

Earlier Indian Women Novelists in English

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Abstract

As natural story tellers, Indian women writers played very important role in English fiction. Toru Dutt was able to draw her own experience. Some other language novels have been translated into English. Especially the development of Indian fiction in English was seen after second world war. Quality of compassion, deeper insights, spiritual truth and possession took place in the novels. Some novels consist of protest against the modern technology. Population explosion, shelter and survival have been drawn to show the lives of the people. Their lives consist of amusement, detachment, interest, self- discipline and contradiction. At that time India moved colonialism to independence. There was a symbolic expression associated with noises of people, animals and birds. Some incidents were associated with social background and political background. Indian women writers in English could succeed to show their novels.

Key Terms

Indian-women-novelists-English-significance-womanliness-contribution-spirit - humanity - unpleasant-traditional-conventional-social-political- colonialism-independence- culture-poverty - talent- dimension- achievement-noises- physical-psychological-prosecution-correlation- characterizatio-imagination-ancient-philosophy-contemporary- adjustments-spirituality- personality.

Introduction

There was a tremendous development of the fiction by Indian women novelists in English during the period in between 1951 and 2000. A large number of women than men came forward to write novels in English. This kind of effort was equal to the effort made by Jane Austen and George Elliot, The Bronte sisters and Mrs Gaskell, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. It explains the contribution of women writers to English fiction.

Generally, women are natural story tellers. Toru Dutt died at the age of 21 in 1877. Before her death Toru Dutt wrote both a French and an English novel. Other women writers achieved significance in Indian fiction in English. She could draw upon the limited fund of her own experience in the writing of fiction. Autobiographical projections are seen in her novels, “Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden” (1878) and “Le journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers”

(1879). In 1878, her unfinished Bianca appeared Posthumously in France. It was translated into English by Prithwindra Mukherjee and it took place serially in the "Illustrated Weekly". Other early novels by women writers were Raj Lakshmi Debi's "The Hindu Wife, or The Enchanted Fruit" (1876) and Mrs. Krupabai Santhianadhan's "Kamala, A story of Hindu Life" (1894) and "Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life" (1895). Perhaps Mrs. Ghoshal (Swarna kumari Debi) was the first women novelist in Bengali, and two of her novels were translated into English as "An Unfinished Song" (1913) and "The Fatal Garland" (1915). Santa and Sita Chatterjee wrote novels and short stories in Bengali. Later they have been translated into English and titled "Tales of Bengal" (1922), "The Cage of Gold" (1923) and "The Garden Creeper" (1931). Having kept useless affiliations Anindita of Sita Chatterjee's, "The Night Errant" did not distinguish Tagore's Binodini either by their tightness of texture or characterisation in depth. Most of the stories of Cornelia Sorabji were appeared in the "Macmillan's Magazine "and" Nineteenth Century and After". "Love and life behind the Purdah (1901), "Sun-Babies: Studies in the Child Life India", (1904) and "Between the Twilights" (1908) are some of her best works. Having kept Parsi-Christian background Miss Sorabji tried to penetrate the silken curtain of the 'purdah' and reveal the nuances of femininity. Purdah contains ecstasy, tragedy, tragi-comedy and comedy. But women managed to endure somehow by her sheer power of womanliness and especially with her gifts of beauty, love, patience, compassion and goodness. After second world war, the contribution of women novelists enriched Indian fiction in English. Especially Kamala and Ruth Praver Jhabvala are outstanding writers. Markandaya has written about the constant fear, hunger and despair of the peasant. Having kept love and faith, suffering and sacrifice peasants did not accept defeat.

Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in a Sieve" (1954) recalls Venkata Ramani's 'Murugan the Tiller'. On the other hand, Markandaya's "Some Inner Fury" recalls her "Kandan the Patriot". Here Venkata Ramani is poetical and masculine, Markandaya is suggestive and feminine. Like her early novel it is based on autobiographical form and exploits the freedom of daydream. Both "Some Inner Fury" and "Nectar in a Sieve" are tragedies but "Nectar in a Sieve" is engineered by economics and "Some Inner Fury is engineered by politics. Both the novels assert the unconquerable spirit of humanity. "A Silence of Desire" is the third novel of Kamala Markandaya, is based on economics and politics, attacks the immeasurable area of spiritual realities. A period of ten years has gone after quit India movement. There was an obscure town, a white-washed house in the suburbs, and a village beyond the river reached by a ferry. Dandekar is government a servant but he doesn't have freedom. He tortures himself and goes to pieces because his wife, Sarojini, ailing from a tumour. In this connection he seeks faith-cure from the Swamy. "A Silence of Desire" is competent enough and it seems to bridge the difference between matter and spirit, doubt and faith. "Possession" is the fourth novel of Kamala Markandaya in which the Swamy figures again. As a modern Swamy he has admirers most in the sophisticated circles. Here the antagonist of Swamy is the formidable Caroline Bell who has

spirited away the Tamil rustic boy Valmiki and made a painter and lover of him. Eventually the Swamy wins and Caroline suffers to make him embarrassment and companion. The same scene as happened in “A Silence”. It indicates it is giving, not taking whereas it is losing not possessing. Here the scene shifts from India to England and America and again back to India. In this scene the clash of wills, the contrasts in scene and situation, the unleashing of passions, the confusion of cross-purposes, all contribute to the exoticism. Caroline is purblind ruthless and demanding but the Swamy is full of serene self-assurance. The real theme of the novel is Art. It is not a matter of technique. It is not only the élan of Valmiki but also his power. It indicates a quality of compassion and profundity in his divine images. The subject and audience is the divine spirit.

As the deeper insights in the novel are about the secret informing and sustaining power of Art, the stupidity and futility of the average human desire for “Possession is openly underlined again and again. The desire to possess, the hazardous act of possession and the constant fear of losing are the trials of human misery. As this novel built round a spiritual truth, possession is rather less satisfying as a human story than its predecessors.

The disturbing extravagance of possession is avoided in Kamala Markandaya fifth novel, “A Handful of Rice”. Its theme is urban economics. Ravi is from the village and he has learnt a thing or two from Damodar during his brief stay in the city of Madras. Both Ravi’s father and father-in-law are men of tradition. They have accepted their lot in life without questioning and rebelling. Ravi is exposed to the evil that rages in its many forms in the city. Having had this kind of notion Ravi saw so many things in the modern city. These new things attract him as well as frighten him. He is influenced by this side and the other side.

The lives of the millions were affected by bad monsoons. All the governments have proved their inability to hold the Priceline. Meanwhile the romance between Ravi-Nalini doesn’t run smoothly. There is an astonishing issue of woman’s power of patience and endurance, were incomplete capacity for love, her simple tenderness. Nalini and Thankam are the sisters. They are the salt of the earth. Here the feeling of Nalini is exquisitely drawn. As description of the problems are similar to us it indicates Kamala Markandaya’s success to measure the touch of universality.

There is a similarity between Kamala Markandaya’s first novel, “Nectar in a Sieve” and her last novel, “The coffer Dams”. The theme of “The Coffer Dams” is a British engineering firm partnered by Clinton and Mackendric set out to build a dam across a south Indian river. Indian engineers like Krishnan and local technicians and labourers assisted the British technicians. The tribesmen occupied the near the proposed dam. They are to be convinced to shift to a less convenient place. Bashiam, a technician works with the company as a crane

operator. Helen, Clinton's wife and Millie Rawlings, the chief engineer's wife live in the small British colony. There is a confrontation between Clinton and tribal chief. Helen is drawn towards the tribes. As he is ready to accept the values Bashiam stands for Clinton. Later Clinton and Helen drift apart and Helen gives herself to Bashiam.

As his men are being easily seduced by offers of jobs the tribal headman is afraid of unpleasant situations. The main thing of Clinton is to complete the project within the stipulated time. But the nature in India did not support the work. Meanwhile some workers were dead. Some dead bodies were not found. The tribal hands say that they will not work till the dead bodies are returned to them. Krishna's men and Helen joined the demand. Bashiam is asked to operate another crane to lift the boulder and release the trapped corpses. As it is new operation to Bashiam, he barely escapes death. Helen too survived from the shock.

Another crisis is coming soon in the monsoon. If the water levels rise steadily with continuous rains and unbreakable cofferdams the river will burst its bonds and drown the tribes in the land basin. Meanwhile Helen and Meckendrick seek guidance from the dying tribal chief. His last speaking words indicate that whenever the ridges clear the water levels will fall and the Great Dam will be safe. There is an excellence in the technical descriptions in which there is a mysterious quality in the early morning adventure in bird catching. Kamala Markandaya has succeeded in applying mastery of the medium. Having kept some obvious contrivance and some ingenious formulations of contrast, the novel as a whole was a deeply disturbing protest against the violent attack of modern technological ruthlessness against the simplicity and humanity of an earlier order of life.

Mrs. Ruth Praver Jhabvala has written six novels. They are "To Whom She Will" (1955), "The Nature of Passion" (1956), "Esmond in India" (1958), "The Householder" (1960), "Get Ready in Battle" (1962) and a Backward Place (1965). She is the daughter of Polish parents who live in Germany. At the age of twelve she came to England. She completed her M.A. degree at the London University. She married an Indian Architect in 1951. Then she settled down in Delhi. As a Chameleon she has opportunities to change her behaviour from local to cosmopolitan, from traditional to conventional, from naïve to sophisticated. In the unreal city like Delhi it is very difficult to survive among different categorical people. At that time a population explosion in Delhi more alarming even than in other Indian cities. All kinds of people found shelter in hospitable Delhi. What kind of life does Ruth Praver Jhabvala lead with endless curiosity as well as acute powers of observation? As the combination of independence and partition, Delhi does not have opportunity to develop itself. A large number of people from their homesteads and a large number of Hindu and Sikh refugees came to Delhi to seek their fortune in a new environment. This is the theme of her first novel, "To Whom She Will".

There was an amusement, detachment, interest, self-discipline and contradiction in the observation of Mrs Jhabvala at life in modern Delhi. According to Jane Austen's world post-independence Delhi refuses definition and containment in which it needs her talent for resolved limitation to locate the urban middle class life in the nineteen fifties and sixties. Husband hunting is significant in Jhabvala's novels. There is a contradiction between the emotional relationships in the Jhabvala world of fiction and the surely inhibited world of Jane Austen. In her fiction Jhabvala's description is associated with the relish of eating, especially eating sweets but in the later novels traditional eating parties are seen where Indian sweets and savouries are liberally consumed. Appropriate background, lot of effort for temporary emotional ties and tactful marriage negotiations are possible through these kind of parties. As the most enjoyable social documentation, Jhabvala's second novel, "The Nature of Passion" is a background of sherbet-drinking and pan-chewing. It helps two cunning men Deva Raj and Lalaji try to find what people think about a particular course of action before they do.

Comedy, irony and satire are mingled to make a fabric of fiction, "Esmond in India". In the place of Amrita, Gulab has married Esmond Stillwood who is that rare combination. Esmond has come to India for teaching Indian and world culture to young society ladies. Sakuntala has completed her B.A., fallen for him and thrown herself into his arms. Meanwhile her father, Har Dayal agreed their relationship. It leads to the engagement of Shakuntala with Esmond. After knowing her interest with Esmond, Prof Bhatnagar seeks an agreement for his son with her. Ramnath has same thinking for his son, Narayan. Meanwhile Esmond has planned to get away from Shakuntala, culture sessions, India's untidiness and poverty. On the other hand, he enjoyed himself on the boat the company of the very English Betty and the happiness of games and tennis. He wanted to get back to England where he was able to see solid grey houses, people and the sky with its decent proportions.

There is a story of newly married couple, Prem and Indu, in the novel, "The Holder". Prem's mother apologized when she was leaving for Bangalore to join her daughter. But they felt very happy to have power as householder. There was some gentle irony in the conversation between mother and son. There is a domestic scene in "A Backward Place". An English, girl Judy, is married to Bal, who is so handsome and a man of plans. In this connection Judy takes care of her husband and children. If the couple involve in long journey there could be an unperceived or only half understood emptiness in the relationship. Like Kamala Markandaya Jhabvala is a major woman novelist. Both the novelists have their own distinctive talent., Wide range of interests and individual style. Miss Attia Hosain's novel, "Sunlight on a Broken Column" (1961) and her earlier collection of short stories, "Phoenix Fled" (1953) stood for the evidence of a talent for past memories and sensitive observation. Her collection of short stories starts with the description of an old woman and suddenly creates to bring out terror when neighbours turned murders, and villagers get fear on seeing the arrival of soldiers. Structure of

full length novel gave distinction to her short stories. A period of about twenty years in the life of Laila, the narrator heroine in the novel, “Sunlight on a Broken Column”. During the period, Laila changing from an orphan girl of fifteen to the widowed mother of a girl whereas India moves from colonialism to independence. This novel consists of social and political documentation as Attia Hosain writes with a feeling for places, events and words.

Anita Desai has added new dimension to her two novels, “Cry the Peacock” and voices in the city, to the achievement of Indian women writers in English Fiction. Social background is important in Praver Jhabvala’s work, the accent on the principal characters is important in kamala Markandaya’s work and the inner climate is more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action. Having kept original talent Anita Desai went on her own way. Her two novels carried not only rich promise but also present achievement.

The sense of inner space, with its deceptive half-lights and the broad darkness, is more potent than and the changeable outer forms, shadows, noises and silences. As it is the story of her married life with Gautama, Maya has succeeded in telling her story to herself. Actually the novel begins with her pet dog Maya was helpless as her husband, Gautama, is a busy, prosperous and middle- aged lawyer. Her mother is dead and her brother, is in New York, is disowned by his father. The only chance is to get protection from her dear father’s house in Lucknow. In this way fate has been pursuing her for several years. At last she has neither Gautama’s help nor family’s help.

As it is not contained by a single sensibility like Maya’s in the earlier novel “Voices in the City” is nevertheless less satisfying than “Cry the Peacock”, Main reason is that Calcutta, city of noises and muffled voices, the city teeming with the meaningless riot of life and the city of death. It indicates Anita Desai is able to spread the narration in the flow of several sensibilities, for example, the inner as well as the outer climate. The novel is held together by the sharp Maya-Gautama separation, the double force of the prophecy and the symbolism of the peacock’s love-death cry. But “Voices in the City” lacks such controlling forces leaves an impression of incompleteness, action and characterization, idea and symbol. In her “Bye-Bye, Blackbird” (1971), Anita Desai is able to project physical and psychological adjustments associated with the coloured immigrant in Britain.

In her “The Little Black Box”, Shakuntala Srinagesh has presented the story in the form of a diary by the narrator-heroine, Sarla. François Mauriac’s “The Knot of Vipers” explains what kind of life we will have if love and trust are replaced self-interest, suspicion and harm. As a young, an unmarried, and an inexperienced woman, Sarla share with Louis a sense of harassment by the family and her mind is far from normal. “Remember the House” is the only novel of Santha Rama Rao. This novel explains love has a little excitement, a little impatience and much

imagination. Both an ease and an urbanity are suitable to the theme and she is able to explore and expose the dividing gulf between the East and the West in a gentle manner.

“A time to be happy” is the first novel of Nayantara Sahgal. As the son of UP Zamindar, Govind Narayan joins Selkirk and Lowe at their office in Sharanpur, learns to drink and to make love and marries the worthy Kusum. He got freedom and talent be happy. There is no correlation between action and characterization in right relation to the background. As a political novel “This Time of Morning” has drawn the knowledge of Nayantara Sahgal. It reflects her position as the daughter of a mother as well as the niece of Jawaharlal Nehru. It is one of the best political novels written by an Indian novelist in English. Her latest novel, “Storm in Chandigarh” reflects the separation of Sikh-dominated Punjab and the largely Hindu state of Haryana. There was a trouble occurred at the beginning as Chandigarh was the common capital. Both the political background and the human background played major role in this dispute. She got impression for her political feelings and her command over English rather than her art as a novelist.

As it was set in the ancient time of Buddha’s time, Vimala Raina’s “Ambapali” consists of culture, religion and philosophy. Vimala Raina might have succeeded in making her novel as she concentrated on the life and personality of Ambapali. Love, war, politics, economic and social tensions, spirituality, culture, religion and philosophy were popular with contemporary novelists.

Toru Dutt is good at projection of autobiographical scenes. Most of the woman writers used to manage their womanliness and especially their beauty, love, patience, etc. Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala got name and fame through their writing. Both social and political documentation took place in the novels of Miss Attia Hosain. Anita Desai is good at the narration in the flow of several sensibilities. Thus women played major role in early Indian fiction in English.

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