



GOVERNMENT FIRST GRADE COLLEGE

WIRUPATI ROAD, COVALENDUR, DISTRICT SRI GANESHPUR

*One Day Multidisciplinary National Seminar  
on*

**Women in Transition :  
Achievements, Issues and Challenges**

*(Literary, Historical, Economic, Sociological, Political,  
Managerial and other dimensions)*

*Friday, 15th February 2019*



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# INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS FROM 1960 TO POST-MODERNISM

## (A Study of Themes)

Jayashree M. G.  
Government First Grade College, Yelahanka, Bangalore

"Literatures of India" are oriented towards culture, tradition, folktales, history etc. Apart from writing in vernacular languages, writing in English took a longer period to establish the identity of Indian English literature. In the past, patriarchy existed and then Britishers invaded and colonized, during the period the writings were emotive and focused on patriotism and evoked national spirit. Women freedom fighters actively participated in the freedom struggle joining India's Reformist Movement against British Regime; this has led to the women literature. It is towards the close of Eighteenth Century the women writers have become more and more prominent due to the resonance of Feminist Movement in the West in Indian Literary World.

My paper focusses on the themes in the modern fiction undergone a metamorphosis in the present day context an overview of it.

The works of selected women writers from 1960 to the post modernism are read categorically based on the themes.

- Domesticity
- Caste & gender
- Diaspora
- Resistance protest challenges

In the first classification "Domestic Identity" here the writers are focused on Indian culture and its values and depiction of female protagonist, educated, working middleclass family tries to strike a balance with professional front with domesticity. ShashiDeshpandey's depiction of women are three different types, we find three types of women characters with subtle changes reoccur. The first type is submissive, conniving. The second type of woman is bolder more self-reliant and rebellious. She cannot conform to mythological, submissive and surrender vision of womanhood. As radical feminist, ideology expressed, for example, Sarah's friend Nathan in the 'Dark Holds No Terror'.

The third, type of women characters, are the women in between neither traditional nor radical in their ideas and practice. For example, Indu in 'Roots and Shadows', leaves her husband to seek refuge in her ancestral home. Being a woman herself, she sympathises with women. As ShashiDeshpande clarifies in one of the interviews about feminist approach in her writing,

A major pre-occupation in recent Indian women's writings has been a delineation of Inner life and subtle relationships. In a culture where, individualism and protest have often remained alien ideas and marital bliss and the women's role at home is the central focus. It is interesting to see the emergence of not just an essential Indian sensibility but an expression of cultural diversion. Another renowned writer Kamala Das reflected her strong feminist ideology, portraying female sensibility with a rare honesty and sensitivity. Her poems have for long served as an inspiration to women looking to break the shackles of sexual and domestic oppression, and therefore find relevance with women even today.

Another popular women writer, Adhyatman Prasad, focuses on the revival of a reformed traditional women's literature to accommodate women's need for self-expression. This is the utmost importance. She does so because she is not just men, as agents of female oppression.

Moving on to the Second category which deals with the disease of the society and been an invasion of the Dalit writers to bank on is Caste and Gender. Bama's fiction focuses the vulnerable condition of Dalit people who are victims of circumstances due to their poor economic status. They remain landless agricultural labourers who are powerless. She focuses other major problems such as discrimination in the new religion, Christianity, which is that their rich culture is robbed and they are left with nothing.

In "Sangathi", Bama focuses multi-level problems of women have to face in society that is driven on the basis of caste and gender. Bama's fictional landscape is scored with Dalit women, wife-beating, sexual harassment, abandonment by their husbands, ignorance, marginalization, freedom in homes and, ultimately, the succumbing of the community to the economic exploitation of the upper-caste men in the society. This is because of the dominance of Dalit men. The Dalit men cannot often protect their women from the upper-caste atrocities. This is because of the rigid social system on caste lines, which render the Dalit men powerless. An episode in Bama's "Sangathi", serves as a good example. KumaraswamyAyya, a local landlord tries to molest a young Dalit woman, while she is passing through a narrow lane. She resists him and runs away.

One of India's most prominent women writers, Mahaswetha Devi's writing focused on telling the story of women from marginalized communities in the context of the bold voice behind the sensational short stories that delved into the lives of women belonging to the lower-caste of Rajasthan who were hired as professional dancers and courtesans of upper caste men.

The next most significant and prominent category is English education in India which commenced during the colonial period and continued through the post-colonial India to the present. The English education, which was predominant among the majority of Indians. The English education extended to girl child has resulted in women's self-emancipation and self-discovery, view of a new world and perspective of life.

Diasporic literature focuses mainly on the experience of discrimination, cultural shock and reverse cultural shock, adjustment and assimilation, orientalism, identity crisis, and displacement, dilemma, depression, hybridity and the cultural gap. The establishment of diasporic Indian English literature as an independent genre of Indian English literature is reported in the 1980s.



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Kamala Markandaya is considered to be among the first few diasporic female Indian writers. She was born in Mairson in 1924 and immigrated to England. The protagonist of her novel "The Mother Man" (1972) is oppressed by the discrimination even after 10 years in England. He lives in a dilemma as he can never say India nor England as his homeland.

Anita Desai, who was born in 1937 in Dehradun and immigrated to England and America respectively is another prominent diasporic female Indian writer. Her novel "Bye Bye Black Bird" (1971) depicts the immigrants who are in search of their identity in another country. Additionally, it carries the viewpoint of young immigrants, east-west cultural dichotomies, discrimination, and isolation faced by immigrants in a post-colonial world.

Sharn Mukherjee, another famous diasporic female Indian writer who was born in 1940 in Kolkata and later immigrated to America. Her novel "Wife" (1975) depicts the transformation of a traditional Indian wife to the murderer of her husband. Her husband had a high standard of life in America catastrophically after the immigration and she becomes a victim of mental stress which leads her to commit the murder. In contrast to her husband, she is a naive, dependent female protagonist of her novel. She wisely uplifts herself to be an independent, brave woman amidst the conflicts she faced in an unfamiliar context.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni known for her Magic realism, born in India immigrated to America and came into spotlight as a female diasporic Indian English literature. Her award-winning novel "The Mistress of Spices" (1997) portrays an Indian girl who works in a spice shop in Oakland, America and helps other immigrants to solve their problems with the magic of her spices.

Meera Alexander was born in 1951 in Allahabad and later she immigrated to Sudan and then to America. Her novel "Manhattan House" (1997) is set on Manhattan as well as on India. There she portrayed the immigrant life, identity crisis, racial intolerance, international affairs and marriages in a sensitive style of writing. The female protagonist of Sunetra Gupta's novel "Memories of Rain" (1996) immigrates to England after falling in love with a British man but she soon realises the true nature of her husband. Disappointed by his rude, mean behavior, she returns India with her children.

Jhumpa Lahiri is a second generation Indian American who was born in London, 1967. Her parents were immigrants from the state of West Bengal, India. Her award-winning novel "The Namesake" (2004) is considered to be one of the best fiction written about immigrant life. In this novel, Lahiri has successfully engaged aspects like the generational gap between first and second generation immigrants, conflict of east-west beliefs, cultural displacement, nostalgia, loss of identity, alienation and despair. The movie which was adapted by this novel too gained much attention worldwide.

Kiran Desai, the daughter of Anita Desai is also a famous diasporic Indian English literature. She was born in Chandigarh on 3rd September, 1971. She immigrated to England and then to America with her mother, who inspired her towards literature. Kiran

Desai in her second novel "The Inheritance of Loss" (2006), subtly portrays the life struggles of Indian diaspora as well as the aspects of globalization, racial intolerance, terrorism and multi-cultural issues. This novel brought her much credit through awards like 'National Book Critics Circle Award' and 'Booker Prize', making her the youngest female recipient of 'Booker Prize' so far.

In conclusion, it is appropriate to say that diasporic Indian English fiction is an important genre depicting the experiences and mentalities of Indian diaspora in a broad sense. It makes space for the discussions about Indian immigrants and offers emotional security to that particular diaspora. Being the representatives of the Indian diaspora, diasporic female Indian writers are successful in addressing the readers of Indian English literature in a sensitive, unpretentious style while carrying a sense of the universal experience of immigration. Furthermore, diasporic Indian English fiction keeps their writers linked with India and the entire world.

Mahaswetha Devi a well known renowned literary personality from the West Bengal and social activist who have sacrificed for the cause of tribal people she has been hailed by them as Goddess. Believed in Marxist Ideology and is influenced by it, associated with Communist Movement, she dedicated her life to fighting for the rights of those most downtrodden and oppressed in our society - the migrant and the destitute, tribals and dalits, communities written off as criminal and marginal. Part of no one's agenda, they became her cause and focus.

ShobhaDe eminent novelist and columnist of India has penned down several popular novels. She belongs to that group of contemporary writers of English literature who support feminism and equality between a man and a woman. In her novel "Socialite Evenings", she explored the lives of the bored housewives and their loveless life of rich industrialist families. "Starry Nights", this prominent novelist portrays the love story of two popular celluloid stars. It is the story of high class people and it wonderfully depicts the dark side of the Hindi film industry.

### Conclusion:

To conclude I would like to quote the words of "In a developing country like India which has undergone a lot of change in terms of its economic, industrial and technological structures it is very distressing to see the condition of minorities which make up to one third of the country's population. In spite of women being worshipped as goddesses and equality being preached in its Vedic verses, the reality seems to be harsh and ironical. Weak theoretical frames addressing the issue of discrimination at the intersections, male dominated governing body, and corrupted structures have been found to be the main reasons of oppression" (Singh, 2010) the Women Writers made the medium of Fiction a powerful weapon to indict various issues prevailing in the society from early patriarchal issues to the present day problems such as Casteism, Gender Violence, Diasporic issues, exploitation and other stark realities presented in a more sensitive and sensible way evincing a human emotions through the characters. In the near future the writers both male and female holds a social stigma, must work in correlation to hint at the remedies for the social maladies in the society.