

## **Emerging new women writers in the Indian firmament**

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### **Abstract**

In the nineteenth century, the introduction of the English language into India served as an ideological force behind the reform and control of society. It took many years and the assistance of numerous notable individuals to elevate Indian English literature to its current rank and distinguishable position among global literature, but this development has been well worth the wait. There have been several shifts in the style of writing in Indian English literature throughout the years. Women also started using the pen sooner as literacy rates rose. However, it was not an easy road, as the women had to challenge centuries of male domination, as well as the taboos and beliefs that had permeated the culture.

Feminist critique has emerged as an important part of today's literary landscape, and the female point of view, as articulated by women writers of all stripes, is now seen as more than just a useful counterpoint to the predominance of male perspectives. Novelists of magic realism, social realism, and regional literature have been authored by women like Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Shobha De, and Arundhati Roy, who have all gained national and international acclaim for their work. Without a doubt, it is recognized that they have performed an excellent job in warning the public about the different strict restrictions that were imposed on them by a society dominated by men.

**Key Words:** English literature, literary landscape, international acclaim, dominated by men, male domination

### **Introduction**

#### **Emergence of Indian Women Writers and their status in Indo-Anglican literature :**

In the nineteenth century, the introduction of the English language into India served as an ideological force behind the reform and control of society. The English-language works of Indian authors Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, and Mulk Raj Anand all sought to establish a distinct voice. There have been several shifts in the style of writing in Indian English literature throughout the years. It is true what K.R. Srinivasan says: when an Indian fiction writer employs English or another foreign language he has learned, he is documenting a type of half-conscious translation (from his native language to English) that took place in his head. Many of our authors are able to communicate well in both English and their native language. Although the setting and circumstances are typically Indian, the characters are frequently influenced by their multilingual upbringings. However, there is no denying the inner drives to portray in English the rhythms, quirks, imagery, idioms, and proverbs of the local speech in order to represent the values,

verities, and heart -beats of a particular culture in the language of another.(Kankariya:2001:28)

Women also started using the pen sooner as literacy rates rose. However, it was not an easy road, as the women had to challenge centuries of male domination, as well as the taboos and beliefs that had permeated the culture. The struggle between the sexes has persisted from prehistoric times to the present. The first section provides a criticism of female authors in general, while the second section details the impact female authors have had on Indian literature in English. During the following decade of the 18th century, Jane Austen's novels were published and her books became part of popular literature, marking the beginning of what is often referred to as "Women's Writing" in English. Oroonoko, by Aphra Behn, was the first work to address slavery, race, and gender preceding Jane Austin's novels. Her poetry centers on a sexual experience from the 17th century from the perspective of two women. In the *Defense of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft analyzes the works of male authors including Milton, Pope, and Rousseau.

Women's literature in India dates back to 2600 years, but its modern history begins when women began challenging the stereotypes of women perpetuated by male authors in an effort to promote a more equitable and enlightened society. Before women were prominent in the literary world, males dominated the field by writing about women from their viewpoint and setting standards for them to follow, all in the name of patriarchy that focused on maintaining sexual inequity.

Feminism, in Chaman Nahal's opinion, is "both the knowledge of women's place within society as one of advantage or in general compared to that of human beings, and also a desire to eliminate those advantages,"

**Women as the subject matter in English Literature :** The use of women as protagonists in Indian literature written in English is not new, but the writers' perspectives are unique. Women in Indian literature of the 1960s were portrayed as perfect beings with many admirable qualities and no inkling of rebellion, in contrast to the books of the 1980s and 1990s. Women today are demanding their rightful role in society, and they have the education and awareness to demand it. Western feminist views advanced by authors like Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1952), or Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) undoubtedly had an influence in recent years. These factors have encouraged Indian women authors to challenge established canons and societal mores. They delve deeply into their protagonists' psyches and often usher in a new morality. Despite initial denials, it is clear that authors like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, and others have an intense feminist intent, as women's issues are central to their stories.

Indian women authors' skills and creativity no longer belong to any one country or culture in particular but to the whole world. Sarojini Naidu, often known as the nightingale of India, was one of the first Indian women to write in English, and her work reflects her genuine and deeply felt worries for her country. Authors like Susan Viswanathan, Kamala Markandaya as well as Dina Maheta, have done a great job of incorporating feminist topics into their work on both a national and regional scale. Authors like Shashi Despande and Anita Desai, as well as Bharati Mukharji and Indira Goswami and Ruth Pawar

Jhabvala and Manju Kapoor and Shobha De and Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri, are just a few of the names that come to mind. Let's have a look at the accomplishments of Indian female authors.

- i. The 1997 publication of **Arundhati Roy's** *The God of Small Things*, which deals with taboo love in Kerala and has been published into more than forty languages, was a watershed moment in the history of Indian women's literature. She was born in Shillong, India, in 1959, but she now lives and works as a designer in Delhi. In addition to her fiction, she has published numerous nonfiction volumes, such as *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* as well as *The End of Imagination*, and her most recent, a collaboration with John Cusack titled *Things That Can & Cannot Be Said*. Roy has won the Cultural Liberty Prize from the Lannan Fund in 2002, the Norman Mailer Prize for Outstanding Writing in 2011, & the Ambedkar Sudar Award for Social Justice in 2015. *The Ministry of Maximum Happiness* (2017), written by Arundhati Roy, is her second book that deals with some of the worst chapters in contemporary Indian history. It was released throughout the world to great media attention, further illustrating the significant strides made in the reception of women writers. The themes of social justice and the pain endured by different communities are prevalent throughout her writings.
- ii. **Githa Hariharan's** *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Novel. It is a linear realistic narrative of the protagonist Devi's search for 'a story of my own' (Hariharan: 139). She has no qualms in opting out of a loveless marriage – she leaves her husband Mahesh and also later her lover to live on her own terms in her house by the sea. Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* (1999) also narrates women's stories – women who were silenced and absent in the original story of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which she uses as theme and context. These women include Sahrzad's sister, their mother, and the mother of Shahrivar herself. Their predicament illustrates Simone de Beauvoir's assertion in *In Times of Siege* (2003) that Meena, a ward of Shiv Murthy, an academic, comes to stay with him when she fractures her leg. Meena, a student studying sociology, is collecting the "woman tales" of women who were impacted by the anti-Sikh riots that ensued following the death of Indira Gandhi in 1984 for her thesis. Despite being bedridden, she is in no way helpless. With the confidence of a seasoned pro, she discusses issues, street theater, gender, and risking jail. (Hariharan: 2003:31). When Shiv falls into trouble with the right-wing activists for his progressive history lesson, she itches for a fight: "what's the plan of action? How do we beat your fundos at their game?" (ibid:97) It is Meena who gives Shiv a crash course on how to live and not give up laughter. She is portrayed as a girl matriarch. To save Shiv, she proposes pamphlets, posters, and a united front rally. To help Shiv, she rallies support. The thought of violence does not frighten her: "Her little past is the history of action." (ibid: 111).

Female heroines in Shashi Deshpande's works develop into whole people without rejecting their families or their communities. They move past what Elaine Showalter

messages the "Female phase," that is the phase of discovery of oneself, a turning inward released from a dependence of opposition, and a search for identity (1977:13), and instead undergo a kind of illuminated reintegration into society, in which they find that their voices are no longer other instructed.

- iii. **Roots and Shadows** (1983) is the story of Indu, middle class young girl, brought up in an orthodox Brahmin family headed by Akka. The novel begins with the heroine's return to her ancestral house. The parental home initiates her into an understanding of the meaning of human life. It is here that she discovers what her roots are as an independent woman and a writer, and what her shadows are as a daughter, a mother and a commercial writer. She rebels against Akka, her conventional world, her rigid values and marries Jayant. Ironically she realizes the futility of her decisions: 'Jayant and I ... I wish I could say we have achieved complete happiness. But I cannot fantasize' (Deshpande: 1983:14). In order to attain freedom she seeks marriage an alternative to the bondage inevitable in the parental family.

She looks forward to the role of a wife with the hope that casting herself in a new role will help winning her freedom. Her baffled longing to achieve complete personhood is explicitly suggested: "this is my real sorrow that I can never be complete in myself. Until I had met Jayant, I had not known it ... I met Jayant and lost the ability to be alone" (ibid: 34). Marriage the promised end in traditional society in feminist fiction becomes yet another enclosure that restricts the movement towards a perception of herself as an independent human being and not buffeted by the circumstances or social prescriptions. She arrives at an understanding of love as a physical instinct: "Love, that's a word I don't really understand. It seems to me an overworked word" she realizes: "the sexual instinct ... that is true too, self interest, self love ... they are the basic truth" (ibid: 97).

- iv. **Indian Writing in English** features work by Nayantara Sahgal, the daughter of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit. She held this position, keeping her near to the center of power throughout India's experiment with democracy and throughout the Indira Gandhi era. The English edition of her novel *Rich Like Us* (1986) was honored with the Sahitya Akademi Prize. This book is set in New Delhi, in the month after the proclamation of the Emergency. It's a beautiful study of India and its people after independence, full of irony and heart. It weaves together many different narratives and perspectives to create a captivating and detailed picture of India's history and culture. Rose, the Cockney memsahib, has a family who does not want or accept her. The hilarity and tragedy in Nayantara Sahgal's story reflect aspects of the splendor and foolishness of the Indian experience. She was one of the first Indian women authors to gain prominence in the English-speaking world, and her work often centers on the responses of India's elite to the difficulties brought on by political transformation.
- v. Shashi Deshpande is a prolific author who has written nine collections of short stories, twelve novels, and four novels for children. She first found success with short tales. *That Long Silence* (1989), one of her works, won the Sahitya Akademi Award. "A Matter of Time, Small Remedies, Moving On, In the Country of Deceit, and Ships

that Pass" are some of her other books. Shadow Play is her most recent book. Several Indian and European languages have adapted her books and short tales. She has translated two plays and her father's memoirs from Kannada into English. She has also translated a book by Gauri Despande.

She is also the author of the nonfiction book "Writing from the Margin," which covers topics such as literature, language, Indian writing in English, feminism, and women's writing. She has been asked to speak at a number of prestigious universities and literary festivals in India and overseas. You can take her novels seriously, and that's saying something. She has no interest in stunts. The voice is sincere and takes the tale and its delivery extremely seriously. She is one of the most low-key authors out there. The main characters in her books are almost always female. Because of this, many of her readers classify her as a feminist author. This is a title she has often criticized. She explores issues of gender and sexuality, as well as the plight of Indian women caught between competing cultures and traditions, in her writings. She has zeroed in on the mental anguish and oppression of the disgruntled housewife whose only recourse was to tamp down the storm inside the unavoidable existential quandary of women in a society ruled by men. She was given the Padma Shri in 2009 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990.

- vi. **Anita Desai**, winner of Sahitya Akademi Award as well as Padma Bhushan Award for her contribution in 2014, is one of the most accomplished writers in India. Arundhati Roy's mother says, Arundhati is a born talker and a born writer. While, she was studying in school, it was a problem to find a teacher, who could cope with her voracious appetite for reading and writing. Most of the time, she educated herself on her own. I can remember our vice-principle Sneha Zaharias resorting to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a text for the little fourth grade. (Roy:2005:32) She portrays the complexities of man and women relationship in her novels like *In Custody*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer* and *Voices in the City*. She has explored the deep insight into psychological aspect of her center characters. She has been shortlisted three times for The Booker Prize. Her first book, published in 1963, was titled "Cry, the Peacock," and her second book, published in 1975, was titled "Where Shall We Go This Summer?" Both books focused on the subjugation and tyranny of Indian women. *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) was lauded for its lyrical symbolism and use of sounds, but it was critiqued for leaning too much on imagery at the detriment of storyline and characterisation. The 1980 novel *Clear Light of Day* is widely regarded as the author's magnum opus for its vivid depiction of two sisters ensnared in the tedium of Indian existence. The characters are revealed via a combination of visual cues, spoken exchanges, and internal monologues. The book, like most of Desai's other writings, depicts her melancholy outlook on life. BI share Anita Desai's belief that marginalizing an individual does little to improve society as a whole. I think the real difficulty is not being alone and feeling like you don't belong anywhere, but rather learning to function as an individual within a group. (Singh: 1994:98). Desai has written a number of works for young readers, including *The Village* by the

Sea (1982), as well as collections of short stories, including *Diamond Dust, Other Stories* (2000) etc. Three novellas were compiled into the 2011 book *The Artist of Disappearance*, which explored the unintended consequences of India's rapid modernization, including the loss of traditional ways of life and the uprooting of whole communities. *The Inheritance of Loss*, a book written by her daughter Kiran Desai, was awarded the Booker Prize in 2006.

- vii. Kamala Markandaya, born in 1924, writes novels under the pen name Purnaiya Taylor and is considered a major figure in contemporary Indian literature. She had earned a degree from the University of Madras. She is well-known for her writings about the gulf that exists in Indian society between urban and rural areas, and she relocated to the United Kingdom when India gained independence. Markandaya's first work, "Nectar in a Sieve," was released in 1955. The protagonist of "Nectar in a Sieve," written by Kamala, is a formidable woman named Rukmani. The reader feels her suffering with her as she relates her experience. Despite the deaths of her boys and the fact that she saw her daughter become a prostitute, Rukmani is unbowed. The novel's protagonist, Rukmani, and her daughter, Ira, go through a lot of pain. Rukmani is a diligent worker and loyal wife. Poverty, starvation, the loss of two boys, the prostitution of one daughter, and eventually the death of Rukmani's husband are just some of the hardships the woman has through.
- viii. Manju Kapur's portrayal of the modern woman, one who is willing to go her own way, is undeniably captivating. *Difficult Daughters* (1998), her first book, was a runaway blockbuster in India and earned her widespread critical praise. She went on to win the Commonwealth Prize for literature that year. This book has been so well received that seven translations exist. "a first quality realistic book about a daughter's reconstruction of her personal history, hinging on her mother's tale," is how author Mukul Kesavan describes her work *Difficult Daughters*. (Suman and Chandra, 1999, p. The Independent praised Kapur's second book, *A Married Woman* (2002), saying, "Kapur negotiates diverse concerns growing out of socio-political turmoil in her. The Sunday Times praised her third album, *Home* (2006), for its "glistening with detail and emotional acuity." Without delving into political or religious themes, it examines the nuanced landscape of the Indian family with warmth and wisdom. Her most recent work, 2009's *The Immigrant*, made the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature shortlist. This struggle between progress and tradition, in Kapur's view, lies at the heart of much that is wrong with the world today. Thus, her works reflect the evolving image of women, which has shifted from stoic, self-sacrificing figures to strong, independent women who use their voices to make society listen to their concerns and achieve their goals. Her ability to express herself in English, the language of the global community, propelled her to new heights. In Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) Virmati is Kapur's difficult daughter for her mother Kasturi, but when she herself becomes a mother, her daughter Ida says: "my mother tightened her reins on me as I grew up". The novel charts Virmati's quest for individualism and selfhood. She too like Ammu in *The God of Small Things* is a

master of her body. She has no qualms of being initiated into sex before her marriage to Professor Harish. She is caught in violent duality when she marries Harish and becomes his second wife. However she refuses to be a victim and transforms the marginal experience into a creative force and potent energy

In her second novel *A Married Woman* (2002) the nucleus of the story is Astha, a married woman who struggles to keep her identity intact while seeking equal opportunities within and without the familial threshold. The novel is about her incompatible marriage and the resultant frustrations. However she attempts to reclaim her body and re-inscribes it with more meaningful love in her lesbian relationship with Pipeelika, which arises less out of active choice than in the wake of a failed relationship. For a moment the text attempts to destabilize the dominant heterosexual Indian culture. At the end of the novel however the subversive potential is mitigated when the heroine returns to her husband and marriage

- ix. **Kiran Desai** was born in India in 1971; she lived in Delhi until she was 14, and then spent a year in England, before her family moved to the USA. She completed her schooling in Massachusetts before attending Bennington College; Hollins University and Columbia University, where she studied creative writing, taking two years off to write *Happenings in the Guava Orchard* (1998). She first came to literary attention in 1997 when she was published in the *New Yorker* and in *Mirror work*, an anthology of 50 years of Indian writing edited by Salman Rushdie - *Strange Happenings in the Guava Orchard* was the closing piece. In 1998, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, which had taken four years to write, was published to good reviews.
- x. *The Inheritance of Loss* received the Booker Prize in 2006, eight years after it was first published. She says that while the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss* are based on her own life experiences, she was inspired to write the book because of the experiences of her grandparents and herself as they traveled between the East and the West. It's hardly a coincidence that I've ended up with this lifestyle. It was given to me as a gift. She writes on the anguish of migration and life split between two countries in *The Inheritance of Loss*. In particular, her work on *Make it In America* manages to evoke genuine emotion in its readers. As Dr. Shubha Mukherjee points out...Kiran Desai lives up to his role as an intellectual writer and keen observer of human nature by covering newsworthy, exciting topics.(Shubha:1976:18)
- xi. Shobhaa De is in a prestigious position. She made significant contributions to South Asian literature as both a writer and a pundit. Shobhaa Rajadhyaksha was born on January 7, 1947. She was nurtured in Maharashtra by a Brahmin family of the Saraswat sect. Shobha attended Queen Mary School, Mumbai, for her primary and secondary schooling. She then attended St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, to get a degree in psychology. She tried her hand at modeling initially and was successful enough to follow that path. She began working as a journalist in 1970. Shobha's editing services were supplied to high-profile publications including *Stardust* and *Celebrity & Society*. She was lauded for her "Politically Incorrect" column in *The Times of India*.

She makes observations on the workings of society, the economy, and even politics in her writings.

De has been called the "Jackie Collins of India" because to the prevalence of socialites and sexual encounters in her novels. *Socialite Evenings* was De's first book, and it was out in 1989. The story delves into the inner workings of Indian society's upper crust. In reality, there is a touch of autobiography in the novel. The decline of morals, culture, and society is brought into sharp relief. The protagonists paint the socialites as amoral, depraved types who have sold their souls for wealth and fame. Despite its difficult subject matter, the book was a financial and critical success. After years of writing, De became one of India's most popular authors. Over the course of a year, more than 17 of her books were on the New York Times best-seller list. Numerous translations of her writings exist.

Shobha De is regarded for revitalizing and elevating women's literature because she dared to write what she really believed. *Starry Nights*, her second book, supposedly draws inspiration from two real-life celebrity couples in Bollywood. The book delves into the inner workings of India's entertainment business. Another immediate classic that cemented Shobha's reputation as a master storyteller. In her other book, *Spouse - The Truth About Marriage*, she examines marriage in modern Western culture. On the first day of its formal release, more than 20,000 copies were sold.

- xii. Jhumpa Lahiri was born to Bengali parents on July 11, 1967, in London, England. She won the Pulitzer Prize for her first novel, *Interpreter of Maladies*, which was released in 1999. *The Namesake*, her first book, was released in 2003, and her short story collection *Unaccustomed Earth* debuted at the top of The New York Times bestseller list in 2005. The political circumstances of the time influenced her 2013 book, *The Lowland*. Mostly focusing on non-resident Indian (NRI) individuals, immigrant challenges, and problems, Lahiri's work has garnered worldwide attention. Her work is simple and symbolic, focused on the intricacies and hidden tragedies of everyday life, and it strikes the spirit.

### **Conclusion**

All of the women authors discussed above, from the most urban to the most remote, have one thing in common: they care deeply about the issues facing women today. This examination of women writers in Indian Writing in English supports this notion. Over the last four decades, there has been a shift in the representation of women in literature. Women authors nowadays are less likely to have strong, selfless female protagonists and more likely to include complex female characters who are exploring their own identities rather than being defined only by their roles as victims. Novels written by women after the 1980s include strong female protagonists who reject traditional gender roles like marriage and parenting.

Indian literature's cultural and linguistic patterns have been influenced by the ways in which female authors have interpreted universal female experience. Indian women authors who wrote in English have shed new insight on the status of women in society via their work. Indian women fiction authors are capable of delivering feminist themes in an



Indian fashion, and this is something that Indian leaders want to see in the works they read by Indian women writers. The contributions of Indian women authors to rewriting the history of India and raising public awareness of women's needs and interests are substantial.

They have made important contributions to raising awareness among contemporary women all around the globe, touching on a wide range of topics in the process. They deserve praise for the thoughtfulness of their subject matter choices in light of India's cultural context. They have openly discussed topics that would normally be forbidden due to societal constraints. For Indian women, the roles played by Indian women authors are exemplary demonstrations of dignity, propriety, discipline, and commitment.

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