

## REVIEW ARTICLE

**English Literature on Social Discrimination, Fiction, Democracy and Feminism**\*J Abitha<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup>Udaya School of Engineering, Nagercoil, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, India.

\*sharonabitha@gmail.com, +919442058557

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**ABSTRACT**

Indian English literature is the collection of articles written by Indian writers. This article depicts the writings of women authors. Most of the women Indian writers in English literature focussed their views on different concepts such as social discrimination, fiction, non-fiction, literacy, democracy, human rights and feminism. The articles are based on their real life experiences as well. A few writings of Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Meena Anand, Gita Piramal, Jasodhara Bagchi, Manjula Padmanabhan, Meena Alexander, Sarojini Naidu, Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta are summarised in this article. The authors and their contribution to “The God of Small Things, Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard, Interpreter of Meledies, A Voice for Freedom, Dalit Women: Fear and Discrimination, Managing Radical Change, Indian Women: Myth and Reality, House of Thousand Doors, Double talk and Inside the Haveli” are portrayed. These works are considered as the assets of Indian literature which attained several acclamations. The article purely deals with the Indian women writers whose contributions are well utilised for the welfare of the country’s development in different ways.

**Keywords:** English literature, Discrimination, Fiction, Democracy, Feminism.**1. INTRODUCTION**

Right from BC 450, writers indulge in contributing to English literature. There are many women writers in India. Some of them are Anita Desai, Nistula Hebbbar, Kiran Desai, Leela Devi, Shashi Deshpande, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Vera Hingorani, Sagarika Ghose, Manorama Jafa, Anuja Chauhan, Pupul Jayakar, Neelam Saxena Chandra, Jhumpa Lahiri, Meena Alexander, Namita Gokhale, Sheila Bhatia, Santhini Govindan, Shobhaa De and Arundhati Roy. Most of the writings are based on feminism and some others depict their views regarding many topics such as Indian constitution, fiction and non-fiction. The women writers of modern literature centralise the culture and physical as well as psychological needs of women other than the traditional writing style followed either by rural and urban communities. Anees Jung’s “Unveiling India: A Woman’s Journey” acclaimed severe critics related to the subject

due to the way in which it is narrated. The author has travelled around to collect ideas from different people which are presented in the book as a whole. Feminism promoted education, employment and rights of women against several protestations. Women authors raised quotes against male domination. This article particularly deals with feminism, comics, poetry, social discrimination, Indian democracy and fiction. Many authors write short stories of fiction that are widely acceptable among young readers. It is stated that for the country to be developed, women education is must. The article provides an overview of Indian women writers who are familiar to the literary world with their writing pattern. Authors like Swati Kaushal wrote books based on their personal experiences. Her publications are “A Piece of Cake, Drop Dead and a Girl like Me”. There are novels based on religious scriptures. “A Spoke of the Wheel” describes about Buddha in which he is

\*Corresponding author. Tel.: +919442058557

Email address: [sharonabitha@gmail.com](mailto:sharonabitha@gmail.com)(J.Abitha)

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compared to Emperor Asoka. It portrays that one's life changes similar to the change in the spokes of the wheel.

## **2. SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION**

The term discrimination denotes keeping someone away for the sake of one's caste, religion, disability, language, nationality and gender. Even Gandhi tasted racial discrimination. Even-though he had first class ticket to travel by train, he was forced to travel in third class passage. This made him to fight for injustice and he succeeded too. These writings suggest that discrimination in any form is discourteous and should be avoided.

### **2.1. Arundhati Roy**

Arundhati Roy has penned several novels, articles and essays. The writings are mostly based on non-fiction and she has won many awards including Booker Prize, National Film Award, Lannan Foundation Cultural Freedom Award, Human Rights Award, Sydney Peace Prize and Sahitya Academy Award. Some of her writings include "Kashmir: The Case for Freedom, Public Power in the Age of Empire, The Algebra of Infinite Justice, The Greater Common Good and The Road to Harsud". It took four years to complete the novel "The God of Small Things". It won several acclaims in Indian literary history.

#### **2.1.1. The God of Small Things**

[1] The novel depicts that it is not necessary to have greater things to affect human lives, even the small things do. It is a fiction based novel which states about social discrimination as well. It also deals with her childhood experiences. Though the book is well famed, it is also criticised by several means. "God of Small Things" frames concepts regarding social discrimination. It is said that high caste people do not have link with the other caste people. The people of higher caste consider the lower caste people as slaves or polluted creatures and they claim that no rights must be experienced by the people belonging to lower caste. The members of Paravan or Parayan community are not allowed to enter the house of high caste people as they are considered to be untouchable. Even the separation of class systems are visible in such a way that the members of higher class would own higher position where the lower class ones

are to be regarded as servants in most of the cases. Such discrimination is seen not only in caste and class of people, but also in religious levels. No one dares to raise any questions related to their partition. It reveals that this condition affects the living as a whole and it portrays that a change must be needed for the well-being of humans.

### **2.2. Meena Anand**

Meena Anand has written reviews regarding the rights of Dalit women in "Dalit Women: Fear and Discrimination". Her other book titled "Struggle for Human Rights: Nelson Mandela" encloses federalism and role of political parties in South Africa. Some of the other Dalit women writers include Anita Bharti and Gogu Shymala.

#### **2.2.1. Dalit Women: Fear and Discrimination**

[2] The word Dalit itself means oppressed. There are millions of people under this scheduled caste. Though certain relaxations are prevailing for such people, they are not treated in the same way as other caste people are treated. This is really a brutal behaviour in the nation. The book focuses on the cruel opposition faced by Dalit women and their challenges. The Dalit women are also eligible to enjoy all the rights which are being experienced by other women in the society. The issues on racism factors are seriously discussed by Meena Anand.

## **3. FICTION**

Some authors prefer to use imaginary creation in their writings. No real characters would be included. Though it is imaginary, it may cause serious impact over real lives. Some of the notable fiction writers include Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Namita Gokhale and Manorama Jafa.

### **3.1. Kiran Desai**

Kiran Desai is known for her notable works of "Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard and The Inheritance of Loss" which won several critics world-wide.

#### **3.1.1. Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard**

[3] The story deals with the life of a young man from a small Indian town where there is a mixed lifestyle of traditional and modern cultures. This boy lives in a dream

world all long at his schools and somehow he gets a job at a post office where his pastime is reading other's mail. Once, he takes a long route and stays at a guava tree with the monkeys there. People start to treat him as a saint by which he gains popularity. Knowing this, his father tries to use his son's power to become rich. By this time, the monkeys get addicted to liquor and disturb the surrounding people. A spy considers him as a tricky fellow and approves that such persons spoils the country by polluting the mankind. Here, the author shows a clear view about the characters of the boy's family. He is not liked by his father at the beginning but gradually he attains respect from his father as he becomes a celebrity. "Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard" is well known for the variety of characters depicted.

### **3.2. Jhumpa Lahiri**

"The Namesake and the Lowland" are her renowned novels. She has written fiction and non-fiction based articles and has won several awards like "O Henry Award, Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and Asian American Literary Award" to her credit. For her work on "Interpreter of Maladies", she is awarded PEN/Hemingway Award and is considered as the best fiction debut of the year.

#### **3.2.1. Interpreter of Meledies**

[4] "Interpreter of Meledies" includes many short stories where the story "a real durwan" states the tale of an old stair sweeper of a brick building. She tells her experiences to the neighbours that pretend to be un-truthful. A rich man helps this woman. He often renovates his building and goes on to visit places. This kind of attitude is not welcomed by the neighbourhood where they often grumble at him. The woman is well settled with her work. Meanwhile, when she was away from her work, a sink in the staircase was stolen. The neighbours blame her for the theft and they are in the state to choose another worker instead of her. This condition upsets her and forces her to leave the job. Here the pathetic situation of the worker is stated.

## **4. DEMOCRACY**

The constitution is powered on the basis of people who elect their leaders. Each member of the society serves the nation directly or indirectly. Certain ideas of great

authors have brought effective results in framing Indian democracy. A number of laws and acts have been enacted for the betterment of citizens and many are unaware of them. Several welfare schemes are framed for women who play a significant role in national empowerment.

### **4.1. Nayantara Sahgal**

Nayantara Sahgal is concerned mostly about feminism which also showcases the development of Indian democracy. The writings are based on political issues and the way it affects the civilization.

#### **4.1.1. A Voice for Freedom**

[5] It includes remarkable statistics on political matters as on how a politician's life makes a headline most of the time but not ordinary ones. It proclaims that the death of any political leader makes a huge issue, where same incident to the other democratic people is not considered at all most of the time. Nayantara Sahgal focused on Indira Gandhi's regiment in "A Voice for Freedom".

### **4.2. Gita Piramal**

Gita Piramal writes on business management of India. Her books include "Business Maharajas, Business Mantras and Smart Leadership". She has been awarded with Business Today Award for her smart work.

#### **4.2.1. Managing Radical Change**

[6] "Managing Radical Change" relates the various strategies to become successful in one's career. Some of the basic principles to be followed are also mentioned. The problems and the challenges that arise in management are elaborated and solution methods are provided to overcome the problems. It is believed that this book helps in leading the managers to face any risks and challenges and make them successful. Hence it is considered as one of the best contributions to the business women.

## **5. FEMINISM**

Feminism includes certain principles and ideas regarding women empowerment emphasizing that women possess equal rights right from birth and education to employment as men do. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were deprived of their rights in several sectors. Eventually this has been improved by the

contribution of several feminists including Jasodhara Bagchi, Rama Mehta, Kamala Das, C K Meena, Suniti Namjoshi and Nayantara Sahgal. This paved way for women to be financially independent and to lead a self-designed life.

### **5.1. Rama Mehta**

The feminine characters in the writings of Rama Mehta are noteworthy and are greatly considered. She focused on equal rights for girls and strongly opposes to male domination. She does not want the girls to be considered as slaves by bounding them within the household works. Rather, the author urges the need of basic education to all girls in the society. Her collection includes “Ramu, Inside the Haveli, A Story of India, The Life of Keshaw, The Western Educated Hindu Woman and The Hindu Divorced Woman”.

#### **5.1.1. Inside the Haveli**

[7] “Inside the Haveli” embodies the life of a young educated modern girl who marries a man from a village which is full of traditional behaviours. At the beginning it is difficult for her to cope with the traditions and so she is in a miserable situation. She finds that the people from that village are illiterates and do not contact each other. Somehow she manages to educate the people there and schools are constructed based on her initiative.

### **5.2. Jasodhara Bagchi**

Jasodhara Bagchi is one of the eminent feminists. “Indian Women: Myth and Reality, Migrating Women and Human Rights and The Changing Status of Women in West Bengal” are some of Jasodhara Bagchi’s works on feminism.

#### **5.2.1. Indian Women: Myth and Reality**

[8] It points out several issues on women that influence their behaviour. It is said that no proper improvement would be visible unless there is change in the society by formulating the rules favoured for women. The common problems experienced by women is been focused and procedures are given as how to move on in the midst of those problems. Several laws have been enacted to protect women against crimes. Still, it is doubtful whether these laws are applied so that the offenders are penalised in a right manner.

## **6. POETRY**

Authors like Sarojini Naidu, Reetika Vazirani, Anna Sujatha Mathai, Meena Alexander, Anju Makhija, Rajlukshmee Debee and Bhattacharya prefer to write by lyrics. Poems play a significant role in Indian literature. Poetry is a form of literature where lines, stanza, rhyme and rhythm are its main components.

### **6.1. Sarojini Naidu**

Sarojini Naidu is noteworthy for her poems. She has composed several poems including “The Broken Wing, The Bird of Time, In the Bazaars of Hyderabad, Ecstasy, Past and Future and Indian Weavers”

#### **6.1.1. The Broken Wing**

[9] The broken wing is one of Sarojini Naidu’s notable productions. The poem is written at the eve of freedom struggle. The broken wing depicts all the citizens who lack actual freedom. The people are ready to celebrate the victory over the British rule in India. The lines say that it is intolerable to be bound with the British rule and time has come to enjoy the era of freedom. Thus the poem is composed in the spirit of liberty.

### **6.2. Meena Alexander**

Meena alexander is a renowned poet and she has composed several volumes of poetry. Some of her poems are produced into songs with tunes imposed. She has penned several poems where, “River and Bridge, House of a Thousand Doors and Birthplace with Buried Stones” are a few of them.

#### **6.2.1. House of thousand doors**

[10] It shows the multicultural position of a country. She also tries to write the incidents along with her life experience that together gives worth-able points to the readers. The poem includes thousand doors which is stated that if a way is closed, another would be opened and a new life begins. The poet represents her grandmother as her main lead where she doesn’t care about the doors.

## **7. COMICS**

Comics is a part of English literature used to entertain readers especially children. It is the symbolic way of representation of prose. It may enclose pictorial illustration to understand the concepts illustrated in it.

Authors like Manjula Padmanabhan and Suniti Namjoshi revelled in writing comics.

### **7.1. Manjula Padmanabhan**

She is regarded as a cartoonist and a play writer and has written many scripts for the favour of children. "Lights Out, Unprincess, I am different! Can you find me?, Harvest, Three Virgins and Other Stories" are some of her productions. The author has received Greek Onassis Award for her play.

#### **7.1.1. Double talk**

[11] "Double Talk" is a cartoon based book written for the sake of children. It depicts the character of a young girl of age 20 and her pet frog. The amusing character of girl is well expressed by Manjula Padmanabhan, which amuses the readers as well. Apart from applauses, "Double Talk" also claimed critics presuming the character is awkward.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

Various concepts for women empowerment is been formulated in several books and journals by Indian women writers. The prime idea of this article is to highlight the works of great authors and poet who provide lists of contribution to the English literature on variety of themes such as feminism, Indian democracy and discrimination. The concepts are purely women centric other than fiction. Most of their writings influence the society. It concludes that the laws which are framed for the welfare of women must not be violated. Writers like A.S. Priya and Bhargavi Rao translates others' novel. For e.g. "The God of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy is been translated to Malayalam by A.S. Priya and Bhargavi Rao translates novels to Telugu.

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