



Contribution of Women in Indian English Literature

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of East India Company led to the spread of English language in the early 1600s in India. The British decided to educate and civilize the Indian population for their benefit. The promotion of printing press helped them to publish Indian and English literature. Thomas Babington Macaulay introduced English education in India through his famous minute of February 1835. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule are prominent figures who supported women's education in India. They started the first-ever school for girls in India in 1848 at Bhide wada, Pune. Savitribai is well known as India's first woman teacher. Her contribution helped women to get proper education, financial independence, and led to the economic growth of the country. It also helped in the expansion of Indian English literature in India. Several women writers have played an excellent role in the field of writing English literature.

The present research paper analyzes and interprets the contribution of women in Indian English literature. It is an analysis of some women authors and the contribution of their works to the development of English literature in India.

Keywords: Literature, history of IEL, contribution of women in IEL, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

to The concept of word literature is continuously changing over the period. 'Literature' is a piece of work that changes readers' perception towards life. Sometimes it instructs, surprises, entertains, and helps the reader to enter in the world of fantasy. It is authors' responsibility to follow a particular literary style and achieve the highest aim of writing. But any piece of writing cannot be considered as a part of literature. Every literary work such as poetry, drama, novel, short story, bildungsroman, novella, etc. should have lasting importance then only it can be included in the canon of literature. M. H. Abrahams defines literature as:

“Literature has been commonly used since the eighteenth century, equivalently with the French belle letters (beautiful writing), to designate fictional and imaginative writings-poetry, prose, fiction, and drama.” (Abrahams, 2014: 199)

The above-mentioned definition suggests that literature should have aesthetic value. In ancient times literature was orally transmitted from one generation to the other. The invention of printing press became an important reason behind the widespread of new learning and imitation and adaptation of literature all over the world. In

present time, literature is an umbrella term that includes poems, short stories, biographies, autobiographies, novellas, novels, drama, etc. Today each country has its wealth of oral or written literature such as Indian, American, French, African, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese literature.

II. THE HISTORY OF INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

The history of Indian English literature starts with a travel narrative *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) written by Sake Dean Mahomed. *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) is the first Indian novel written in English by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. Other prominent figures of IEL are Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, and Rabindranath Tagore followed by Sri Aurobindo. Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan are the pillars of Indian English literature. The contribution of these Indo-Anglian writers increased the popularity of Indian English literature during the 1930s. Along with these male writers, women novelists, short story writers and poetess have continued the rich Indian tradition of folklore, fables, storytelling, mythology, religion, culture, tradition, and much more. Women writers led the proper foundation of IEL with their distinguished personalities, portrayal of female subjectivity, and depiction of their own identity. Their continuous effort brings IEL to its current position. This change does not occur in one day but it is a slow process that developed over a period of time. Women writers throw light on the themes of nationalism, patriotism, domestic violence, feminism, revolt against British rule, a quest for identity, etc.

Traditionally women writers were bound to write about the fixed domestic area but 19th and 20th-century women writers gave a new dimension to IEL. In the 19th century, women writers actively participated in India's freedom struggle against British rule. In the 20th century, women's writing strongly supported the new wave of modernism, postmodernism, and feminism. In the present time, women writers of IEL have achieved phenomenal success through their powerful intellectual writings. Writers like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das, Kamala Markandeya, Nayantara Sehgal, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Sudha Murthy, Jahnvi Barua, Anju Makhija, Mahashewata Devi, Sujata Bhatt, Smita Agrawal, Nalini Priyadarshni, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Anuradha Bhattacharyya, Meena Alexander are the prominent figures of IEL. Some of these women writers' contribution to IEL is discussed thoroughly in the present research paper.

III. CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Toru Dutt (1856-1877) was an Indian Bengali poet and translator from colonized India. She is one of the prominent figures of Anglo-Indian literature along with Henry Derozio, Sarojini Naidu, and Manmohan Ghose. Most of her works are written in English and French. Toru Dutt is the first Indian woman novelist who is well known for her unfinished English novel *Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878). Her well-known poetry collection is *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876). It includes 165 poems and translations from about 70 French poets. She wrote *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) that include translations and adaptations from Sanskrit literature. Her poems like *Sita and Lakshman* are based on the theme of the Ramayana. Her poems are based on the theme of patriotism, loneliness, aspiration, and regret.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), 'the Nightingale of India' is another prominent figure of IEL. She is Bengali who lived in Hyderabad. Her birthday, 13th February is celebrated as National Women's Day in India. She is well-known as an Indian activist, political leader, feminist, and poet. Her popular poems are *Bird Sanctuary*, *The Queen's Rival*, *Palanquin Bearers*, *Coromandel Fishers*, *The Pardah Nashin*, and *To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus*.

Arthur Symons praised her first anthology *The Golden Threshold* (1905). Sarojini Naidu's other famous poems are *The Bird of Time* (1912), *The Broken Wing* (1917), *The Sceptred Flute* (1943), *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961), and *The Indian Weavers* (1971). Her poems depict the themes of love, rustic life, moral values, patriotism, religion, etc.

Kamala Das (1934-2009) gain popularity as a leading Malayalam author and Indian English poet. She is famous for her autobiography, short stories, and poems. She was shortlisted for Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984. Kamala Das wrote poetry collections such as *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants* (1967), *The Old Playhouse*, and *Other Poems* (1973). She wrote a short story collection *Padmavati the Harlot and Other Stories* (1992) and a novel *Alphabet of Lust* (1977). Her poems describe romantic subjectivism, expression of feminine sensibility, male dominance, suppression of women, sufferings of women, etc. The central themes of her poetry are freedom, justice, gender politics, communal conflict, home, etc.

Meena Alexander (1951) is an Indian English author, born in Allahabad, in a Syrian Christian family from Kerala. Now she lives in New York. She is well known for lyric writing.

It focuses on the violent events that compel people to cross borders. She wrote poetry collections such as *House of a Thousand Doors* (1988), *Birthplace with Buried Stones* (2013), *Quickly Changing River* (2008), *Raw Silk* (2004), and *Illiterate Heart* (2002). Her well- received poems are *Muse*, *Cadenza*, *Central Park*, *Carousel*, and *Night Theatre*. She wrote two novels that are *Nampally Road* (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997). Her well-known essay collections are *Poetics of Dislocation* (2009) and *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial experience* (1996). Her critical writings include *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Mary Shelley* (1989) and *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979). Her writings deal with the themes of migration, subjectivity, partition, exile, identity crises, etc.

Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016) is an Indian English author, born in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She received many honorable awards such as Jnanpith Award in 1996, Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979, the Padmashree Award in 1986, the Magsaysay Award in 1997, and the Padma Vibhushan Award in 2006. She was nominated for Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012. Most of her works are adapted for films. She wrote an autobiography of the queen of Jhansi, *Jhansi Rani* (1956). Devi wrote two novels that are *Mother of 1084* (1974) and *Right to the Forest* (1979). Her short story collections are *Agnigarbha* (1978), *Murti* (1979), *Stanyadayani* (1980), and *Chotti Munda Ebong tar Tir* (1980). She portrayed the hardships of the tribal communities in the states like Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh through her writings. Her writings throw light on the themes of protest against oppression and injustice, protest for liberation, freedom of the downtrodden, etc.

Nayantara Segal (1927) is an Indian English writer born to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, sister of Jawaharlal Nehru. She won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1986 for her novel *Rich Like Us* (1985). Her other prolific novels are *Mistaken Identity* (1988), *A Time to Be Happy* (1963), *This Time of Morning* (1965), and *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969). She wrote two memoirs that are *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954) and *From Fear Set Free* (1963). Segal wrote a work based on the theme of India's freedom struggle that is *The Freedom Movement in India* (1970). Her writings throw light on the themes of politics, women's rights, self-realization, emancipation of women, justice, and opposition to women's exploitation.

Sudha Murthy is an Indian English writer born in 1951 in Shiggaon, Karnataka. She is an author, educator, actor, philanthropist, and chairperson of the Infosys Foundation. She is honored with the Padma Shri Award in 2006. She is the founder of many orphanages, played an important role in rural development, provided several facilities to Karnataka schools, and developed 'Murthy Classical Library of India' at Harvard University. She is best known for her works such as *Dollar Bahu*, *Runa*, *Gently Falls The Bakula*, *Mahashweta*, *Wise and*

Otherwise, *Three Thousand Stiches*, *House of Cards*, *The Serpant's Revenge*, etc. Most of her works are adapted for films. Her novels deal with the themes of feminism, relationships, moral values, self-realization, charity, love, humanity, etc.

Suzanna Arundhati Roy is an Indian English author, actor, and screenplay writer born in 1961 in Shillong, Meghalaya. She won Booker Prize for Fiction for her best-selling book *The God of Small Things* (1997). Her other well-known works are *We Are One: A Celebration of Tribal Peoples* and *My Seditious Heart*. The central themes of her writings are Indian history and politics, social discrimination, miseries of Indian women, caste discrimination, cultural tensions, etc.

Anita Desai is an Indian novelist who received a Sahitya Academi Award in 1978 for her immensely popular novel *Fire on the Mountain*. She also received the British Guardian Prize for *The Village by the Sea* and Padma Bhushan Award in 2014. Her best-known works are *Cry, The Peacock* (1963), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *The Village by the Sea* (1982), *In Custody* (1984), *Journey to Ithaca* (1995), *Fasting, Fasting* (1999), *The Zigzag Way* (2004), etc. the prominent themes of her writings are isolation, love, childhood, fantasy, tension, etc.

Women writers of India contributed to the development of IEL through their unique themes, revolutionary ideas, and path-breaking concepts. They worked hard for the uprising of the weaker section of society, welfare of the society and fought against the subjugation and suppression of women. Their ideas, thoughts, and works lead to self-confidence and self-realization. In this way, the present research paper presents a brief study of the contribution of women writers in IEL.

IV. REFERENCES

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