

Women status and consciousness in selected works of Arundhati Roy

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the role & status of Indian women authors before and after independence. The period of world war –II and Independence of India was a period of reconstruction, regeneration and rehabilitation. The women status and consciousness in the works of women authors were also taken up as an important theme in the Indian English writing .A new dimension to the Indian English writing was added as the psycho- analytical study of human beings, witnessed a shift from the public interest to the inner intricacies of individuals. This study shows the representation of women in literature by female authors namely Arundhati Roy, as a comparison and to answer the question of whether or not female authors can automatically be defined as feminist. Indian Women writing in English is recognized as one of the major contemporary currents in English language- Literature. Finally it takes a look on success of Indian Women both in social and personal perceptive of their lives.

INTRODUCTION

Female writers have gifted us some of the greatest novels, poems, essays, and short stories written in English literature. The period following the World War II and the independence of India was a phase of reconstruction, regeneration, and rehabilitation in which the individual along with the society became the focal point of the younger generation of writers like ‘Bhabani Bhattacharya’, ‘Anita Desai’, ‘Kamala Markandaya’, ‘Arundhati Roy’, and others. Now the personal concern of individuals including women were also taken up as a significant theme of the Indian English novel. The psychological analytical study of human beings added a new dimension to the Indian English novel, thus witnessing a shift from the social interest to the inner intricacies of individuals roaming in the crowd. Moreover, the upsurge of women novelists writing in English in India brought the woman at the centre leaving the man or the periphery. Many of the women novelists have focused their attention on feminine issues and have recorded their experience as the individuals of the same gender, hence making woman the center point of the Indian English novel bringing man on the outer edge.

Though earlier novelists too have dealt with issues pertaining to women yet they were not so open and vociferous in their expressions. Woman’s voice against injustice and inequality has formed the genesis of feminism. A different image of woman concerned with the more fundamental issues of women pertaining to moral, social, economic, emotional, and spiritual issues had been projected lending her the status of the new woman. The women writers redefined the concepts of marriage and sex securing an equal position for her. Frankness and aggressiveness are her obvious tools. Her treatment of the new women characters in writings of female writers obviously belonging to high status, their problems, predicament values and life style is superb. One label that is easily endorsed to women’s work is that they ‘only speak about women’ and are often observed as ‘feminist’ and hence distracting the conventional family structure and peace at home. The most deplorable women writers are those who interrogate social phenomenon. The Column of community-Marriage, Motherhood, control of sexuality and customs must be conserved for the interests of maintaining the culture.

There are women who are traditionalists as well as protesters who take subversive stands. For these writers the term ‘woman’ hardly represents a common personality. They precisely expose the strength and weaknesses of women, and they believe in their own freedom as creative writers. These writers repeatedly try to signify a larger context in which women’s rights and gender issues most often prevail as their seething concerns. Woman’s victimhood and her objectification as well as her move to subject hood where she demands freedom, mobility, individuality and enjoyment are part of the oeuvre of most of these writers.

The prominent feminist novelists in the breed are Anita Desai, Shashi, Deshpande, Shobha De, Kamala Markandaya and Arundhati Roy. They inhabit a significant position in Indo-English fiction. Their writings reproduce a variety of

shades, colours and visions. The declaration of identity in their writings deserves a better treatment at the hands of their male counterpart. They protested against the cruelty perpetrated on the women by exposing their responses and reactions. The spirit of revolution against mechanical life, mismatched marriages and wayward ways of their life partners was obvious in their writings. The central character of their novels are women of a typical Indian society. The intrigue of their story is knitted around the women who negotiate the harassment of a masculine society. The modern novels of middle 80s paid attention to the depressed plight of the contemporary middle-class, urban Indian woman. They tried to rebuild Indian womanhood, which has been regarded as an ideally warm, gentle and docile and the view that women be worthy only to be kept in subservience to the male members of the family. Many of the Indian women novelists emphasize on women's issues; they have a women's viewpoint on the world. The prominent woman writer like Arundhati Roy has distinguished herself for her boldness in presenting the status of woman in Indian society and for depicting in Women status and consciousness fictional form.

WOMEN CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WORKS OF ARUNDHATI ROY

Many critics believe that because men and women have different life experiences, the writing of male and female authors will differ, as well. Some believe that male authors are not able to write accurately from the female perspective or present feminist ideals because they have not experienced life as women.

Arundhati Roy born in Shillong, on 24 November 1961, spent her childhood in Aymanam in Kerala and went to school at Kottayam, later shifted to Tamil Nadu. She then studied architecture at the School of Planning and Architecture. Delhi is where she met her first husband, Gerard da Cunha. She married twice in her life. She met her second husband, filmmaker Pradip Krishan, in 1984 and worked in his award winning movie 'Massey Sahib' in which she played the role of a village girl. She experienced various jobs, including aerobics teacher in New Delhi, until the success of her novel 'The God of Small things' which made her secure financially.

The book is semi-autobiographical which includes her many childhood experiences & memories in Aymanam. The publication of the 'The God of small things' raised Roy to immediate international fame. It received the Booker Prize for fiction. It had become one of the five best books of 1997 by TIME. Set in Kerala, India, during the late 1960's when communism rattled the age-old caste system, the story begins with the funeral of young Sophie Mol, the cousin of the novel's protagonists Rahel and her fraternal twin brother, Estha. In a suspenseful narrative, Roy reveals the family tensions that led to the twins' behavior on the fateful night that Sophie drowned. Beneath the drama of a family tragedy lies a background of local politics.

Roy counters that her writing is intentional in its passionate hysterical tone "I am hysterical. I'm screaming from the bloody rooftops. And he & his smug little club are going. Shhh..... you'll wake the neighbours". I want to wake the neighbours, that's my whole point. I want everybody to open their eyes." (From Wikipedia).

As Max Velmans and Susan Schneider wrote in the Blackwell companion to consciousness:-- "Anything that we are aware of at a given moment forms part of our consciousness, making conscious experience aspect of our lives."

As according to Sheila Rowbotham's book, woman's consciousness, Man's world, excerpted here, was published in 1973 by politics inclusive of gender, class and race-and in that respect it was a revolutionary challenge to capitalist structures as well as to the left of the 1960's and early 1970's.

Education has always been an instrument of enlightenment. It is true that during the Sultanate and the Mughal period, the female literate Hindu women group was reduced to a microscopic minority. The worst affected were daughters of the Rajputs, Nairs and Jamindar families. Jain nuns were also affected by this wave of illiteracy. But valor and courage were never solely male bastions. Numerous Rajput queens exhibited exemplary leadership. This tradition continued up to the time of Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi in the 18th Century. Rajia Sultana and Chand Bibi also fought bravely and managed their kingdoms. Sher Shah Suri received his primary education from his learned mother. Women's education as well as their status touched its lowest ebb by 1857.

This was the period when only courtesans could read and write. During the early 19th Century, (the Indian Renaissance period) many social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwarchand Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda raised the issue of women's education. Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded Brahma Samaj in 1828 and the work was carried out by Rabindranath Tagore and Kesubchandra Sen. In 1867 Kesub Chandra Sen founded Prarthana Samaj in Bombay. Justice M.G. Ranadey, Sir K.G. Bhandarkar and others became its members. Justice Ranadey was one of the founders of Widow Remarriage Association. Dayanand Saraswati founded AryaSamaj in 1875. His movement became popular in Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

The goals and activities of organized women are completely attended by politics. Politics is a potent tool to alter the status of women. The issues of education, social reforms and women's rights appeal to only a section of the society. Any movement requires mass support from all classes, communities and ideological groups. At the time of freedom

struggle, the national leaders deliberately cultivated linkages with rural women as well as women's organizations. These linkages harnessed and demonstrated mass support for the cause of freedom. Women were amazed to find approval for political participation from men. This changed women's perception regarding themselves. The society also recognized their potential in contributing to overall national development. Participation of women in the national movement shaped the mission of women in this country to a great extent. Their participation legitimized their claim in sharing the responsibility of governance of India.

Arundhati Roy is an interesting example for a number of reasons. While she was hailed in the West as the coming of the global author, she's been far more controversial back in India. As a handful of Indian writers have become worldwide celebrities, there has been a backlash in India. Roy is dubbed insufficiently Indian and, in many cases, barred from college curriculums. Look at Orhan Pamuk. He's been writing these wonderful novels of Istanbul, but because he's been perceived as very pro-Western, and has written things that are critical of Turkish Islamic fundamentalism, and has achieved such incredible success in the Western world, she's practically an outcast in some segments of his own country. It makes you wonder if the novel will ever be able to successfully decouple itself from questions of national identity. There was a greater focus on the strangeness of human behavior and all sorts of different cultures. I think in some ways the novels we associate with globalization have a lot more in common with them than with the great novels of the nation that we began to see in the 18th century and that came to define the form's highest achievement.

CONCLUSION

Indian women writers, particularly in the post-Independence era, who seek to project and interpret experience from the point of feminine consciousness and sensibility. Writers like Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, , who through their female protagonists engage in self-analysis wherein they find themselves subjugated and marginalized. It is hoped that this paper will open new vistas for further studies and would be of great help to academicians, students and scholars. Since the textual representation is always linked with the particular social status and personal context, one of the main thrusts of the study has been on how writing interacts with the specific personal context. This study reveals the invariable link gender has with class, culture, and other forces of society on women.

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