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## Emergence of New Women in the Selected Indo-Anglian Fiction

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A women's place in a man's world has always been assigned to her by man, and the roles by which she should live and guide her conduct in her various roles as daughter, wife and mother, determined for her by social norms, were based on male superiority. A woman in man's world often did not arrive at the level of intellectual maturity required to question these assigned roles and their value system. In rare cases where she acquired such maturity she could hardly make an impact on prevailing norms either because her questions never led to a viable alternate system or because hers was too lone a voice easier to be dismissed as deviant than listened to with any serious attention.

Men generally cherish the qualities of obedience, and self-sacrifice in a woman and these qualities are safely nurtured in the sense of passivity, compliancy and irrationality which women accept as part of their powerlessness. So too are qualities like piety, lack of materiality and other worldliness generally attributed to women. By the same logic, women are to avoid aggressiveness, self-assertion and competition since these are the most inconvenient attitudes to have under a state of subordination. There are no room for allowing any importance to women's possible intellectual abilities. Therefore, this article is an attempt to explore women's infinite struggle to shake the patriarchal foundation to get identity of their own in select fiction of Indian English novelists.

Women have indeed often lacked the sort of access to power and material resources that men have had and they have been victims of male power and brutality. Women's world may often have been small scale, concerned largely with the care of children and the physical and emotional maintenance of family. The wide acceptance of the social myth that women's place was in the home hindered the arrival of any basic changes in women's place in man's world. Since marriage was the only vocation permitted to women there was no question of their trying to evade these roles and work out the possibility of a different status in the world.

As a result, marriages that were once entered into as opportunities for fulfilment often became dubious ventures with a dull association of material and social interests, and woman began to brood on their condition. Although there have been no many significant changes in marriage and family norms, increasing numbers of women today are entering into various professions and service even when they are married which have brought for them economic and various other benefits which can diminish their sense of powerlessness. Several complex psychological and sociological factors besides economic have altogether helped in the emergence of the 'new women'.

Protest, anger and sense of challenge against the old values such as patience, sacrifice, endurance, and spirituality are often associated with the new awareness developing among women. The sense of protest and anger women have felt against unfair treatment meted out to them so far has turned many of them to become rebels against social practices. No women can disagree on the point that freedom is desirable. Enchainment is loathed by all. Even birds and beasts love freedom, so why not women? Women of this age claim that they must be emancipated and allowed to solve their own problems. They have had till now a very comfortable life under male protection.

But the women of today know no rest. In recent years new women in India have received so many appreciations for their ability to acquire an independent status and hold their own against so many odds. If words of encouragement reinforce the tendency to assume new, responsible roles among women, no active support actually comes forth from other members of society to back it up.

By throwing up a set of married Goddesses, Hindu society has created an extra bit of psychological problem to women born to this tradition. New women have, after all, been exposed to the teaching of their mothers and foremothers who had deeply internalised those traditional ideas and relationships. Hence the new women in India suffer from a strong sense of guilt if they have to deviate from the traditional course to meet occupational requirements. Whether women in India were cast in the image of Goddesses or whether the image of the Goddesses were conceived as a result of habitual human use of womenfolk in India is a tricky question. In their bid to satisfy this inner urge of keeping up the image of 'Devi' intact and combine it with new demanding human roles, married women often take too much upon themselves.

To become a wife in a privileged home is still a middle class maiden's dream. This fondly cherished hope cuts them off from the stream of responsible women who want to take a new objective look, and react with courage and independence of thinking. They are not all angry young women cut to deny feminine qualities in them. On the contrary, they are aware that femininity is given premium not only within homes. The new women are not ashamed of their sex but they are against letting others use it to their advantage. They have no longer any use for the ideal of all enduring 'mother-earth'.

Many new women, like old romantics, look for superior, senior men while choosing their husbands. But their husbands' success does not satisfy their own need for achievement. That is why traditionalists find new women highly ambitious. Their ambition is perhaps nothing but a drive for self-expression. They want to pursue their own inclination and interest. They are dissatisfied with the ideas of pre-determined role assignments and the social arrangement which makes home-making impossible for a whole time professional workers and a housewife a passive, dependent follower of the man in the house.

An earning woman, a modern phenomenon, has been trying hard to extent the horizons of freedom of a woman in the most arduous way. The new women, as supposed to be enjoying unfettered sex rights, and economic rights may be looked upon as posing no new problem.

A promiscuous woman is an aberration. Women's lib does not connote it. It means a little freedom for her to exhibit herself. She wants to be recognised as a full being, intellectually, emotionally and culturally. If there is any challenge from the modern women, from the women today, it is this challenge for recognition. Her challenge to the modern society has been that of her unique status in the household and her social status as a working partner in the social milieu.

If the society fails to cognise this divine hunger of womanhood, it will have to pay dearly for it. There will be social instability and the new generation will be left on a waste land, to cultivate the crops to be reaped by future generations of men and women.

This exploration into feminine consciousness which is found in many novels by women writers leaves us in no doubt as to the ultimate possibility of women being able to achieve total freedom from the limitation of femininity. The distinguished emancipated women who have written about themselves in this country often reveal the extra-ordinary difficulties

of feminine freedom. As against this search for the concomitants of freedom in the external world some writers have shown their heroines achieving real inner freedom by accepting the limitation of their femininity and transcending them through imagination. An awakened feminine consciousness will go a long way in discovering itself and creating the conditions for such discovering.

The change brought about by the Western culture and education, the struggle of the country for freedom, and the changes in economic conditions proved powerful lovers to bring the woman out of the Sita-image. She gradually came out of the cocoon of pride-in-suffering and started looking on herself as a human being. Literature, which until recently was a male dominated, has started reflecting the sparks that have emanated from this struggle of the women to be herself. Women, imprisoned in the walls of the family and shackled by tradition now look upon herself from a different angle. Even man has begun to think what he has made of woman. This has resulted in the emergence of the 'New Women' in literature and other fields.

The early Indo-Anglian writers presented the traditional Sita-type woman as seen in Rajmohan's *Wife* (1864) and Bankin Chandra's *Poison Tree* (1873) where the woman is shown as the silent sufferer and sacrificing in the forms of Indian wife and widow. But the writers that followed tried to show the emerging new woman. The Sita image which had been extolled earlier became an object of pity and as in Mulk Raj Anand, realistic images of women began to appear. Indo-Anglian fiction reflects how a girl is unwelcome in the family and explores the reason behind the traditional view as in *The Financial Expert* (1952) by R. K. Narayan. Margayya, one of the characters in *The Financial Expert* tells his borrowers:

"These daughters were born to my father. Five cartloads of paddy came to us. Every half year, from the fields. We just heaped them upon the floor of the hall. We had five halls in our house, but where has it all gone? To the three daughters. By the time my father found husbands for them there was nothing left for us to eat at home." (Narayan: 2008: 5-6)

The influx of Western culture, however, did bring about a change of attitude. In *He Who Ride a Tiger* (1954) by Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kalo, the blacksmith, would have liked a son to work with him at the smithy, but love for his wife who had died at child-birth made him love his daughter and educate her. He becomes a rebel when he finds the society indifferent to her brilliant academic achievements. In India's Woman Power, Tara Ali Baig rightly comments:

"Arch traditionalists that women are, it is they who have successfully and brutally established man's ascendancy over women in society. And it starts right from birth." (Baig: 1976: 24)

The image of a suffering girl is shown by Anand and Bhattacharya in their early novels like Sheila in Anand's *Coolie* who could play with Munoo only when her mother went out. Lekha in *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954) is subject to traditional restraints. She is warned not to laugh by an old woman relative for:

"Laughing, a maiden uncovers a part of her that should be hidden. A maiden is safe only in gravity's cloak." (Bhattacharya: 2000: 25)

However, some writers have given convincing images like in Narayan's *The Dark Room* (1938), where Sumati is weak and Kamala spirited. As education among girls spread and they age of marriage raised, the novels began to show the girls themselves facing the

problem of fusing tradition and modernity. The works of women writers have given a distinct dimension to the total picture of woman in the present society. Ira Weddy in *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) by Kamala Markandaya is a sweet and obedient daughter of Rukmani and Nathan, who is rejected by her husband because she is childless. But she is not depressed by this. She takes over the burden of her younger, sick brother and starts looking after him. When famine occurs, she flouts the moral code and sells her body to the people of the tannery. Though being a rustic girl, her outlook is quite modern and she does not feel ashamed at all.

Roshan in *Some Inner Fury* (1955) by Markandaya is a challenge to age old conventional upbringing. She does everything that a well brought up girl is not supposed to do. She even leaves her husband when she is no longer able to live with him and she does not repent about it. Mira is like Roshan in many ways. She has sufficient intelligence, courage and farsightedness to take up career in journalism once she is representative of the modern woman in the sense that she is eager for new experience and is capable of living a full, enriched life. Mira is willing and capable enough to tackle any obstacles that may arise in her wedded life with Richard. Yet, she has immense resources of courage and endurance even when her love for Richard does not result in wedded bliss.

Anasuya of *Possession* (1963) by Markandaya is of the same ilk as Mira and Roshan who proves that a decent existence is possible without a man, that a manless lifestyle need not necessarily be dry, meaningless, that one can be completely independent. Like the new women of the present century, Anasuya is positive of the fact that a woman can remain single if they do seem to see any point in marrying. Saroja and Lalitha in *Two Virgins* (1973) by the same author are also representative of the modern women. While Lalitha opts for manipulation through sex, Saroja having a foretaste of sexual knowledge and its power, observes everything, wisely decides to wait and bids her time. Lalitha succumbs to temptation all too easily and has to pay the price for it. On the contrary, Saroja wants to move beyond the time worn values and establish a sense of her own integrity, of her own independence as a whole human being.

Nayan Tara Sahgal too has concentrated on the discriminations made against women – psychological, social and even political and presented a few characters as Kusum, Rashmi, Simrit, Saroj, Sonali who try to grapple with uneasy relationships to find meaning in their existence. Whereas her earlier novels were an attempt to explore the status of women within maladjusted marriages, her later novels show the woman totally rejecting marriage as the sole option in life and opting for a career in singleness instead. Sonali in *Rich like Us* is the very picture of the New Woman, who has finally arrived on the Indian scene.

The institution of marriage has been minutely examined and commented upon many times in the novels of Sahgal:

“Marriage was inestimably more important for a woman than for a man.  
A single woman had no status in society”. (Sahgal: 1999: 49)

Sahgal has completely rejected a marriage based on the exploitation of one partner. Like Sahgal, Ruth Jhabwala gives a penetrating and ironic account of this conflict leading to domestic friction. Amrita in *To Whom She Will*, and Nimmi in *The Nature of Passion*, try to find a balance between their traditional roles and modern viewpoint that their westernized education has imparted to them.

It is true that Indian has many women in important positions. There is no field which does not boast of female representatives. It will hardly be right, however, to deduce from this that women in general are emancipated in India. Khushwant Singh writes:

“Between the cities of India its 550,000 villages and between its elegant, educate ladies who grace the Lok Sabha and the vast majority of Indian women yawns the gulf of many centuries. The lives of these women have not changed very much with the passage of time. Those whose mothers and grandmothers always enjoyed a certain degree of liberty still enjoy today.” (Singh: 1984:65)

It is evident from the study of modern Indo-Anglian novels that there has been a visible shift in the attitude of the authors towards Indian women. The social changes are changing something deep within the individual which the creative artists are striving to express. Characters Sonali (*Rich Like Us*) and Bim (*Clear Light of Day*) are fresher, newer role models. They are far removed from the vision of the unhappy and but ideal wives of early Indo-Anglian literature which is unsuited to modern times. As Simone de Beauvoir says:

“Much more interesting are the insurgent female who have challenged this unjust society; a literature of protest can engender sincere and powerful work”. (Beauvoir: 1997:718)

On the whole, however, the New Woman has yet to make appearance in an effective way, both on the social scene and in the world of fiction. The Indian woman has come a long way but there are still ‘miles to go before see can finally be at peace with herself and the world.

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