

Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Bharati Mukherjee: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee are contemporary Indian English Writers. They have represented the case of Indian women who are the subject of negligence, suffering, suppression and exploitation. The problems of identity figures more prominently in the novels of Bharati Mukherjee and Anita Desai. Shashi Deshpande's main concern also has been to trace out the root cause of denial of women's self and their struggle for self-identity. Thus all these factors give rise to emergent trends and tendencies like hybrid cultural forms among the migrants. These three female authors who have been under the influence of trans-nationalism, immigration, migration as well as re-housing, began to take deep interest in study of the women's problems in India and giving them insight and outlook that have some relevance with the Western culture and social back-grounds.

Keywords: Negligence, Denial, Migrants , Immigrants, Hybrid , Exploitation, Relevance

1. Introduction

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either the Western cultural and social backgrounds. In independent India women's rights have constitutionally been recognized. After India's independence the Indian women English novelists got more interested in the problems of the women and their exploitation by their husbands and family members.

2. A Comparative Study

This study focuses on three novelists who bear a curious resemblance to one another in certain respects but are yet very different in many aspects. The triad chosen here comprises Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee who are all women novelists dealing with the world of women. They belong to urban upper middle class, English educated society. Their milieu is the world they are familiar with. They depict women with both their negative and positive attributes. Women in these novels are no longer treated as objects for they become the subject of these novels. We see women in all her colors the "power of women. The deviousness of women. The helplessness of women. The courage of 4 women".

Character takes precedence over plot as each one of the novels under consideration here deals with the working of a woman's mind. In seeking to dispel the myths and popular beliefs about what provides fulfillment to women, these 5 novelists portray "Women who aspire, attempt and strive to be their true selves.

Anita Desai is one of the few remarkable Indian writers in England, whose works have been greatly praised both at home and abroad. Her novels are certainly presentation of social realities from psychological perspective. She closely examines the emotional world of female class. She presents the social instincts of female and their torture by the dehumanization of society. When Anita Desai's first novel *Cry The Peacock* was published in 1963, Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabwala were already well acclaimed novelists. It is with Desai that a totally new approach to fiction writing in English by Indian women can be seen. Srinivasa Iyengar describes the difference thus

In Praver Jhabwala's work the social background is rather more important than the characters who enact the various comedies, tragi-comedies and farces; in Kamala Markandaya's the accent is as much on the principal characters as on the divers backgrounds: economic, political, cultural, social; but in Anita Desai's two novels, the inner climate, the climate of sensibility that hours or clears or rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning is more compelling than

the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action. (K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing in English)

Her forte, in other words, is the exploration of sensibility. Though Desai is of mixed German and Indian parentage, her novels are firmly entrenched in Indian soil. Thus it is very much obvious that Anita Desai's novels are about the inner worlds of her characters. She has commendably delineated the mental trauma of her protagonists. Desai's women are unhappy and suffer from mental trauma because they fail to achieve the status which they like and their dreams are ruined. It is in this atmosphere she presents the strong reactions of quiet, sensitive and intelligent Indian women married mostly to complacent insensitive, uncaring, though dutiful men. Her main concern has been with the fate of married women in Indian society. Like Deshpande, she may not be projecting any feminist ideas or taking any anti-male stand, but unconsciously, in her honest and realistic depiction of the husband –wife relationship she is mounting concerns very close to feminism.

Shashi Deshpande as a novelist has high honorable place. Daughter of a distinguished Sanskrit scholar, Shashi Deshpande began her writing with short stories and published her first novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* in career 1980. Like Desai, Deshpande too has a distance between herself and her writing. She believes that when writing is really good "anyone can

identify" with it. Her novels look at the average upper middle-class Indian woman who has no /pretensions to any earth-shattering achievements. Her novels revolve around the preponderant desire of the protagonists to realize themselves. She admits that she is able to empathize better with women and hence her protagonists are necessarily women

As writing is born out of personal experience, the fact that I am a woman is bound to surface. Besides, only a woman would write my books-they are written from the inside, as it were. Just as a woman cannot get deeply under a man's skin, so too a man cannot fully appreciate the feminine experience.(8)

Her women characters are an integral part of the Indian society to which she belongs. Shashi Deshpande is different from the other Indian English writers in the sense that she was never educated abroad. She is firmly rooted in the Indian soil and she has deep knowledge of Indian traditional culture as well as civilization. The novels of Shashi Deshpande, like Desai's novels, are related to pathetic conditions of the Indian women whether educated or uneducated. Even the educated women belonging to middle class families suffered a lot due to lack of their courage to fight the injustice.

Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian writer who lives in the West and hence her novels deal with the expatriate experience. Born in a Bengali family in India, Mukherjee has lived in the West, first as a school student and later after marrying a Canadian. Mukherjee experiences that in "straight lines and smooth plains." She finds it difficult to portray female characters who struggle in "a fragile identity and cultural hybridity to be preserved against obliteration." (1986:3).

Lal observes the theme of identity in Mukherjee's novels in her Indo-American duality and personal dilemma is neurotic, schizophrenic, ambivalent and suspended between two worlds and rooted in neither. In the expatriate sensibility her women protagonists think of India abroad

in their bicultural perception, emotional transit ghetto of nostalgia confronting multi-cultural society in the awareness of their social reality by carrying “core beliefs in the interior of the self against which all new experience is measured.”(Lal 1995:150).

The Western woman coming to live in India as the bride of an Indian was the favorite East-West encounter in the English novel written in India in the either half of this century. These novels dealt with the social pressure and job personal tensions of the dual setting of England in India. With Mukherjee, the scene shifts to the West : the expatriate Indian moving to a Western country and the resultant conflicts that an Indian woman faces form the mainspring for her thirt three novels. Her experience in Canada, in spite of a Canadian husband and a fulltime job, were not very pleasant. It is only after she migrated to the US that she began to experience the joys of expatriation. Beginning with *The Tiger's Daughter* published in 1971.

Mukherjee's novels under consideration here explore the East-West encounter from an Indian woman's point of view. She experiences the pull of Indian traditions which are in constant conflict with Western attitudes. Mukherjee in her immigrant sensibility thinks “Immigrants are many times born and the assimilation is a spiritual rebirth...”(Rao, 1999,271)

The three novelists give a prominent position to marriage and marital relationship in their novels. In the Deshpande's novels protagonist introspect after discord and disappointment in marital relationship. Despite harassment and punishment, they do not disregard marriage institution and want solution to their problems within it.

Desai's protagonists to some extent differ in nature and action from Deshpande's protagonists. They are unhappy and sensitive to the point of being neurotic. Marriage never holds any sanctity for them with the result that they are not in favor of protecting marital relationship because it is insignificant. While Deshpande's novels end on positive note, Desai's end on nihilistic note.

3. Conclusion

Deshpande, Desai and Mukherjee may not be called feminist writers, but the story what they have presented in their novels clearly indicate that they are feminists. A comparative study of these three contemporary novelists brings out some similarities and dissimilarities in their Noels and approaches. Their characters are mostly from the urban areas except a few.

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