
INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS IN ENGLISH: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Indian literary scene has seen a complete change as far as women writings are concerned. It has got quite richer in the span of time. Writers like ShashiDeshpande, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, Gita Mehta, Shobha De, Gita Hariharan, , BharatiMukharjee, Kamala Das, Mahasweta Devi etc have made feministic and women writing popular in the world.

Introduction

The term 'Status' signifies the sum total of the various culturally ascribed roles one has to play and the rights and duties inherent in a social position. Besides the ascribed status, there is also the 'achieved status', which results from one's efforts and personal achievements. The concept of status clearly indicates the placement of individual on the basis of education, occupation, income, perception of one's status, freedom and so on. Considering 'status' in the light of these attributes it is to be noted that the level of status of women varies from country to country the widest difference in levels being between women in developed and developing countries. Even within a country, the level of status of women differs from rural to urban areas.

whole. The fact that Indian literatures are a product of a multilingual, multicultural and sociohistorical mélange cannot be overlooked. Today Indian literature reached at the apex of creation with the contribution of regional and national writers. This researcher would like to focus on the root and brief literary history of Indian writing in English and the genre – novel in Indo-Anglian literature up to the time of Mulk Raj Anand for better understanding of his novel. Here, it is essential to mention the brief history of Indian writing in English and the contributors of it. Along with the list of the contributors in Indian writing in English, the rise of the new form of literature- novel in India is also necessary to

focus. For that researcher would like to divide the history of Indian writing in English into three parts, first to understand the beginning and exploration of Indian writing in English by major contributors, second for the rise and development of new literary genre (novel) in Indo-Anglian literature and third to understand Anand as a novelist. These three parts are foundation of my research work. On the basis of the understanding of the Indo-Anglian literature and the rise and development of novel in IndoAnglian literature, the major novels of Mulk Raj Anand can be judged properly. Indo-Anglian literature contributed to the common pool of world writing in English. It is a literature which is a combination of Indian 9 literature and Indian literature written in English. Indian English Literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian Diaspora. It is frequently referred to as IndoAnglian literature. As a category, this production comes under the broader realm of postcolonial literature- the production from previously colonized countries such as India. Indian English literature has a relatively recent history; it is only one and a half centuries old. The first book written by an Indian in English was by Sake Dean Mahomet, titled Travels of Dean Mahomet; Mahomet's travel narrative was published in 1793 in England. In its early stages it was influenced by the Western art form of the novel.

Early Indian writers used English unadulterated by Indian words to convey an experience which was essentially Indian. Indian writings in English are a product of the historical encounter between the two cultures—Indian and the western—for about one hundred and ninety years. It isn't that Indian people didn't experience the impact of a foreign culture. It did during the reigns of various foreign rulers. But the difference with the British rule lies in the nature of the economic system that had come into being in Europe after the Renaissance, described by Marx as capitalist system. Before the introduction of the British rule India had the feudal economic system, in accordance with which the vast population of the country, having various religious faiths and conforming to the caste system, tried to live their life, sometimes fatalistically and sometimes stoically. Above all, it was a closed society with a peculiar cultural racial intolerance. In fact, India had been awaiting a political and cultural change, which became necessary after the weakening and disintegration of the Mogul Empire. British rule in India, first of all, resulted in breaking the barrier of that closed society. Then the greatest cultural impact came with the establishment of four universities and with the introduction of western educational system. The English language provided the natives with a way to the western literature and to the western culture, of course. English education created a class of native bourgeoisie, the majority of which turned to their mother tongue while giving birth to a native literature, applying the western aesthetic norms. But a few among them thought it appropriate to give expressions to their feelings and experiences in English. Thus, the peculiar body of Indo-Anglian literature was created—while its contents were to be Indian, its medium of expression was English. If we take a backward glance at the beginnings of Indo-Anglian literature, the stalwart figure of Raja Rammohan Roy appears first. The renaissance in modern Indian literature begins with Raja Rammohan Roy. He had earned good command over English language by working with British officials. He had tried to give new thoughts, removed old dogma and

typical rituals through Bramhosamaj. The Bramhosamaj encourages establishing harmony between men's accepted faith and their practical observations. Rammohan Roy worked for the betterment of women, freedom of press, English education, social justice and plight of Indian peasantry. He had good command over the English language and wrote prose and poetry in it. For his contribution in the pool of Indian writing in English, K.R.Srinivasalyengar writes; Rammohan Roy although he could be named as the first of the Indian masters of English prose, was great in so fields that he belong to Indian history more than to mere Indo-Anglian literary history

In this way he had contributed his writing and thoughts in the foundation of Indo-Anglian literature and prepared pathway for his successors and contemporaries like Henry Derozio, the Cavally Brothers, KashiproshadGhose, Hasan Ali, P. Rajagopual, Mohanlal, 12and Michel MadhusudanDuttetc are considered first Indo-Anglian writers of verse and prose. The mid nineteenth century is the renaissance in India as that was the time of great literary and social revolutions. At that time legendary thinkers like MaharshiDebendranath Tagore, KesubChunderSen, DayanandSaraswati, the founder of the AryaSamaj have contributed for social reform, educational reform and religious reform which has given scope for renaissance in India. The first Indian English poet, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) had nurtured English verse in India. He became a teacher of English literature at the Hindu College, Calcutta. A teacher as well as a poet, Derozio had expressed nature in his poetry like Keats. The flavor of Romanticism found in his poetry as he was highly influenced by Byron, Shelley, Keats, Scott and Moore. He died at the very early age due to cholera in 1831. This was the time when Hindu society in Bengal was undergoing considerable turmoil. In 1828, Raja Ram Mohan Roy established the BrahmoSamaj, which kept Hindu ideals but denied idolatry. This resulted in a backlash within orthodox Hindu society. It is in the perspective of these changes

that Derozio was appointed at Hindu college, where he helped release the ideas for social change already in the air. His brilliant lectures presented closely-reasoned arguments based on his wide reading. He encouraged students to read Thomas Paine's Rights of Man and other free-thinking texts. Although Derozio himself was an atheist and had renounced Christianity, he encouraged questioning the orthodox Hindu customs and conventions on the basis of Judeo-Christian rationalism. He infused in his students the spirit of free expression, the yearning for knowledge and a passion to live up to their identity, while questioning irrational religious and cultural practices. Derozio's intense zeal for teaching and his interactions with students created a sensation at Hindu College. His students came to be known as Derozians. He organised debates where ideas and social norms were freely debated. In 1828, he motivated them to form a literary and debating club called the Academic Association. In 1830, this club brought out a magazine named Parthenon. Apart from articles criticizing Hindu practices, the students wrote on women's emancipation and criticized many aspects of British rule. He also encouraged students into journalism, to spread these ideas into a society eager for change. He took great pleasure in his interactions with students, writing about them: 'Expanding like the petals of young flowers I watch the gentle opening of your minds...' KashiprosadGhose (1809-1837) is also counted as one of the founder pillars of indo-Anglian literature. His contribution in Indian English literature is as equal as Henry Derozio. His *The Shair and Other Poems* (1830), finds a place in literary history of India. Even he is considered as the first Indian to publish a regular volume of English verse. Ghose edited an English weekly *The Hindu Intelligence*. His poetry is counted as moralizing as good texture of originality and conventional descriptions. Michael MadhusudanDutta (1824-1873), began writing while he was at Hindu College. He won several scholarships in college exams as well as a gold medal for an essay on women's education. While a student at Hindu College, his poems in Bengali and English were published in

Jnananvesan, Bengal Spectator, Literary Gleamer, Calcutta Library Gazette, Literary Blossom and Comet. Lord Byron was Madhusudan's inspiration.

Michael's exceptionally colourful personality and his unconventional, dramatic and in many ways tragic life have added to the magnetism and glamour of his name. Generous in friendship, romantic and passionate by temperament, he was fond of the good life. By dint of his genius, he removed the stagnation in Bengali literature both in style and content. He was the first to use blank verse in 1860 in the play *Padmavati* based on a Greek myth. His later poems silenced the critics and detractors, and permanently established the vogue of blank verse literature. Madhusudan's epic poem: *Meghnad-BadhKavya* is considered as his all-time masterpiece till today. Written in blank verse, this epic was based on the Ramayana but inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Madhusudan transformed the villainous Ravana into a Hero. This grand heroictragic epic was written in nine cantos which is quite unique in the history of Bengali Poetry. *Meghnad-BadhKavya* was Bengali literature's first original epic and gave Madhusudan the status of an Epic Poet. Much of his time abroad, especially in Versailles, was spent in abject poverty, as the money from his late father's estate on which he was relying did not come regularly. His Indian friends who had inspired him to cross the ocean had by now managed to forget the beggar Madhusudan altogether. He fell hopelessly into debts and appealed for help to the great personality, the scholar, social reformer, and activist IshwarchandraVidyasagar (this kind soul was known to all as *DayaSagar* – the ocean of kindness, for his immense generosity). His extravagant life-style, fickleness in money matters, and reckless drinking to drown problems conspired to wreck his health and happiness, and likewise the health and happiness of his second partner Henrietta, who had also succumbed to alcoholism during her days of poverty in Versailles. He was a man of real, though somewhat erratic, genius, and a courageous innovator of forms and types which altered

the whole course of Bengali literature and added new dimensions to it. To his adventurous spirit, Bengali Literature owes its first blank verse and the sonnet, its first modern comedy and tragedy, and its first epic. Dutt was particularly inspired by both the life and work of the English Romantic poet Lord Byron. The life of Dutt closely parallels to the life of Lord Byron in many respects. Like Byron, Dutt was a spirited bohemian and like Byron, Dutt was a Romantic, albeit being born on the other side of the world, and as a recipient subject of the British imperialist enterprise. Madhusudan was a gifted linguist and polyglot. Besides Indian languages like Bengali, Sanskrit and Tamil, he was well versed in classical languages like Greek and Latin. He also had a fluent understanding of modern European languages like Italian and French and could read and write the last two with perfect grace and ease.

There is a wider exploration – sociological and economic – in the novels of Kamala Markandaya. She portrays a large repertoire of women in a changing Indian Society. In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Rukmani struggles in a village passing through the transitional phase and is shown as exploited. In *Some Inner Fury*, Sarojini Dandekar shows battle between tradition and modernity in contemporary India. What distinguishes Kamala Markandaya's novels is an awareness of the socio-economic forces and their impact on women

In the novels of Nayantara Sahgal (1927) the emphasis is on freedom and a new definition of "the virtuous woman". She emphasizes the need of awareness for women. In most of her novels, the heroines are aware of the injustice done to them in their marriage and they walk out of their homes. Nayantara Sahgal projects a new angle of the concept of virtue. The conventional woman suffers quietly, the New Woman is determined to live with self-respect. Her virtue is courage and a willingness to risk the unknown. Most of her characters feel that man is still not fit to be an equal partner

The passage, no doubt, gives "metaphysical probings into the world of the spirit,"³ but the novel contains a lot else which the author tries to convey through the "idea of three women from three generations from the same family and how they respond to the tragedy that suddenly overpowers their lives."⁴

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CONCLUSION

