

Major Thematic Concerns in Contemporary Indian English Writing by Women in India

Dr. Reshma Rajyaguru

Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Science and Humanities, Sal Engineering and Technical Institute. Ahmedabad

Abstract: History has to be written in every generation. Each generation asks new questions of the past and finds new areas of investigation to understand different aspects of the predecessor. These exercises of generation to generation give a universal rise to various branches of literature in all direction. Gradually, Indian writing in English, which was grown over the years in variety and its maturity has aroused as considerable interest both in India and abroad. Before going into details of the writings of Indian women writers, it is necessary to have an idea of a sociological understanding of women's status. In fact, tracing the status of women in India from a historical background is not an easy task and tracing the history of women writing in India is more difficult as women come from different castes, classes, states and families. Thus, their positions differ from one another. The role of women in Indian society and the ironic image of women in India have undergone an evolutionary process. The significant difference between this evolutionary process was that in the west, it was directed for equality with man, while in India it was directed against the social evils.

Index Terms : women writing, thematic concern, equality, status, ironic image, investigation

INTRODUCTION

When one is born, one is without identity. Gradually, he/s starts involving himself with the social environment and maintains relations with persons, places, and things. The question is that how a man reacts, behaves, and looks at all these persons, places and things. Attitude plays an important role in developing one's personality and his/her entire behavior. This attitude and reaction become a cause of joy, sorrow, harmony, etc. One can find answers to these questions in our Upanishadas. *Chhandogya Upanishad* defines principle of living life in an ordered manner. This principle of living life teaches a common man the ways of getting harmony and joy in relations.

Yo Wai bhuma tatsukham alpe sukhamsti

Yo wai bhuma tata mrutama thayata

Alpa, tata martyam. (Chhandogya 6, 23)

According to *Chhandogya Upanishad* 'bhuma' means important and 'alpam' means trivial or unimportant. There are two ways of looking at everybody and everything. If one looks at everybody as equally important then there is no question of disharmony or discrimination. This attitude leads a human being to happiness and joy for himself and for others, too. On the other hand, if a person looks at everybody as mean, trivial or unimportant then it will surely lead to hatred, discrimination and indifference. Society looks at a man and a woman as a pillar of the society, but the treatment given by the society to the man and the woman appears different. If we look at the history of women in India, a woman was considered an inferior being to man. It is strange that in India, women have been regarded as 'Devis', but ironically, the respect and privileges which accompany a position of a 'Devi' are not only anti-individualistic but also anti-humanistic. It denies a woman's personhood. The above lines of *Chhandogya Upanishad* exactly fit to the situation of women of India then and now. This is what women have been facing from several centuries. Directly or indirectly, it has become an accessible cause of writing for women. In a literary writing, the theme, the central idea, is the unifying and controlling factor. It is called the mother idea of that literary piece. One may say that it is the nucleus of the whole design. Swapan Majmudar writes, "Theme is an underlying action or movement, a thesis, a message or an idea embodied and dramatized in evolving meanings and images. Theme abstracts and extends a meaning from a situation it is like a line or a thread running diverse features together." (Majmudar 48). In order to understand women's position in society, it is very important to understand patriarchal system in a society. A woman is not born but made implies and compels to think that she behaves and

speaks according to the will of the male dominance. Her existence is totally depended on socio-political patriarchy. In the public and private domains, women are considered 'the other'. Men are always the engine to run society. Women are under the control of males in whichever role they play in society.

Mahatama Gandhiji's movement has brought the true emancipation and modernization of women. The Brahma Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and Arya Samaj played an important role for the liberalization of women. These movements had their weaknesses too. The reason for their limited success was that they were all motivated by Men and not by Women. The second reason of the failure of these movements is they were religion based. With exception of BrahmaSamaj these movements viewed women in the context of joint family and none of them really bothered or aimed at making women an equal partner of men outside the family life. The nineteenth century has witnessed harsh realities. The struggle for freedom thus became not only a political one but it was deeply rooted in emotional and ideological one within the psyche of each and every Indian. The great change occurred in the lives of Indian people. Literature became the instrument in showing contemporary social reality. Indian women began writing in English towards the middle of the 19th century. The changes in the intellectual, social, cultural, and multidimensional image, role, and status of women have given women writing a clear focus. The post-independence period brought a number of talented women writers. Swarnakumari Devi, Toru Dutt, Pundita Rama Bai, Sorabji and Rokeya Shekhavat were among the earliest writers to write against stereotype representation of women in creative writing. One cannot forget the contribution of Toru Datt's *Binaca*, Raj Laxmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife*, Kripabai Sathianathan's *Kamla and Saguna*, and Nikambe's *Ratnaband Swrnalata*. Ghoshal's *The Fatal Garland, An Unfinished Song* and *An Indian Love Story* for creating extra ordinary women characters to explore the possibilities of social change.

A number of women writers have been able to find the peculiar situations of their existence and are able to see the complexities from close looking towards their lives. Writings by women writers provide insights, a wealth of understanding, meaning and a basis of discussion. There has been a growing interest in women and women writers focus on these issues. Most of these

Indian English women writers have been students of English Literature. This could have been the reason behind their proximity to the Contemporary Literary Theories. These women wrote from a more different perspective than their vernacular predecessors. Women writing in the regional languages have been revolutionary and unprecedented in many ways, but postmodernism as a theory to be applied for the practical purposes of creating literature is not as prevalent as it is in the Indian English writing. Postmodern theories have shifted the literary focus from the objective to the subjective.

A common characteristic of all contemporary Indian English writers is the revolutionary spirit with which they started writing. Their writings are nothing but an explosion of suppressed desires and feelings that have been gathered long before. These writings of Indian women emphasize that their writings are not merely pages, but that they are serious and require appropriate attention. The writings of Indian writers focus on the discrimination of the writings that Indian writers have been subjected to by writers and their regional counterparts. Most of the women writers have no domestic place. The majority of works have been written by Indian women with the psychological sufferings of the frustrated home makers. The work of Indian women writers is important in making the society aware of the women's needs and demands. This provides a medium for self-expression. Indian women writers have started questioning the prominent stereotype old domination of patriarchal system. In the particular case of Indian women writers, the father-tongue is bent and destroyed into a mother-tongue. They have shown their value worth in the field of literature both qualitatively and quantitatively. A major development in modern Indian fiction is the growth of the women centered approach. This projects and interprets experiences from the point of a feminine consciousness and sensibility. The image of women in fiction has undergone a change from traditional to outspoken during the last four decades. Women writers started to move from traditional, stereotypical, sacrificing women towards confident female characters searching for identity. Now a day Indian women writing is full of not only just necessary Indian Sensibility, but an expression of cultural displacement. In comparison to past contemporary women's presentation, it is more assertive, liberated and more

articulated. Many women have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity.

With the emergence of a whole new group of contemporary Indian women writers, the long drought was filled and different unknown aspects of women's life were discovered. Apart from dwelling only on issues related to women and society, these groups focused on different points to view about life and successfully established it in the world's literary canvas. In the context of this chapter the word contemporary is used to imply writers who are writing from 1980 till date. This chapter is an attempt to view and highlight the contributions of women writers from different states, among India and their works in various genres of Indian English literature. The concept of Indian womanhood is as divergent as the country itself and has undergone dramatic changes from time to time. India travelled a long path from the past of captivity to the independence to degeneration; from the spirituality to the communal riots and also from the agricultural revolution to the cyber technology.

The role of the Indian woman has changed from deity to devdasi, from Shakti to Abla, from the homemaker to professional. Literature changed as the country progressed from tradition to modernity. The study of Indian English literature reveals the chain of women writers lining up one after another. In such a condition, women writers have been playing an important role to bring an essential change in society and nation. Their writings provide insight, wealth of understanding and basis of discussion. The group of Indian women writers took women from pathetic condition to highly intellectual standards. The writings of Indian women writers have sharpened their observation and imparted a psychological depth in their writings. Women began to better understand their role and with the help of their inner longing began to give specific responses of men and things. In the poem *The Old Playhouse*, Kamla Das writes:

*It was not together knowledge of yet
Another man but I came to you but
To learn what I was, and by learning,
To learn to grow, but every lesson you gave me about
yourself.*

.....
*You called me wife, I was taught to
Break saccharine into your tea and to
Offer at the right moment the vitamins
Covering beneath your monstrous ego*

I ate the magic loaf and became a dwarf. (Das 87)

In recent times Indian English literature has attracted worldwide interest both in India and outside of India. Indian women writers come up with a particular focus and purpose to establish them as gap fillers between male and female relationships. This group of Indian women writers explored major themes like the gender issues, female exploitation and suppression, liberation through self quest, sexual autonomy, human relationships, realism, the image of 'new woman', Indian culture, Indianness, migration etc. There are number of Indian women writers who gave shape to Indian women writing and inaugurated a new tradition of writing in English with a regional touch. The emergence of new woman was reflected in Indian English literature. Indian English literature has portrayed a wide range of feminine characters from conventional to rebellious and thus a new woman became a bridge between the old and the new and the East and the West, too. These writers also tried to analyze their socio-cultural values that have given them their role and image as a woman. These writers have figured out in their writings the hidden and suppressed world of Indian women.

Altogether it is clearer from the above discussion that the social and cultural milieu always plays an important role in building and rebuilding the shape of a 'self'. Women totally socially construct phenomenon in the landscape of literature and so writing by women would not be an exception. Women writers write about the cultural position of them and the attitudes of society. Theorist Elizabeth Abel remarks that women have been given a very limited range of options. Women of the different countries reveal the same experiences of male-dominated world. Indian women writers and the analysis of fiction by writers from different locations living the same timeline reveal the effects of regional culture, language and history in their work. Gradually, a trend change in Indian women writers earlier, largely confined to the home as a part of the culture of oral story telling took a move into the mainstream. If one analyses the journey of Indian women novelists, one can find that almost all women novelists write from their own experiences. Some of them give their readers their autobiography or identify with their female characters. One can come across two extremes of women characters- 1) Women characters are strict followers of religion and cast norms more than men. 2) They are more modern than their male counterparts.

The writing of Indian women shows a double pressure of their faithfulness to the tradition and they must break through conventional barriers to establish new traditions. The construction of the new woman speaks of her intentions to conceive an ideal woman character as well as to break the tradition and reconstruct the body of new tradition where new opportunities are waiting for new beginnings. Apart from Indian English literature, the regional literature of the subcontinent reflected important changes in literature. Many English books were translated in other regional languages and vice-versa. In the middle of the 19th century, the rapid change occurred in literature. Drama and poetry of nineties gained a remarkable success. Women's writings, too, gained an important attention. The move from 18th and 19th century sowed the seeds of referring contemporary Indian literature. Writers belonging to different states are very conscious about their culture and traditions. Thus, contemporary India has witnessed a massive flow of vernacular language and literature. All women writers have struggled a lot to play as women at the center of their narratives. The fictional women created by these writers have started emerging a strong individual deeply rooted in their culture. Anees Jung rightly quotes:

In this complex pantheon diversity, the Indian woman remains the point of unity, unveiling through each single experience a collective consciousness prized by a society that is locked in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time. She remains the still centre, like the centre in potter's wheel circling to create new forms unfolding the continuity of a social life which in turn has encircled and helped her acquire a quality of concentration. (Jung 31)

The aim of this chapter is that one should know why women have to write where they are and why they are writing the stories of their sufferings. In fact, as long as women did not write, they were not heard. The writings of women from different backgrounds talk about their very existence in the society and their struggling shift from a marginal status to a central one. Earlier, the stories were told and written by male writers which depicted the half stories and the reality of society because there was a total silence on women's presence. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in the *Mad Woman in the Attic* analyze the development of women's writing and writes, "A woman writer is engaged at another

level with assaulting and those images of women inherited from male literature, especially the paradigmatic polarities of angles and monsters."(Gilbert and Gubar 5)

The treatment of the themes of Indian women writers has three faces. A personal story slowly develops into a wider conflict in which are involved the individual's identity for supremacy and social demands so the personal story becomes a medium to change social life in India with all its complexities. Thus, the transition is seen from traditional to modern society. It can be said that the fictional world of Indian women writers mingles a whole range of themes related to the freedom struggle, social evils, religion, low status of woman, etc. The modern themes like alienation depicted with new modes of narrative techniques are called or termed as 'The psychological novel' and they present a clear contrast to earlier novels. With all these approaches, the Indian women's writing has come to acquire a new character and wider acceptance not only in India but abroad, too.

Thus, the analysis of the various themes written by women writers show that women's previous writings focused on the home as a part of the culture of oral narration. Their adoption of the written narrative confirms their entry into the mainstream by recasting stereotypical representations of women in novels by men. This empowerment brings about a shift in repressive social structures. Despite their diversity of background, women writers are united in their exploration of the relationship between gender on the one hand and the family, community on the other hand. In their quest for female subjectivity, women writers acknowledged the power and influence of feminine stereotypes drawn from Hindu mythic sources, but here they attempt to redefine, reconstruct these in the context of the 'new woman.'

REFERANCE

- [1] Das, Kamala. *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*. Orient Longman, 2012, pp.87
- [2] Dodiya, Jaydipsinh. *Contemporary Indian Writing in English*. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1998, pp.23
- [3] Gilbert, Sandra M., et al. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. Yale University Press, 2020 , pp.5

- [4] Jung, Anees. *Unveiling India*. Penguin Books, 1988, pp.31
- [5] Swapan, Majmudar. “*Thematology in the Indian Context.*” *Thematology*, Sibaji Bandyopadhyay ED. Kolkata: Jadavpur University, 2004, pp.48