* and *Told by an Idiot* also expose the contemporary society. In *They were Defeated* Rose Macaulay recreated the 17<sup>th</sup> Century life. *Potterism* is another significant novel in which Rose Macaulay attacked the Philistinism of the Victorian Age. This novel is also marked with a lively satire. *The World My Wilderness* is a penetrating novel depicting the influence of the war time. The characters of Barbary and Raove are drawn by Rose Macaulay with sympathy and understanding. The wilderness of the bomb desolated area around St. Paul's Cathedral is so accurately and vividly projected.

**Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923)** She is known for her evocative short stories which show both perfection in technique and maturity of vision. She wrote novels about human relationships, the curious and subtle spiritual adventure, the poignant ironies of contrasting human emotions. Her novels also bring out a deep insight into human experience. She observed and understood characters widely divergent from herself in both temperaments and accidentals. As excessively conscious and conscientious artist, she attempted to work her own aesthetic. '*Life and Art*' she wrote are 'two things indivisible'. *It is only by being true to life that I can be true to art*. *And to be true to life is being good, sincere, simple and honest*. She also exhibited an astonishing assurance in technique and in control of her subject matter. She avoided non essentials and unflinching selection of

telling details. She tried to build up the intensification of a single emotion, mood or psychological situation. Intensity of feeling and maturity of vision feature most of her novels. Irony, pity, sympathy all these emotions are given due importance. Her depth of feeling and subtlety of insight, together with her delicately sensitive prose, imparted a poetic lyricism to subjects that otherwise might have seemed sentimental or mawkish. *Prelude, To the Bay, The Garden Party* which draw on her more youthful experiences, have a tremendous beauty rare in stories concerned with her later life. She was very adept in the delineation of young children, adolescent girls, and old women, perhaps because the experiences and observations of her own adult life were too close to her to view in perspective. Her stories also range from the dewy childish awareness of family life in New Zealand, through the weariness and frustrations of her English Life to the sad and sometimes bitter loneliness of dwelling in the strange land of the Continent.

It is to be observed here that the women novelists discussed above have dealt with various themes and subjects. They have also employed various narrative techniques to give expression to their ideas. Psychological, Historical, Societal, Realistic, Biographical, Autobiographical, Family, Satirical, Detective and quite interestingly religious novels have been written by the women writers. Stream of Consciousness, interior monologue, the detailed tracing of the freakish associations of ideas and allusive style have been effectively used by the women writers.

#### REFERENCE

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