

EARLY INDIAN WOMEN ENGLISH NOVELISTS: A STUDY.

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Abstract:

Indian English novel is a late development. The earliest writing of Indians in English is considered as prose –letters, translations, and religious, social, political and cultural tracks. Some of the important factors for the late development of novel in Indian literature were the absence of novel as an important genre of imaginative literature, which gives artistic expression to the relationship of man and society. Novel as an art form came to India with the British. It was a new genre in Indian literature. Novels are vivid and gendered imaginings of selves and subjects. Reform is crucial in these enterprising undertakings – reform of self and society, including of patriarchy and racism. The novels of Toru Dutt, Krupabai Sathianadhan, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Swarna Kumari Devi Ghosal and their themes are discussed in this paper. The focus of reform in these novels concerns romance, livelihood, and women's education claims to spaces in the public sphere.

Keywords: Autobiographical, colonialism, feminist, melodrama, patriarchy, polemical, racism, reform, Romance, Utopia.

Introduction:

Indian English novel is a late development. The earliest writings of Indian English consisted of prose letters, translations, religious, social, political and cultural tracks. One of the important factors for the late development of novel in Indian literature was the absence of novel as an important genre of imaginative literature. Novel as an art form came to India with British. It was a new genre in Indian literature. Early Indian English novel is derivative and imitative of English models. Early novel writers evince little creative effort. What distinguishes Indian English novel from the very beginning is its social concern, realism and its unflinching interest in man. The Indian English novelist has always been true to this fundamental rule of novel writing. All great Indian novelists from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the father of Indian novel to Arun Joshi and Salman Rushdie have unflinchingly been true to this dictum. In this paper/article, I want to explore about the novels of Toru Dutt, Krupabai Sathianadhan, Rokeya

Sakhawat Hossain and Swarna Kumari Devi Ghosal. They all set in interstices of private and public spheres, participates in the large multivalent reform of gender relations and other matters in late 19 th Indian societies. The focus of reform in their novels often concern women education, livelihood and claims to spaces in the public sphere. However, reform in their novels also takes the shape of concerns over affect, finding, love or seeking conjugal romantic or sexual fulfillment in ways that stretch and question patriarchy.

Early Indian Women novelists (1860- 1918)

1. **Toru Dutt (1856 – 77):** Toru Dutt was cosmopolitan transnational writer whose fame spanned India, Great Britain, France and United States born to a gifted literary family; Toru's prodigious talents were encouraged by her father, Govind. She did not publish her novel in her own short life time though she did publish and gain a reputation for her poetry. Her father published her English novel heroine centered 'BIANCA' or 'The Young Spanish Maiden' in Bengal magazine after her death by TB. As it is penned by a teenage girl; it is more a product of imagination than of experience. Prophetically, melancholy, death and tragedy brood over this novel from its beginning to its complete end. The tale is about half-Spanish and half- British young woman, Bianca. In the beginning of the novel, Toru Dutt describes the deep sorrow of Bianca and her Spanish father Alonzo Garcia, on the death of her elder sister Intez. Bianca and her father are continuing to live in exile in England. Then Toru Dutt describes the romance of Bianca and Lord Henry Montague Moore, Bianca's mother plays a villainous role, conspires to estrange their relations with the help of Owen. Bianca is left alone as her fiancée moves to Crimean war front. When Bianca nearly dies after an illness, her father consents to her engagement to Lord Moore.

The structure of this novel is symmetrical. It shows the influence of Sir Walter Scott's famous romance 'The Bride of Lammermoor'. Bianca and Lord Moore are romantic characters. The themes of melancholy, tragedy, madness and death also dominate, Toru's French novel "Le journal de Mlle D'Arvers". It also weaves a story of romantic love. This French novel has strong resemblance to Toru herself in physical description, sensitivity and intelligence. Toru's novels which are heroine – cultural, constitute a distinctive and unique part of the larger line of 19 century Indian women writings fictitious delineating female growth and development.

2. **Krupabai Sathianadhan (1862 – 94):** Krupabai Sathianadhan was a younger contemporary of Toru Dutt; she too died tragically young at the age of thirty two. Like Toru she was also converted Christian. She was also known as Kamala Sathianadhan. She is remembered for her famous autobiographical novel '**Saguna: A story of Native Christian Life (1895)**'. It describes her own life till her marriage. It is the first auto biographical novel in Indian English fictions. It was serialized in Madras Christianity college magazine in 1887 – 88. Her second novel "**Kamala: A story of Hindu Life**"

was published in 1894 in Madras. It is true story of an upper caste Hindu child wife and later widow. It deals realistically with the miserable and unfortunate life of a girl in her husband's family.

Padmini Sengupta who wrote several biographies of distinguished Indian women like Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, etc, was Krupabai's step daughter. Padmini's mother, Kamala Krupabai's husband second wife, edited "The Indian Ladies magazine". Kamala edited this distinguished magazine first written by husband, Samuel from 1901 to until 1906, when died. Undaunted, she continued to publish the magazine until 1913.

3. **Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880 -1932):** Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was an educator, creative writer, essayist and feminist. In 1911, she founded a school for girls in Kolkata, which still exist today. Her feminist utopian narrative "Sultana's Dream" (1905), written in English, is a master piece. In the story, the driving force behind the utopian feminist country of Land lady and its success is women's education. In particular, Hossain emphasizes women's scientific cultivation and condemns male militarism. As a fable, "Sultana's Dream" has a succinct plot line. In Land lady, the women are busy cultivating their minds, thanks to a queen who deserves universal female education and bans enisled marriage. In the two universities created exclusively for women, innovative schemes are drawn up, one of which allows water to be drawn directly from clouds, while another permits solar heat to be collected and stored. When the country is threatened with defeat in war by a rival nation, The Lady – principals of the universities steep into the breach, making the withdrawal of men into the 'mardana' a pre condition for agreeing to rescue the country. The enemy is attacked with missiles fashioned from the concentrated heat developed by the women's universities and is defeated. Since, the men are now safely in the 'Mardana', the women continue to govern the country, now called Lady land, creating a utopia where science, technology and virtue work together harmoniously.

By contrast, 'Padmarag' (1924), is generically hybrid. It is a short novel with myhen melodrama and romance. It is also a polemical, passionate work on feminism, social welfare and education.

Thus, Hossain's literary oeuvre is fascinating for its story stylistic and generic innovations.

3. **Swarna Kumari Devi Ghosal (1855—1932):** Like Sathianadhan and Hossain, Ghosal was active in social reform. She founded the sakhi samiti, an organization to help widows and destitute women. She had crafted an impressive place for herself in the literary sphere in Bengal by the late 19 th century. She was an elder sister of the writer Ravindranath Tagore. Some of her works translated from the original Bengali were published in English. She edited the Bengali literary monthly "Bharathi" from 1884, on and off, for nearly 30 years. Her finest work is the novel "Kahaki" (1898), which she herself translated into English and it was published in London as "The Unfinished

song” (1913). This is a novel of manners and a whimsical, subtle love story about Moni, a sensitive, intelligent young woman seeking to find true love in the heart of the artificial, Anglicized Bengali drawing rooms of early 20 th century Calcutta. At first, Moni falls in love with Romanth who later deceived her. Later she fell in love with a young doctor. Ghosal protested against racism that was integral to colonialism.

Critique: Thus, the appearance of early novelists is an important development in Indian English Novel. Women wrote from the feminist point of view mainly of the social problems relating with women. Fiction by Indian women continues to be, from the early women writers. We encountered many contemporary writers such as Arundathi Roy, Anitha Deasi, Manju Kapoor, Sumitra Gupta, Shashi Deshpande and so many others. Indian English novel was in embryo in the early 19 th century but the tendencies and fictional and genres like social novel, realistic novel, historical novel etc. began in the late 19 th century.

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