

**PSYCHO-SOCIO-CULTURAL MATRIX OF WOMEN'S WORLD IN THE
SELECTED INDIAN WOMEN WRITINGS**Dr. Jayshree Singh^{1*}, Ms. Kamla Mali²^{1*}(Lecturer in Selection Grade, HOD English, Bhupal Nobles P.G.College, Udaipur)²(Research Scholar, U.C.S.S.H., MLSU, Udaipur)

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ABSTRACT

Indian women writers have significant contribution in Indian English Writings. Indian literary scene has witnessed a tremendous change as far as women writers' role. Women writings are concerned with the status of women in India. The ups and downs in these writers' life have emphasized much upon the socio-cultural and psychological aspects. Women's literature in Indian English Studies presents many women characters as role models or as silenced voices. This research paper takes into account the Indian women writers' perspective of women's world. For the study the following works have been selected - the novel *Cry, the Peacock* which explores the sociological state of the protagonist, Maya. She reflects internal conflicting realities of her psyche in de-motivational or subversive terms. The novel is concerned with a modern new woman's rejection of her priorities and subsequently her failure on account of her meaninglessness in her thoughts, choices and deeds. The novel *The God of Small Things* portrays the politics of caste/gender and its effects on the marginalized, deprived woman in context of informalization and feminization of labour, her body and her 'Self'. Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Harvest* delves deep inside the pains, anguish of the poverty-stricken family that falls victim to the commoditization of the Third World body; while it also visualizes the futuristic approach of woman to counter the machines that may likely to govern human body in modern times. The *Selected Poems* of Kamala Das represent the wishes, aspirations, individuality, ambiguity and frustration. She is concerned with the women's status in the men's world. This research paper will attempt to find insights into the subjective experiences expressed in the writings, and same will be investigated as a source of self-discovery of these authors and their creative urge to find their space in public sphere. Other aspects such as - woman's subjugated past, their voice breaking the silence, resisting the patriarchy and finding a female tradition and their imagined stereo- typed image will also be discussed.

Keywords: *Indian English Literary Studies, Women Writers, Gender-autonomy, Discriminatory doctrines*

Article Info:

Article Received 20/3/2015

Revised on: 20/4/2015

Accepted on: 22/5/2015



INTRODUCTION

Indian English Literary Studies and Indian Literature in Translation play a vital role to create a new awareness amongst the masses about the position of women. Indian women have had an extremely difficult time to develop under the oppression of a gender-biased society, class and religion since the Post-Vedic times. Traditional beliefs have caused skeptical notions concerning the issues of gender autonomy - whether a woman should work outside the home or she should be educated. These subsequently have also added in their suppression due to patriarchal and hierarchical discriminatory doctrines. Dattar in this context theorizes, "It is the women's community that can enable each woman to claim with authority the unique identity and freedom that has been denied to her by the patriarchal community."¹ Women have long been fighting for equal rights in every sphere of society. They have consistently been oppressed in nearly all aspects of life. But slowly the modernization of India after the independence has changed the trend and this change is the primary need.

The present research paper is an attempt to examine the inner conflicts of women through the writings of selected Indian English women writers. A number of women writers have arrived on the literary scene and have exhibited a new hope to open the door for the women to stand for their rights and to acquire equal position in society. Slowly and gradually these writers have occupied the rightful place in public sphere. It is aptly quoted by Chaman Nahal in concern of Indian women who have made place in men's academic world. "Both the awareness of woman's position in society as one of disadvantage or in generality compared with that of man and also a desire to remove those is advantages."² The majority of works written by Indian women writers depict the psychological sufferings of the frustrated homemakers. Their subject matter is often considered superficial compared to the depiction of the replaced and oppressed lives of women.

ANITA DESAI'S *CRY, THE PEACOCK*

Anita Desai was born in 1937 and has a multi-cultural origin of a German mother and a Bengali father. She is one of the prominent Indo-Anglian novelists of her generation in English. Among Indian women writers, she is an acclaimed author. The exploitation and suppression of women has been the subject of her writings. She has a deep insight in the psychological and social problems of modern life. Her novels introspect and analyze the psychological self of women that finds its own ways of motivation which may be in actual sense are their disillusionment for example - Maya, the protagonist is described by the author with the help of various symbols and images or with certain situations. The novel, '*Cry, the Peacock*' shows the state of vacuum in the life of Maya in an artistic manner. The author reveals the difficult human condition, focusing on conflict between the individuals. Both the characters Gautama and Maya face the overwhelming and seemingly incomprehensible power of family and society. Most of the authors beautifully mould her autobiographical thoughts to show the hollowness and meaninglessness in their life. Here in context of Maya's disillusioned life it would be appropriate to quote Dr. N. Raj Gopal - "The inner most psyche of her protagonists is revealed to us through their interaction with those who are emotionally related to them on the basis of kinship. For the purposes of fiction, no human relationship is more fertile and potential than that in the family and especially among the kins". He goes on to comment that "the emotional crises among kins are born of the realization that the kins fall short of the ideal in such relationship."³

The heroine, Maya enjoyed life which provided her love and pleasure along with discipline in her father's house. She is a pampered child, surrounded with all comforts and marks of affluence. As a young girl, living under the protected roof of her father's house at Lucknow, she has the affectionate and kindly care of her father who is over indulgent towards her. She feels like a princess living in a fairy-land. She has been brought up as a princess. She says, "As a child, I enjoyed, princess-like, a sumptuous fare of the fantasies of the Arabian



Nights, the glories and bravado of Indian Mythology long and astounding tales of princes - and regal queens, jackals and tigers, and being my father's daughter, of the lovely English and Irish fairy tales as well, that were read out to me by him"⁴ (CTP 41). Moreover, she is motherless and suffers from deprivation of the maternal love. In this type of atmosphere, the growth of her personality is not normal and she suffers from the cause of egocentricity and possessiveness. She remains deprived of the sort of training she should have received to meet the challenges of life where pain and pleasure co-exist. She is unable to face the realities of life after marriage. She is a motherless child but her father showers all his love on her.

The childhood memories of Maya are happy, soothing and most cherished. She keenly aspires to re-live the same world as she lived in her paternal home. Besides her world of illusion, she promises and shares everything with her husband, Gautama and longs for love and affection to be shared with him. She always desires for mental support and moral courage from him. She describes fancifully to him about her new world of which she is the queen. She compares her life in her husband's house with that which she had in her father's house. She thinks of her married life with Gautama as a deadly struggle in which one is destined to kill the other. She is deeply stricken with the sense of loneliness and insecurity. She feels greatly distressed:

"God, now I was caught in the net of inescapable, and where lay the possibility of mercy, of release? This net was no hallucination, no..... Am I gone insane? Father! Husband! Who is my savior? I am in need of one. I am dying, and I am in love with living. I am in love, and I am dying. God let me sleep, forget, rest. But, no, I'll never sleep again. There is no rest any more-only death and waiting" (CTP 84).

In the novel, Desai creates an image of a suffering woman preoccupied with her inner world, her sulking frustration, and the storm within the existential choice and subsequent predicament of a woman in a male - dominated society. Gautama treats Maya as a child and resents it. Once both of

them were walking together and Maya talked of the flower, Gautama plucked it and gave it to Maya saying, "Who should deny you that ?" he said, and smiled at me as to a winsome child." (CTP 102) Then in the debate, Maya said, "And you will think me a tiresome child for it, for showing what you once called my 'third-rate poetess's mind" Maya realizes that she is not as helpless and dependent as a child. She is as much competent as man. Through her characters, Desai manifests women's desire for a better way of living.

ARUNDHATI ROY'S NOVEL *The God of Small Things*

Arundhati Roy was born on Nov 24, 1961 and brought up in Kerala. She is one of the foremost novelists showing exceptional awareness of the social crises and sensitivity to the problems like casteism and gender and its effect. In the novel '*The God of Small Things*', Roy has come out strongly on several contemporary socio - political issues. The novel won the Booker prize in 1977. She uses a compressed language and a thrifty style to foreground the essential predicament of the socially oppressed. The quality of her narrative art is extra ordinary. In chapter one the Kottayam Police Inspector Thomas Mathew addresses Ammu, with his lecherous gaze and expresses his authority while making her wince. Here is the brief and clear truth of his indifferent behavior:

"He started at Ammu's breasts as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that the Kottayam Police didn't take statements from Veshyas or their illegitimate children.... 'If I were you,' he said, 'I'd go home quietly'. Then he tapped her breasts with his baton Tap, tap....."⁵ (GOST 8)

There could be nothing more humiliating than to be called Veshyas (Prostitute) for a respectable woman. Ammu's married life illustrates the maltreatment of wives by their husbands. It shows the extent to which a woman can be bullied in a male dominated society. Ammu, only suffers because she is a female, she comes from a Brahmin family. But her marginal position conversely disables her to realise that caste is a way devised by the



power to exploit and dominate the working masses; subsequently the author through Ammu sharpens consciousness about the true nature of the social institutions and their oppressiveness. This takes Ammu closer to the untouchable Velutha; she loves him and involves in illicit sexual relationship with him. This indeed releases her from the limits and makes her a woman of strong will- power, who on breaking societal - norms enables herself to make impossible possible. She is pictured as: "What was it that gave Ammu this Unsafe Edge? This air of unpredictability? It was what she had battled inside her. There was an unmixable mix of the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber. It was this that grew inside her, and eventually led her to love by the night the man her children loved by day" (GOST 44)

The conditions of the socially deprived woman or a neglected woman like Ammu even as Touchable have occupied the minds of Indian English Writers and they have exposed the same through their remarkable works. To escape the inhuman humiliations, Ammu attempts to seek refuge in her love and intimacy with untouchable, Velutha. She causes uproar in the caste- ridden society as a Brahmin woman being in relation with an untouchable. Ammu got alienated from her kith and kins on account of her ill-thought idea of illegitimate sexual intimacy. Eventually her efforts crossed limits of socially accepted attributes. The novelist autobiographically postulates her feminine perspective not only in context of male gaze towards females, but also analyses the sexuality as a device to release emotions of love, suppression and escape. Arundhati's feminist outlook is delineated in her protagonist who represents resilience as well as resentment against the prevailing norms. Arundhati Roy's mother shares her experience as: "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-principal Sneha Zaharias resorting to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a text for the little fourth grade."

MANJULA PADMANABHAN'S PLAY *Harvest*

Manjula Padmanabhan's play '*Harvest*' is a futuristic play which is acclaimed for its theme of the purchase and sale of human organs. It is described on the cover of magazine *BLURB* as "... a dark, bitter, savagely funny vision of the cannibalistic future that awaits the human race..... a parable of what will happen when the rich denizens of the First World... Begin to devour bits and pieces of Third World poor....."⁶

The author aims at presenting the realistic problems and emerges as a sensitive writer who portrays the romantic and fanciful notions in the play. She exposes the indifference towards the sufferings of women through the ugly picture of the society. The play brings out the sensitive attitude of women towards the emerging issues that the subalterns have been going through since the advancement of technology in organ transplantation. The play deals with the four members in a family - Om Prakash is the tense and jobless clerk. Jaya, his wife is leading the tensed life of deprivation and insecurity. His old mother is frustrated and an ill-natured woman. Amongst all these characters, Jaya is the only one who attempts to evaluate the predicament of inhuman situation. She realizes that she has lost every member of her family (Om Prakash, her husband, Ma, her mother-in-law and Jeetu, her brother-in-law) due to the power-play of the materialistic post-modern world. It is only she who realizes the seriousness of Om's decision of organ selling. She tries her best to make him realize that his decision is not right. She also tries to make Ma understand who sees the benefit only. But everything fails and she expresses her grief in heart rendering manner. The sufferings of Jaya are not given any heed by her husband. Om neither pays any concerns for his wife Jaya nor changes his decision for her. His very nature and temperament show the status of women in their own families and society. The words and desires of wives have no value for their man. It shows that a woman's concern and voice does not hold acceptability in man's thoughts.

Harvest beautifully symbolizes the relationship between the first and third world - the third world provides the raw material that the first



world consumes for its own survival and expansion. Jaya decides to protest and says that if she is pushed against her will, she will kill herself, as she has nothing to lose. It is evident that she cannot resist the First World Power structure through nothing except death. She says, "I have discovered a new definition for winning, winning by losing. I win if you lose" (Harvest 100). Ma and Jaya are seen waiting for Om in the opening of the play, who is about to come after job-hunting. Apart from the usual retorting and differences between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, reader notes their concern for his getting job. Though the ever-growing use of electronic devices like computer has turned him jobless, his sixty-year-old mother seems to be addicted to another electronic domestic device-television. She appears to be less concerned about her son and daughter-in-law. It seems that she believes to escape her troubles and sense of suffocation more in the celluloid world than the real world. The mother-in-law finds herself insufficient to feed four members in the family at meager sources of income. The mother-in-law retorts her daughter-in-law Jaya when the latter asks to leave her alone. Instead Jaya has the guts to bear the pains of not only belonging to subaltern world, but also living with no source of healthy livelihood. She seems to be always gathering courage out of herself to stand. She emphatically tries to convince her mother-in-law, how her neighbours though in same crisis is still not dependent on make-shift world of T.V, rather harmoniously existing to survive and trying to meet their ends. She says:

"MA. Alone, alone! Have you seen your neighbours? Ten in that room; twenty in other! And harmonious as a TV show! But you? An empty room would be too crowded for you. (Harvest 218)" Thus the inmates of Third World are trapped under the unrelenting gaze of the First World. In the battle between the machine and men, it's Jaya who wins the battle and decides to survive life with common sense. It also shows the futuristic picture of the modern times where the machines will replace and distance human beings gradually. The role of

Jaya in the novel specifically suggests that the power of man and self-control, both can win the adversity that is inflicted upon them by mechanized machine world of the Industrial notions.

The play warns through the character of Jaya, how one has to govern the machines instead of being governed. It poses a potent critique of the recently emerging trade in body – organs. It shows the first-world's exploitation of third-world bodies for the commodities of labour-power. Thus, the word 'Harvest' itself suggests the production of food but in the play it gives an ironic meaning as the organs are used as food produced by the human body. The modern world is progressing faster in every field but this progress has led to the loss of basic values and morals. The importance of women is lost and money has become more important for men.

KAMALA DAS'S *The Selected Poems*

Suraiya or Kamala Das was born on 31st March 1934. She is the most outspoken and outstanding writer of the present generation, who has given birth to a host of women characters of unique distinction. The women characters in her works are all modern, sophisticated, independent, unconventional, and protesting individuals. She even goes to the extent of justifying free sex. Pre-marital and extra-marital sex is an all-pervading theme in her short stories and poems. She is a young and bold poet. The publications of her poem have given a different shape to Indian writings. Women writers for the first time began to realize the crucial need to reveal the deep felt emotions and secrecies without reluctance as was expressed in the works of Kamala Das. She wrote despite the constant male domination she experienced after her early marriage at fifteen. She desired for freedom and her wish to free herself from the dull routine of domesticity. About the women writers and their writings Essayist J.S.Miller comments:

"If woman lived in a different country from the men and never had read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own and a different image about themselves, for who can understand a woman better than herself."⁷



Kamala Das articulated the despair and longing of fellow women through her writings. She protested against the oppression of the female class and wants to emancipate woman from the stereotypes of her colonized status. The poetic works of Kamala Das has engaged considerable critical attention and sustained accurate explication. The subject of Kamala's work comprises of "woman" and the revelation of female experiences- be it trauma of an unhappy marriage or unwilling surrender in sex or disgust at the gender- equity disabling dimensions. Quest for love is certainly the perennial theme of Kamala's poetry. The poet studies love from many angles, and her treatment of the theme is characterized by increasing depth and intensity⁸ in a male dominated world, it depends on a woman to satisfy the male ego by admiring his male power and showing her own feminine weakness. Her soft and lovely feminine self serves the duties to excite his passion and to gratify his vanity as a superior male. Her feminine self also learn to get a man to satisfy her lust:

Getting a man to love you is easy
Only be honest about your wants as
Woman Stand nude before the glass with him
So that he sees himself the stronger one
And believes it so, and you so much more
Softer, younger, lovelier Gift him all.
(*The Looking Glass*)

Kamala Das strongly complains that nobody is serious for the wishes, aspirations, individuality and even the frustrations of women. They are all prisoners of the male ego, selfishness and greed. In the poem, '*The Dance of Eunuchs*', there is the feeling of frustration in love. So as eunuchs are in capable of performing the sexual act and of producing a child. Likewise the poet also had failed to satisfy her emotional demands. Even nature sympathizes with these poor erections. It conveys the poetess's sense of the futility of her sexual experiences:

The sky crackled then, thunder came, and lightening
And rain, a meager rain that smelt of dust in
Attics and the urine of lizards and mice.
(*The Dance of Eunuchs*)

She finds herself trapped and suffocated in such pitiable circumstances. In the society women are often targeted and exploited. Their household labour is not considered noteworthy. They are deprived of primary facilities of health and educations. She revolts against male domination and the consequent dwarfing of the female:

You called me wife I was taught to break
saccharine into your tea and
To offer at the right movement the vitamins
Cowering Beneath your monstrous ego I ate
the magic loaf and
Became a dwarf. I lost my will and reasons,
to all your
Questions I mumbled incoherent replies.
(*The Old Playhouse*)

She has been labeled as a confessional poet and has a largely autobiographical content. Her poetry is confessional because she has revealed what strikes the readers as the secrets of her life, thoughts and feelings. She thus takes the readers into her confidence. In her personal life, she always faced frustration but her poetry proved to be the medium for the outlet of her feeling of frustration and for the purgation of her feelings. The validity of her experience lies in the validity of her expression. She writes addressing her husband:

.....you let me use my youth like coins
Into various hands, you let me mate with
shadows,
You let me sing in empty shrines, you let
your wife
Seek ecstasy in others' arms.
(*A Man is a Season*)

The love theme in her poetry is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. She realizes love as the mechanical act of bodily union and says in the poem:

As the convict studies
His prison's geography
I study the trappings
Of your body, dear love,
For I must someday find
An escape from its snare.
(*The Prisoner*)



In conclusion all the above mentioned selected Indian women writers in their respective writings enter deep into the inner mind of the women. They bring in open the issues faced by women in a male - dominated society governed by rigid traditions and restrictions. However, the success of women writings is highly acclaimed and they have won national and international recognitions breaking the glass ceilings of gender, race and religion. Through the revelation of imbalances in women writings, these Indian women writers have added a new dimension to evaluate their disabling autonomy, discriminatory deprivation and society's disenchantment towards women's integrity.

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