

Report of the Minor Project submission as part of Eleventh Plan

Narratives on Indian women: Foregrounding the flustered and flummoxed female

**A study on the representation of women in
Indian Short stories in translation**

By

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OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

Research Objectives: It is hypothesized that when men and women narrate the same reality even then the description, the images and comparisons, the perspectives and perceptions differ.

In the foreword to the anthology of Khushwant Singh and Neelam Kumar, Kamala Suraiya observes, "Indian fiction has robust roots. Myth and reality, like the warp and woof together, construct the rich tapestry of our literature. In translation each story suffers a colour change. A sea change, infact. A reconstructive mode of translation is required but the authors, in distrust, seldom permit anyone to take liberties with their writings for effecting minor alterations or tidying up the phrases, however shoddy or tardy the originals appear in a word to word translation." She wants the authors themselves to attempt that. That is an indication of the present scene of the dependable sources for the project that has been undertaken. The number of good translations is few in number in terms of authenticity. In the same book the editor Neelam Kumar says "the concern that some of the best short stories of India have remained imprisoned within their geographic and linguistic boundaries...in the absence of translation they have been deprived from reaching a wider audience." Hence a study needs to look into the variety of literary output that has surfaced and an analysis of the same from the feminist perspective would give ample cultural material to debate on.

As it has been stated earlier, the present study focuses on

1. Emergence of the New Woman and her perception of new reality
2. The diminishing of the urban/rural divide
3. The changing social conditions show the inherent strength of the New Indian women to adapt to the newer circumstances
4. The shifting paradigm in social categorization, a change from loyalty to liberation
5. The silence of the previous era is juxtaposed with the varied voices in present
6. Depiction of marital strife, assertion of individuality and feeling of wasted womanhood
7. Representation of a world replete with destitution, poverty, upper-class avarice and debauchery
8. A possible re-reading of ancient texts/myths with a feminist angle
9. The use (and abuse) of language in projecting the hitherto sub-textual feminist arguments.

The study now focuses on certain representative works from each native Indian language and critically estimates the value of the same.

OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED

In the present study the project gave emphasis to the position of Indian woman as represented in the short stories of various languages. In the last fifty years, there has been a significant development in the themes expressed as well as the manner of expression in fiction. The following could be identified as the chief features of them:

- a) The similarity of themes invoked, signify empathy among the writers as well as their individual efforts at social reform.
- b) The theme of contrast between the educated and the uneducated, the powerful and the powerless
- c) The frank expression of sexuality which conveys the bold and the independent mind
- d) The prevalent social structures and social boundaries regarding men and women
- e) The interpersonal relationship between man and woman in the changing times and the need to re-orient the traditional thinking pattern regarding social roles and responsibilities

ACHIEVEMENTS FROM THE PROJECT

Feminist theory has rightly disputed the location of power in the traditional denominations of male and female activity. It has also challenged the hierarchical division of the private and the public. The realm of psychological interiority, the minutiae and the personal are imbued with the colour of resistance to patriarchy. By a curious analogue, the short story can be seen as an emblem. One can perceive the dictum 'small is beautiful' in the contemporary urban cultural scenario and that offers a rich diversity to the readers. The analysis throws to light the predicament of Indian women, despite all cultural and barriers, the continued oppressive patriarchal paradigm and the resistance shown by women to such perpetuated value systems.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The following recurrent motifs in the stories selected for study were identified;

- a) The liberation of women from their naïve outlook and embracing the realities of life. Marital strife, the assertion of individuality and feeling of wasted womanhood are common themes.
- b) Allegory of the woman's struggle within the revolution in a shifting historical moment can be seen. A re-reading of ancient texts/myths with a feminist angle.
- c) The theme of violation of women's rights and the patriarchal version of the control over women's body. The protagonist is the representative of the oppressed female who does not anything about law and jurisprudence. She knows that her body is weak and susceptible to man's carnal desires but once she reacts violently the society and law come together to put her in place.
- d) A representation of the new perception of reality, the deconstruction of the old norms that physical love is something that gets diminished by old age.
- e) The theme of shifting paradigm in social categorization, a change from loyalty to liberation.
- f) The stealing of innocence is a continuing theme in the narratives of rural India.
- g) The woman, brought under the control of male dominated code of ethics, could only suffer silently. This kind of willful acceptance of suffering, bordering on masochism, has been perpetuated in many parts of our country.
- h) It has a sub textual significance of the traditional projection of woman- the giver of life, the sustainer of life. The constant association of the tree with woman is not without significance. The dependability and steadfast way in which the tree gets attached to the family needs special mention.
- i) The perpetuation of glorifying the oldest profession of woman. They are just objects who are used (abused) and thrown away. The dignity of womanhood is stolen for the sake of gratifying man's physical desires.
- j) The portrayal of the hapless new generation grandmother. She is a representative of the victim - a society which cannot tolerate old people, especially, old women.
- k) The deep rooted prejudices and patriarchal norms that make a woman destroy her illegitimate new born offspring and a man trapped in a maniacal frenzy in his desire for a male heir of his own blood.
- l) The language of social protest is often highly metaphoric and symbolic and the complexity of the narrative challenges the reader with a different kind of an experience.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIETY

The study as such deals with only the thematic aspects of regional feminist short stories in India. Many related concepts and features are can be explored and some of them are given below;

1. The presence of the 'new feminine voice' in fiction in India
2. Analysis of the separate social cultural aspects reflected in women's writing.
3. A linguistic analysis to bring out their 'identity' and 'uniqueness' in feminist discourse.
4. Dialectal differences that is visible in socio-cultural discourses of writing depending on geographical distribution.
5. The possibilities of translation from regional languages to English thereby making them visible and central.