

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While going through Sunaina Singh's interesting book, The Novels of Margaret Atwood and Anita Desai: A Comparative Study in Feminist Perspective (1994), I was first struck by the idea as to how distinct is the "feminism" of the Indian women novelists writing in English today compared to that of their Western counterparts. However, my haphazard ideas found the primary theoretical shape only when I went through such postcolonial/third world feminists as Kumari Jayawardena (1986) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1992) who questioned the relationship between Western/First-world feminism and the third-world feminism. I was convinced by their argument in favour of re-writing women's history based on specific locations and histories of struggle as much as the day-to-day strategies of survival utilized by them. Within this broad term of third-world feminism, I then concentrated on other critics who are concerned with articulating the issues of race, gender, ethnicity, religion and self-reflexivity to provide a bridge between postcolonial intellectuals and postcolonial communities. Moreover, I was immensely influenced by postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Spivak (1985), Partha Chatterjee (1989), Lata Mani (1989) and a few others who are concerned with analyzing the systematic integration of women in the third world into nationalist/postcolonial discourses. Then I found to my surprise that during the last three decades, though the readers' attention to the novels of Indian women writers, especially those who write in English has remarkably increased, yet no serious critical endeavours have emerged to analyze and understand the intricacies of power relations narrated by them. Hence, as a student of Indian English literature, I could not resist the urge to re-examine the novels of some trendsetters through a fresh magnifying glass of

understanding and, if possible, to re-validate a feminist critical spectrum in the context of these writers.

Indian writers in general and women writers in particular have derived inspiration from extremely extensive parameters of themes, technique, language and characterization. In a single work one may find individualistic, social, political, economic, religious, spiritual and also psychological patterns co-existing. So, in this endeavour, I had to apply a wide variety of approaches — Marxist, psycho-analytical, sociological, deconstructionist, and new historicist — in order to frame an eclectic critical tool so that no injustice of exclusion of any sort is consciously committed.

Inclusion of only four novelists in this dissertation namely, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan should not be misinterpreted as very limiting. I have done it purposely and consciously due to several reasons. First of all, the figures from Kamala Markandaya to Githa Hariharan project a specific study of women writers covering the major experimentation from the middle of the twentieth century to the dawn of the present one. Undoubtedly, there have been other women novelists but the ones discussed here are trendsetters in the real sense. Their fiction reflects very comprehensively the image, the status, the plight, the struggle and the existential enigma of Indian women of all classes and creeds in the modern and post-modern India. Such major novelists of this period as Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Bharati Mukherjee may appear to be conspicuous by their exclusion, but they migrated very early in their career to the West and, in my opinion, most of their writings lack Indian sensibility.

The second reason for taking up these limited four novelists is their total involvement with the feminine issues. No other novelists of this period, male or female, tend so committedly to polarize around the evolution of women in India, especially after decolonization.

Many critical books and researches have drawn attention to these novelists. Here my effort has been to refer to as many of them as possible. Moreover, all the novelists included in this dissertation except Kamala Markandaya are still busy in writing and hence, any claim to a final evaluation of these writers will also be uncalled for at this stage. However, effort has been made to analyze the most recent of their works and attempt has been made to scrutinize them effectively and dispassionately without any prejudice and preconceived notion with a view to presenting a clear and correct picture of their feminist perspectives.

In course of my study I got enormous help from the National Library, Kolkata, the School of Women's Studies' Library, Jadavpur University, the Central Library, University of North Bengal, Centre for Women's Studies' Library, University of North Bengal, and the Centre of Women's Studies' Library, Guwahati University. I am really grateful to the management and staff of all these institutions.

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