

# Concept of 'New Woman' and Indian Women Fiction Writers

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## Abstract

Literature is one of human creativity that has universal meaning as one of the way to communicate each other about the emotional, spiritual and intellectual experiences that needed to build up intellectual and moral knowledge of mankind. A creative writer has the perception and the analytical mind of a sociologist who provides an exact record of human life, society, and social system. Fiction, being the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian literature. Indian women novelists in English and in other vernaculars try their best to deal with, apart from many other things, the pathetic plight of forsaken women who are fated to suffer from birth to death. The word 'New Woman' has come to signify the awakening of woman into a new realization of her place and position in family and society. Many women writers made their mark in Indian fiction in English. Toru Dutt, Raj Laxmi Devi, Mrs. Krupabai Sathianadhan, Swaran Kumari Debi, Cornelia Sarobji, Shakuntala Srinagesh, Beena Barua, Vimla Raina, Anita Desai, Ruth Pravar Jhabwala, Kamala Markandaya etc., are unquestionably some outstanding names. They have enlarged the scope of the novel with their personal sense of insight and social sense of values. The portrayal of women gained importance and

depth in the novels of women. Writers like Jane Austen, Bronte sisters have the confidence and the independence of the 'New Women'. It should be noted that women novelists like the Bronte Sisters and George Eliot excelled in the portrayal of woman , her feelings, her frustrations and passionate longings. The prominent feature of the 'New Woman' in the changed India is her constant effort to live as an economically independent individual. The women writers have shown an admirable understanding of the problems and the predicaments of the women. They try to go deep into the forces that condition the growth of the female in the patriarchal society, their novels reveal the variegated facets of women in modern India and as such reflect the fully awakened Feminine sensibility.

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## **Concept of 'New Woman' and**

# **Indian Women Fiction Writers**

## **A Research Paper**

Literature reflects the social reality, imaginative experiences and interpersonal relationships of men and women. Indian novelists have dealt with family relationships with high seriousness because the traditional heritage of India gives great importance to the family unit. A creative writer has the perception and the analytical mind of a sociologist who provides an exact record of human life, society, and social system. As we all know, literature is one of human creativity that has universal meaning as one of the ways to communicate each other about the emotional, spiritual and intellectual experiences that are needed to build up intellectual and moral knowledge of mankind.

Literature reflects accepted patterns of thought, feeling and action, including patterns of expressions and society's unconscious assumptions. It innovates, giving expression to emerging themes, that may not yet be definable in literal terms .1.

A literary work is created not only to be read by the people but it also reveals feelings and emotions of the author and can also give a lesson to learn and teach something to the reader. Of all the literary forms, the novel is considered to be the most socially-oriented because it depicts human relationships in varied aspects. The novel develops from the lineage of non-fictional narrative forms - the letter, the journal, the memoirs or biography, the chronicle or history, it develops out of documents, stylistically it stresses

representative details. The novel is realistic and has a realistic background. The novel shows a character deteriorating or improving in consequence of causes operating steadily over a period of time. Thus in a novel, the situation at the end is very different from that at the opening. Fiction, being the most powerful form of literary expression today, has acquired a prestigious position in Indian literature. As a distinct literary form, the novel is the most acceptable way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of time. As far as Indian creative writers are concerned, they have been fascinated by this form and they have adopted it generously and skilfully. Indian women novelists in English and in other vernaculars try their best to deal with, apart from many other things, the pathetic plight of forsaken women who are fated to suffer from birth to death. Woman in the ancient times is sometimes upgraded and at other times degraded. But in other times degraded. But in the modern time, women have shown their mettle in every field and in some respects, far better than the male. The word 'New Woman' has come to signify the awakening of woman into a new realization of her place and position in family and society. Conscious of her individuality, the new woman has been trying to assert her rights as a human being and is determined to fight for equal treatment with man.

The English feminists endowed with her hostility to men, her questioning of marriage, her determination to escape from the restrictions of home life and her belief that education could make a woman capable of leading a financially self-sufficient, single and yet fulfilling life. **2.**

Before 1947, the English models were the major influence on the Indian novel, but after independence, the Indian novelist have shown new talents, and touched new horizons. After the advent of independence the novelists have shown the joy

of freedom, the tragedy of partition, continuing corruption, poverty, misery, and struggle of women against age – old slavery. These variety of subjects gave a new life to the art of fiction writing in India.

Women are the natural story tellers. 3.

It cannot be denied that due to the difference in ‘gendering’ men and women are bound to adopt different characteristics and modes of feeling and temperament.

As Gilligan points out:

When the observer is a woman, the perspective may be of a different sort.

4.

Even Virginia Woolf, commenting on the difference in male and female writers, argues:

It is probable, however, that both in life and in art, the values of woman are find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values - to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. 5.

For the women writers, writing is a form of self – expression. A perceptive study of these novelists brings forth their concerns with women’s issues. This does not mean that they fictionalize only women’s problems or the female psyche; they also hold a mirror to women’s reaction to man, society and vice versa. They discuss new themes, the complexities of the man - woman relationship and provide a penetrating analysis of the female world. Many women writers made their mark in Indian fiction in English. Toru Dutt, Raj Laxmi Devi, Mrs. Krupabai Sathianadhan, Swaran Kumari Debi, Cornelia Sarobji, Shakuntala Srinagesh, Beena Barua, Vimla Raina, Anita Desai, Ruth Pravar Jhabwala,

Kamala Markandaya etc., are unquestionably some outstanding names. They have enlarged the scope of the novel with their personal sense of insight and social sense of values. They succeeded to expose that woman was really caught in the web of intrigues and social taboos of all kind and that her subservience to man gave her very little freedom of action. Their silent suffering is often more eloquent than any violent action of speech. These woman novelists come to feel that they could satisfactorily use novel as a equable medium for introspection and self analysis.

Indian woman whose badge has been silent- suffering and who is an upholder of Indian culture is an oft-repeated type in Indian-English fiction. She is shown to be enacting various roles- of a mother, a wife, a daughter and a sister- a cog in the family machine but never as an individual claiming her life to be her own, wherein she could seek personal gratification and self-fulfilment. This is mainly due to the prevailing patriarchal society where the authority emanates from the eldest male in the family. Indian women had set models like Sita and Anasuya whom they had to imitate. But with the growing emphasis on education, Indian woman experienced freedom and struggled to improve her lot. Education brought economic independence of women which in turn changed their outlook and the traditional equation of superior husband and inferior wife. The traditional concept of love and marriage as sacrament and sex as a taboo is fast losing its importance. A new consciousness has been developing among the educated women. This consciousness compelled them to demand economic, political and social justice and equality with men. A woman of today desires her due and rightful place in the society and a partner who understands her feelings and respect her individuality and identity.

The cause of women's education had the support of many reformers, philosophers and thinkers. Swami Vivekanand said ,

“educate your women first and leave them to themselves.” 6.

Dr. Annie Besant advocated women's education on the ground that on the education of Indian women depends the rising of India as a nation. Indian woman's freedom symbolically as well as literally heralded the dawn of independence. Her thirst for knowledge and craving for recognition were awakened and her latent potentialities that rusted with disuse were tapped and came to the forefront . The first fortunate women who had the benefit of western education began to campaign for political equality for women with men. This was the transitional phase , when the Indian woman had to face the conflict between tradition and modernity.

With the rise of feminism, women became aware of the fact that her inferiority is not ordained in heaven, that gender is neither natural nor immutable, because it is a creation of patriarchy and patriarchy is not given. It is a construct which can be deconstructed. Women realised that the system of patriarchy which existed since a long time, no longer served the needs of the rapidly changing society where women were trying to emancipate themselves and define their potential. Revolting against their marginalization they have started questioning the sexual politics and gender agreement. Literature, being the mirror of society, does not remain unaffected but explore the “Woman's questions” extensively and vociferously.

The above points and counterpoints very aptly show that woman in the ancient times is sometimes upgraded and at other times degraded. But in the modern

time, women have shown their mettle in every field and in some respects, far better than the male. If we delve deep into the history of Indian authors in English , we come to the conclusion that Indian women have shown their worth both qualitatively and quantitatively and are showing even today without any full stop. Women novelists writing in English attempt to project woman as the central figure and seem to succeed in presenting the predicament of woman most effectively. The work of women writers has given a distinct dimension to the image of woman in the family and society. The reason might be their instinctive perception of and insight into the woman's reactions and responses , problems and perplexities and tlkhe complex working of their inner selves and their emotional involvement and disturbances. These women writers have shown in their works the New Woman who has her own changed notions of life. It is true, women's education, her rights of citizenship and other legal rights and above all her gainful employment and economic independence have tremendously influenced her outlook on conjugal relationship and attitude towards marriage. 7.

Women who advocated Fiminism like Mary Wollstonecraft, Sarah Grand levelled a scathing criticism against those men who treated women no better than cattle. The Indian counterpart of the Bawling Brotherhood continued to feel uneasy and touchy with regard to the "New Woman" while the great thinkers and reformers worked for the uplifted of Indian women. The slow but steady hanges in cultural, social and economic patterns of life have expanded and altered the nature of reality for women. There are traces of feminist trends in early English writers too. The portrayal of women gained importance and depth in the novels of women. Writers like Jane Austen, Bronte sisters have the confidence and the



independence of the 'New Women'. It should be noted that women novelists like the Bronte Sisters and George Eliot excelled in the portrayal of woman, her feelings, her frustrations and passionate longings. Hitherto woman had been revealed in feminine splendours, as a woman ought to be, and life is presented from man's point of view alone. Charlotte Bronte revealed woman as a human being. George Eliot's women are studies of various facets of woman, which remind us of the complex personality of the novelist. All these women are the forerunners of the 'New Woman'. Among the women writers, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, R. P. Jhabwala and Naintara Sehgal are foremost in the field. Sensitive women surrounded by violent and vicious circumstances, reacting neurotically to the existentialist problems, begin to appear in the fictional world of the women writers. Women come to occupy the central position in the fictional world of the women novelists. One wonders why this important aspect of a woman's life – the necessity and attempts of women to gain financial independence – does not receive the importance and emphasis it deserves, even in the novels of women writers. The prominent feature of the 'New Woman' in the changed India is her constant effort to live as an economically independent individual.

The emergence of women novelists has considerably influenced the change in attitude. Their writing reflects a shift in the sensibility of the writer as well as the reader. These women novelists have distinguished themselves with their innovative style, depiction of social realities, advocacy of the emancipation of women and portrayal of feminine sensibilities. They delve deep into the psyche of their characters to reveal various dimensions of their personalities. Some of them, like Kamala Markandaya, R. P. Jhabwala show the socio – cultural realities that

hamper the growth of women. They project a strong feminist as well as psychological view in depicting their women characters. They have rejuvenated the realistic novel by using it to explore and share their experiences and put forward their own point of view on life, especially through their female characters with all their pain, agony, helplessness, exploitation and suffering.

Feminism as an ideology and as a movement against a male dominated society is of special importance in the Indian context. It emerges as

a concept that can encompass both an ideology and movement for socio – political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women’s subordination within any given society.” 7.

The women writers have shown an admirable understanding of the problems and the predicaments of the women. They try to go deep into the forces that condition the growth of the female in the patriarchal society, their novels reveal the variegated facets of women in modern India and as such reflect the fully awakened Feminine sensibility. The realization of the self and a shift to emphasis from the external to the internal world, has resulted in an urge to deal with feminist issues by many Indian English novelists. Moreover, these concerns have lent to the works of modern novelists an intensity and depth which cannot leave the average reader untouched. The important truth revealed is that self – pity is not the answer. It is only through a process of self – examination and self searching through courage and resilience that one can change one’s situation from despair to hope.

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