
Social Milieu and Women Poets- Pre and Post Independence

Anju Rajput

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dev Samaj College For Women

AnuPriya

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dev Samaj College For Women

Abstract

Women played a pivotal role in the colonial period. Their contribution in literary set up has been remarkable. The partition was a focal point where the social milieu had a drastic change. The Indian authors played a significant role in the upliftment of the traditions and techniques of literature thus renaming it as Indian English Literature. The Indian English poetry took further strides distinctively in various aspects. It is not just a branch of the laden tree but an essential part of the Indian literature. Indian English poetry matured in 19th century in Bengal. All the poets were influenced by Victorian and romantic strain. Earlier it was confined to a particular area later it started growing and that too in the urban area. Indian English poetry can best be seen as a phenomenon as valuable as it symbolises its own achievements. It embodies the legacy of colonialism, struggle against it and oppression. True to India's diversity, poetry is the product of its multicultural, multi-racial and multi-lingual sensibility. However it retains its Indian identity. During this era, many Indian women poets also contributed towards the social milieu. They penned down boldly on the women's status in society for which they were applauded and given accolades. No doubt the poets also faced criticism to be not one of the culture, nevertheless poets bravely weathered all the criticism asserting their Indianness, sterling worth and winning global recognition. The story from birth, growth and evolution is quite interesting and makes a magnificent history that goes back to pre-Independence and links it up to the post - Independence poetry.

The present paper aims at highlighting the journey of women poets of Indian English poetry from Pre-Independence to Post- Independence.

KEYWORDS: *Magnificent, Pre-Independence, Post-Independence, Recognition, social milieu, applauded, accolades, Victorian, Romantic*

Introduction

Indian women necessarily involves a brief resume of the cultural background of Indian women through the ages. Unlike her western counterparts the Indian women is a part of a culture which goes back into the past. The highest place has been accorded to woman in Indian religious and philosophical thought the concept of Ardhanarishwara describes God head and half male and half female. The shakti cult is centred around the superiority and destructive strength of the female. Every particle in nature from tiny to huge like rivers, streams, dawn, twilight, flowers and seasons, knowledge and music are conceived as feminine. The social structure during the Vedic time admitted the equality of woman. With the passage, the deterioration can be seen but with the advent of Buddhism saw a welcome change in women's status in the society. It allowed women to breathe in a way she want to, have education, travel as missionary and also could remain unmarried. The gradual degradation can be seen and it got worse with the Muslim invasion in the eleventh century. Women were forcibly taken away to be slaves and consequent insecurity and instability

narrowed down woman's social liberties. Purdah system, sati, and female infanticide were the common pictures of the time. India has been the crucible for the different ethnic groups and cultures. Each alien influence has left its mark on the pure land. In the 18th century, at the dawn of British rule, the position of women in India was in a sorry state only the fossilised narrow practices of a static society prevailed. The British government's non-interference attitude with religious sentiments had worsened the situation.

The change came with the pioneering works of some leaders. They brought changes in the social structure of the country in the later part of the 19th century. After centuries of stagnation, due to divergent factors, Indian women shoed a sudden urge to come back into the mainstream of social life. The first impetus was given by the freedom movement and this marked the beginning of the new era for Indian women. Under the inspiration of great personalities, women stepped forward and participated in the league in many ways like they participated in movements physically and others participated through their writings. The partition was a focal point where the social milieu had a drastic change. Women played a pivotal role in the colonial period. Their contribution in literary set up has been remarkable to cast off the rituals that put them in the cage of slavery also bind them in the shackles of illiteracy and many customs and traditions which have no relevance in the society but the convenience of patriarchy.

Role of Literature in Indian English Poetry

Literature has its special role when it comes to the above stated problems and issues. It is only literature that helps the one to come up with ones emotions and ideas through paper. The Indian authors played a significant role in the upliftment of the traditions and techniques of literature thus renaming it as Indian English Literature. Indian English poetry can best be seen as a phenomenon as valuable as it symbolises its own achievements. It embodies the legacy of colonialism, struggle against it and oppression. True to India's diversity, poetry is the product of its multicultural, multi-racial and multi-lingual sensibility. Since the time immemorial, India has been a melting pot of creative poets and many artists who have shaped history and culture. India is a home to several fascinating women who have penned beautiful poems that would enthrall the readers.

"She learned that an act intended
to express love could
have nothing to do with it.
That her heart and her body were different things."

Jhumpa Lahiri

"Running through the trees, in her dreams
She trips over jagged roots,
Becomes tangled in
The overgrown rush."

Christy Ann Martine

"The only people who see the whole picture,
Are the ones who step out of the frame"

Salman Rushdie
(The ground beneath her feet)

The above quoted lines rightly stress on the position of women in the male domineering society and how she is being dragged to be a subject to various atrocities. From Mira Bai to Sarojini Naidu and from Kamala Das to Sunita Jain, women poets have contributed to the literature in a miraculous way. They touched the minutest details of the society and made a voice to let the world know the reality of the time.

Indian English poetry has been categorised into pre and post independence poetry. No doubt that pre-independence poetry witnessed two stalwarts in the arena i.e Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh but women poets had their own place and relevance at the time though they haven't got that recognition but with the passage of time they got recognition in the arena of literature and also their contributions in the society as they have broken the shackles of orthodox thoughts of the time for example Mira Bai and the contributions of Sarojini Naidu can't be ignored as they have set the examples for coming generations to raise their voice against the evils. post-independence scenario was totally different from pre-independence. In this phase, new innovations were introduced. Nineteen-sixties and seventies witnessed a period of development in the field of Indian poetry. Women writers like kamala das, Gauri Deshpande, Lila Ray, Margaret Chaterjee, Ira De, Sunita Jain contributed much towards Indian English poetry by exploiting their miraculous inherent knack. The themes has the intellectual quality in it.

Mira Bai

Sixteenth century Hindu mystic poet, a devout of Shri Krishna, a divine soul known for her bhakti movement in India. She was known for her undaunted spirit and disregard for social norms and customs. Her poems (translations) I have found my Guru, I am mad with love etc are full of divine power and devotion. Her verses are just enchanting. She is a celebrated bhakti saint. About 1300 prayerful songs and Hindi poems attributed to her are popular throughout India and have been published in several translations worldwide. She is one of the most well known Indian poets in history.

Toru Dutt

Indian English poetry matured from imitation to authenticity only with the Toru Dutt. Born in Clacutta in Hindu family was baptized in 1862. She has written magnificent works. Her works like Ancient Ballad and Legends of Hindustan were excellent examples. She is the one who has written on Indian myths and legends. Toru Dutt touched the sensitive senses of the readers through the imagery she used in her poetry. Reader sympathizes and indulged oneself with the memories and various issues she wanted to put in front of the reader. One feels as one is living with the time and memories. In poem our Casurina tree, the poet represent the life. Her poems deal with Indian background.

" O sweet companions, loved with love intense,

For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!"

Sarojini Naidu

A pioneer poet of Indo-Anglican literature, a renowned orator and accomplished poet. Often known as 'the nightingale of India' was Independence activist and politician also. She was attracted to the poetry from childhood and applied her prodigious literary skills to write 1300 lines long poem 'The Lady of the Lake'. Sarojini Naidu was initiated into political arena by iconic stalwarts. Her poetic basket is filled with the qualities of imagery,

symbolism, mysticism and native fervour. She always presented the themes of nature, love, life and death. Her poetry was soaked in ethnic culture. She had a bird like quality.

“Lo! I have flung to the east and the west
Priceless treasures torn from my breast,
And yielded the sons of my stricken womb
To the drum- beats of the duty, the sabers of doom.”

(The Gift Of India)

“Softly, O softly we bear her along,
She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;
She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide,
She falls like tear from the eyes of a bride.”

(Palanquin Bearers)

Kamala Das

A trail blazer of feminist voices in the postcolonial era. Her contributions in the poetry earned her the label ‘The Mother of Modern Indian English Poetry’. Highly appreciated by Sylvia Plath for her confessional style of writing. With her voice she tried to give voice to the generation of women who were confined only to the households. She portrayed women as human; with desires, pain and emotions. Her popular quotes which paves the path to the inner reality and also motivate to see around and inside.

“.....I am Indian, very brown,
Born in

Malabar, I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one.....”

It is about the celebration of heritage to which she belongs. Her identity which she never want to part with and her commitment to her heritage.

Kamala das was highly sensitive and feminine. Her poetry is based on the search of the identity of women in the male dominated society. Through her poems she expresses the alienation, anger and desire for freedom .She attacks the traditional values and raises the questions through her poem ‘An Introduction’. Her bold and candid expression is a kind of contribution in uplifting the position of the women in society.

Gauri Deshpande

Her poetry explores the various dimensions of human relationships and the feeling of frustration, loneliness. Her poetry deals with the chaos and anxiety in the man-woman relationship in the post - independence era. She expressed that the time has changed but not the thinking. She explores the repressed world of women. She is the mouthpiece of suppressed women in the society. Her poetry is highly feministic in tone.

“Without wondering how,
When, Why, or Where
We live and meet with death
Turning a street corner.
But I want to see him coming
Scan his face joyously.”

(Death)

According to her, women should be confident enough to face the harsh and unpleasant realities of the society. She demands for a little space for women folk in such a scenario:

“Oh let me go out into the rain
Then like lizard I will lie
Between sliding mud and water.....”

(Oh Let Me)

Nandini Sahu

Of the great names in Indian English literature, Nandini Sahu occupies a special place. To her poetry is an expression of the insipient self....both an introspection and a liberation. The most popular work ‘The Other Voice’ expresses the existential absurdity and alienation. Her personae seem to love the beauty of the nature but disturbed at the other time at the slumber of the society on sensitive issues like slavery especially mental.

“An illusion I am
I suffer, I am the symbol of suffering.
Even when I laugh with the cruel,
Hot blood of Dusshasana,
I suffer.”

(Draupadi)

“I am prakrity; born of and fading
Into mother nature.
I am Shakti , phenomenal destroyer
Of Ravana .
I am grace; I stand for mercy,
Bounty and redemption.”

(Sita)

Conclusion

Few women poet have been discussed above to get a nerve of the women folk right from the 16th century till date showing the arduous journey of their survival in the field of literature. Through the present paper, it is highlighted that Indian society always regarded women as its Achilles heel but the above contribution of poets in the literature shows how they have tried their hard to become a voice of women, how they broke the shackles of orthodoxy and made their place in the arena of literature and also motivated other people to come along with them and voice their thoughts. The different poets from pre-independence to post-independence faces the same evils in the society. They expressed their disgust through their graceful words, imagery and depiction of heartfelt thoughts. Through their ardent efforts and tireless struggle, the women poet have tried to give the women their place in the society. Their endeavours are worth praise. Their zeal and strength has become the strength of the women next door. Indian English poetry has mirrored several phases of the rise of both nationhood and collective unconsciousness. Women poets have played a very significant role in the Indian English poetry.

“You tell me to quiet down cause
My opinions make me less beautiful
But I was not made with a fire in my belly
So I could be put out
I was not made with a lightness in my tongue
So I could be easy to swallow

I was made heavy
Half blade and half silk
Difficult to forget but
Not easy for mind to follow”

Rupi Kaur

REFERENCES

1. Agarwal B.R., Sinha M.P- Major Trends in The Post-Independence Indian English Fiction
2. Dutt Toru, Lokuge Chandani- Collected Prose and Poetry
3. Dwivedi A.N-Kamala Das and Her Poetry
4. Iyengar K.R Srinivasa- Indian Writing in English
5. Khanna Girija, Varghese Mariamma A- Indian Women Today
6. Kumar Anu- Sarojini Naidu: The Nightingale and the Freedom Fighter- What Sarojini Naidu did, What Sarojini Naidu Said
7. Naravane Vishwanath S- Sarojini Naidu Her Life, Work and Poetry
8. Rajeshwar Mittapali, Piciucco Pier Paolo-Studies in Indian Writing In English
9. Sahu Nandini- The Other Voice: A Collection of Poems
10. Thomas P- Indian Women Through The Ages
11. Trivedi Tanuja- Indian Women and Globalisation