



# Focus on Women Education in Early Indian English Novels

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Received: 18 Jun 2022; Received in revised form: 07 Jul 2022; Accepted: 11 Jul 2022; Available online: 15 Jul 2022  
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**Abstract**— *The paper focuses on the works written by early Indian writers throwing light on the condition, need and concern for women's education. Keeping the patriarchy as root, the Indian women novelists made a debut after independence and started producing novels dealing with themes of family, dowry, child marriage, superstitious practices, education, purdah system and widow remarriage. With their personal experiences and suffrage women novelists have paved down the path for modern writers of the time. They represented their vision of a 'New Women', a woman who is courageous, educated, independent and liberated.*

**Keywords**— *Indian writers, Education, Patriarchy, New Women.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a means to release oneself from the hands of oppression and the chains of tradition, superstition and dogmatic belief laid down by so called rulers of society. The Women Indian Association (WIA) had reformists and feminists like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Dr. Joshi, Begum Hasrat and fourteen others questioned on women suffrage. The women were portrayed as in desperate need of an education designed to ethically alter her (and, as the hand that rocked the cradle would control the globe, also her nation) and equip her with the domestic and social skills required for new companionate marriages and effective parenting. Women are seldom shown as victims or as urgently in need of correction or reformation to be useful to society. Literature from the first decades of the twentieth century depict women as strong, powerful, and important to the social architecture. They are mothers, keepers of the social order, and vital resources in the nation's liberation struggle. In sharp contrast to the previous fiction the women's lives are better because of the reformers, writers and activists who spoke up in order to bring women issues in limelight during nineteenth century.

Focusing on the works of women writers specially on Krupabai Sathianadhan, Swarnakumari Ghoshal, Shashi

Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Rukeya whose works are considered as the early beginnings of feminism in India. As written by C. Vijayasree, "The women question was central most of most of the socio- cultural and political debates".

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous academicians and writers have discussed the importance of women education in order to eradicate patriarchy, find self-identity and be independent not only financially but mentally too. While talking about women education we cannot forget the mother of Indian feminism Savitribai Phule, known for her immense contribution for Dalit women upliftment, untouchability, education and employment. In an interview given in the Dnyanodaya, Jyotirao summarizes Savitribai's and his contribution saying, "It did occur to me that the improvement that comes about in a child due to the mother is very important and good. So those who are concerned with the happiness and welfare of this country should definitely pay attention to the condition of women and make every effort to impart knowledge to them if they want the country to progress. With this thought, I started the school for girls first."

In her novel, "The God of Small Things" (1997) Arundhati Roy depicts men's prejudices towards women's education. The main protagonist Ammu's father says, "A college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl." (The God of Small Things 38) Siddiqia Begum Sevharvi's "Tare Laraz Rahe Hai" (The Stars Are Trembling) is a discursive, loosely structured work that puts light on some important themes in a lucid style. The brother who supports his younger sister's education is infuriated when he finds his other sister teaching his wife to read. Women were considered as a threat to the patriarchal order. Whereas M.K. Indira in her novel *Tungabhadra* talks about a controversial story of a girl child born in a prostitute area seeking education and other basic rights to lead a normal life. English influence has always been there in India and so we have borrowed the concept of feminism from the west where we had women like Mary Wollstonecraft who said that women "had to refashion her nature to emerge as fit complement to the new man". Kapur was often compared to Jane Austen who wrote about women's marriage, education, rights and dependency on man.

### III. DISCUSSION

Nineteenth century was a time when female writers wrote under several restraints. The first Indian woman author to fictionalize in English, Krupabai Sathianadhan gave us her vision of new woman by focusing on 'the value of women as educated and self-reliant individuals and active participants in domestic and public life'. (Forbes) In her novel *Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Life* (1892-94) she experiments with the theme of education. Kamala's husband shows a positive attitude towards helping her in gaining knowledge but later on she has to repress her intellectual awakening in domesticity. Ganesh couldn't stand and oppose her mother and sister in order to educate Kamala raises the question that whether men were the silent observers or participators. The portrayal of Sai's character as an educated, intelligent and a liberated woman who seeks to destroy all the patriarchal structure is seen as 'monster' or 'mad woman' (Gilbert&Gubar 1979) The novel seems to be confession of her own experiences and inner conflicts as she tries to show two contradictory worlds. Her attempt in uplifting Kamala is partially successful as Kamala is drawn back towards the stereotypes, traditions and cultural clutches.

Swarnakumari Ghoshal's "An Unfinished Song" is an example of how female writers made fictional writings as their stage to speak through female characters like Moni. The Sakhi Samiti was a women's organization launched by Swarnakumari Ghoshal in 1886. The main focus of the organization was to 'nurture, educate and where necessary

provide financial support to poor unmarried girls and widow' (Majumdar 2003) She was an activist and a social reformist who contributed in planting the seeds of women emancipation through literary and political works. Moni is Ghoshal's concept of new woman who is educated, intelligent and individualistic. Though the author's major theme is consent, marriage and independence but the education plays a vital role in every aspect. The root cause of women being oppressed by societal pressure and not given choice is due to lack of education. The portrayal of male character such as Binoy Krishna gives us an example of sensible and supportive male figure who is a perfect match for a woman who believes in learning and making a career. The author focuses on carrying positive elements from English people. Binoy has an open mindset about liberty of women and even believes in the competence of women as readers or as politicians. He places George Eliot on par with Shakespeare which reflects his nature of accepting women as educated and intelligent beings and not merely wives.

Awarded with the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1999, Manju Kapur's debut novel "Difficult Daughters" (1998) talks about women who chose "to be something other than a wife." Harish felt ashamed about her illiterate wife as he was an Oxford return English Professor. Kishori Devi, mother of Harish says, 'Beta, you are very good. How many husbands encourage their wives to study after their marriages? She has got a diamond- a diamond from heaven! (Difficult Daughters, 260). The author illustrates the obstacles and limits that girls face in achieving a brighter future through education. She expresses traditional women's ideas on the necessity for males to protect them. Manju Kapur investigates women education through two different approaches, traditional and modern approach. The traditional approach is Viramati's mother Kasturi who approves Viramati to study in 'Arya Kanya Mahavidyalaya where they follow routine rituals and perform holy prayers, chant hymns whereas Shakuntala's mother Lajwanti supports modern form of education where Shakuntala stays in a hostel and learns various activities such as horse riding, sports and acts according to her own wish. She motivates Viramati saying, 'times are changing and women are moving out of the house, so why not you?

Shashi Deshpande in her novel "That Long Silence" shows how Mohan being a man is proud of his wife Jaya who is a well-known writer and often introduces her as, 'My wife is a writer' (That Long Silence,119) The concept of carrying husbands name was a women's identity. Like despite Jaya being a writer, her sweeper Jeeja says, 'Saheb is a big officer, you are his wife....' This indicates how the society never considered women as an individual and educated being. Deshpande demonstrates how women believe that

"a spouse is like a sheltering tree" and that women are only supposed to please their husbands and in-laws.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reformists were convinced to the need of educating women. The issue about how to educate and what to educate became a matter of concern. The kind of education to be imparted was that 'women should read only those books that will help them to become better wives and mothers' (Murshid 1983) Thus, in order to show India as a civilized nation the women were educated but for becoming good wives, mothers and home caretakers. The aim was that traditionality should not vanish in the name of modernization.

The novels discussed above gives us an idea that generally women were not supported by women characters for notwithstanding the traditional norms that is followed since

a long time. The male characters are much more supportive in terms of education. If the women were not deprived of education from an early period, the scenario would have been different and progressive. Still, it is the contributions of both genders that we as women are standing at a better place.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author is grateful to Dr. Eligedi Rajkumar, Assistant Professor, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad for his kind support and supervision.

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