



FEMINIST VOICES IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract:

The feminist voice is a socially constructed concept that cannot be set apart from experiences and emotions; it identifies struggles with bail and accuses the patriarchal system, who are suppressed, oppressed, ignored, and rejected by male-dominated society. In English literature, there are many female authors who raise their voices for a change in society, as Indian women strongly believe it would be unfortunate not only to confine them to the role of homemaker, but to retain their feminist aspects and desires in search of dignity and equality. This paper reflects and focuses on the voices of struggles faced by ordinary, middle-class women whose voices are for upliftment in society, and it should not affect the relationship between man and woman. It also shows how to empower people socially, politically, and economically. Many women writers generalize these issues and focus on recent modern women's transformation of lives from a patriarchal society to an image of professional, independent women. Despite her best efforts to break the age-old net of patriarchy, modern Indian women are no longer slaves to circumstances and patriarchal dominance. Even today, women seem to be suffering from certain weaknesses and complexes, which have become the central theme of most humanist and eminent writers like Jai Nimbakar, and Sudha Murthy. "The women of today are not looking for sympathy, pity, or charity. They are looking for a change in their mindset and the implementation of the laws of the land, which are just and fair. What they probably don't know is that they themselves are the harbingers of a change that is long overdue." Sudha Murty

Keywords: Assurance, Chauvinist, Oppressed, Transformation, Victimize

INTRODUCTION

The word feminism was first coined by French philosopher Charles Fourier in 1837. During the Communist movement, the theoretical developments were led prominently by middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America. In medieval Europe, women were denied the right to own property, to study, or to participate in public life. Women were prevented from conducting business without a male representative; in some parts of Germany in 19th century, a husband had the right to sell his wife. Moreover, a woman had little or no access to education. The feminist voices of the Renaissance coalesced into an enlightened rhetoric about liberty, equality, and natural rights. A person who supports feminism always believes in the political, social, and economic rights of all women, sharing power, responsible and transparent use of power, and accountable collaboration with respectful feedback. Emotional attachment is effacing, and human beings are becoming like machines. The woman protagonist asserts individuality above everything and ultimately achieves self-realization by building a successful career in their life. Human characters compromise and accept reality to maintain harmony.

Feminism in Indian English has acquired great significance in recent years. Like feminists in other countries in India, women struggle for gender equality. Indian English writers attempt to portray the depth of human emotions in relation to social realities. They focus on issues like human conflict, social injustice, and the image of the professional world. Some contemporary writers emerge to spread social messages through their writings. The leading and successful women writers portray middle-class women as sensitive, intelligent, educated, and career-oriented, but they are trapped in the roles assigned to them by family members and society. They believe in adapting and adjusting for the sake of domestic harmony rather than disruption. Deshpande rightly believes in “On the Writing of a Novel,” *Problems and Struggles of Indian Women* (1991): Women have a great deal of strength. All humans do... But for women, the situation is made more complex by the fact that they have been told they are weak and are made to believe in their weakness, and they often learn to hide their own strength because a woman’s strength seems to weaken men. ¹(Deshpande173)

Feminism in India has existed since the Vedic period. During the Vedic period, there was no gender discrimination in India. Women were extremely respected, revered to, and revered by the male members of the family. Gender discrimination in India started in post-Vedic and contemporary times. We still live in a patriarchal society, with the gradually changing face of women coming to light at all ages. *Feminist New Style*, a journal published in 1927, aptly declared that --“the new woman is a blend of physical freedom and stamina with feminist self-assertiveness and traditional domestic femineity, a woman who can combine pleasure, career, and marriage. They are eager to participate in pleasure as they would in play, work, etc.”²

Sudha Murty

Sudha Murty is an Indian English writer, one of the most emerging contemporary women writers and talented authors, who has recently made a significant contribution to the field of Indian writing in English. She is a philanthropist and a prolific author. Having published over 30 books. She attempted to share her message of optimism, jaw, and wisdom through her work. To develop this approach among people, we must adopt some principles for feminist leaders: self-care and caring for others; dismantling bias inclusions; sharing power; responsible and transparent use of power; and accountable collaboration with respectful feedback. Emotional

¹ Deshpande, 173 on the writing of a Novel, *Problems and Struggles of Indian Women* 1991

² *Feminist New Style*, a journal published in 1927

attachment is effacing, and human beings are becoming like machines. The woman protagonist asserts individuality above everything and ultimately achieves self-realization by building a successful career in their life. Human characters compromise and accept reality to maintain harmony.

Sudha Murthy's novels reflect the characteristics of feminism. She doesn't directly question the male-dominated society, but she uses her various characters in her novels to raise questions about male, egocentric society. Her heroines in her novels belong to middle-class, educated, working women. Her heroines deal with the problems, worries, and challenges of a painful situation that have never been exposed to society. Sudha Murthy lucidly describes her ideas in all her novels. She uses simple and clear words to express her thoughts.

Sudha Murthy has the knack of writing about issues, much debated in all her novels. Her books have had a profound impact on readers all over the world and have helped to raise awareness about a wide range of social issues in Indian society. Through her books, Sudha has tackled a wide range of issues from gender inequalities to the tension between tradition and modernity in child marriages. Her novel furnishes mixed and sundry ideas prevailed in an orthodox Indian society and the firm conscientiousness of a modern Indian woman. Her novels shed light on recent contemporary issues and the lack of insensitive human attitudes exhibited by society. As well as the mental agony and suffering experienced by people, particularly middle-class Indian women. Her novels are based on this idiom. "Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light in the heart."

She portrayed the feminist psychic; her heroines Vinuta, Shrimati, Anupama, Mridula, Bhagirathi, Nirmal, Rupinder, and Sumathi show their mettle in quest of their own freedom to be free from the clutches of patriarchal society. They voice out their predicaments boldly to be self-reliant and self-assertive. By adapting different strategies through feminist consciousness, these women emerge as powerful and become iconic inspirations for many women in society.

Mahashweta:

In *Mahashweta* (2007), the heroine Anupama shows her intense and unconditional love for her lover, Dr. Anand. "Like Rohini to Chandra; Lakshmi to Narayana, am I to him?" Dr. Anand does not honor her love simply because she suffers from an incurable disease called Leukoderma, a rare skin disease. He leaves Anupama for his further studies; she faced a lot of hardships, amidst tainting the minds of people. No artist can recreate the vibrant colors of nature on canvas. We think we all know about beauty, but we understand that external beauty is short-lived.³(MS 147) Anupama is portrayed in the first half of the novel as meek, submissive, enduring and condemning her fate, and expecting help from her husband, but in the second half of the novel, she emerges as a confident, self-sufficient, guiding, and respectable person. "We met accidentally, but we were not made for each other. Let us part with good grace."⁴ (MS149) She remained a liberated countess.

Dollar Bahu

Dollar Bahu (2005) depicts the life journey of a young protagonist, Vinuta, to find her identity through her feminine consciousness in the prevailing Indian contemporary society, in which a daughter-in-law is often treated like a sacrificial goat and always neglected. "She shed her tears while watering the garden, and no one in the house

³ Sudha Murthy, *Mahashweta* 2007, Pg 147 Penguin publishers, New Delhi

⁴ Sudha Murthy, *Mahashweta* pg. 149 penguin publishers 2007, New Delhi

knew of her sadness.”⁵ (DB 14) Vinuta and Girish are married; the first encounter she faced with her mother-in-law was, “If you sit in the garden the whole day, who will do the household work? Dirty clothes are piling up. I am sick of reminding you about every task...”⁶ (DS 11) Vinuta was treated as a slave by none other than the female members of their own family. Her mother-in-law constantly compares Jamuna and Vinuta in terms of their economic backgrounds. The pain and suffering that she has endured since her early formative years have chiseled her character to perfection. Through the astounding portrayal of Vinuta and her plight for survival in *Dollar Bahu*, Sudha Murthy successfully questioned and challenged age-old traditional beliefs and attempted to kindle the feminine sensibilities of her readers. Sudha Murthy sows the seed of great cultural change, paving a new path by projecting the character of Vinuta.

Gently Falls Bakula

Sudha Murthy’s first novel, *Gently Falls Bakula* (2008), portrays Shrimati as an individualist, goal-determinator, dedication, dutiful, sincere, and affectionate wife from a small place in North Karnataka, Hubli. Shrimati is adjacent to Srikant; both are educated at the same school. She always wins and stands top in her academics; she receives appreciation from friends, teachers, and family members. Shrikant falls in love with Shrimati; both are married. Shrimati sacrifices her professional desire and dedicates her life to her husband’s benefits. Shrikant climbs the highest ladder of success in the IT industry. He owns a company; in this process, he neglects his responsibilities and ignores his wife. “When I think of Srimati, I continue to be amazed by her clear thinking and wise decisions...”⁷(GFB103) Eventually, Srimati learns that Srikant loves his career more than her. Srimati recognizes that she has become her personal secretary; there is no more love, affection, or respect in their relationship. She assumes that she gave him all the power and authority to treat her like this, but when she looks back, she has nothing. Her life is filled with void and meaninglessness. “A house is made up of just four walls, but a home is where there is love, affection or a meaningful relationship. When that was not there, it was only a house, and the best thing was to get out of it”⁸ (GFB 152). Sudha Murthy portrays life as a journey with learning and unlearning experiences. Srimati puts an end to the solitude and yearns for freedom from the clutches of family shackles.

House of Cards:

House of Cards (2013) is the story of Mridula, a young lady hailing from a small village in Karnataka. She gets married to Dr. Sanjay. Sanjay gave his salary to Mridula and told her to manage the money. Later, Sanjay quits his government job and starts a nursing home. His quest for power and wealth manages him to manipulate her completely due to her ignorance and foolishness. Sanjay’s ambition to earn more and more moves him to correct his practices. "It's all about the faith that a wife has in her husband; without it, we have nothing. How can Sanjay destroy the faith I had in him?"⁹ (HOC 186) Marriage was not the destination for her. She goes away to release herself from the emotional obligation. She felt that it is better to be alone and happy than to be with someone who makes you feel inferior, undesirable, or inadequate. Mridula came out with a white cotton saree and a glow of peace on her face. “I have spent more than twenty-five of the most important years, and yet I never felt I belonged to you and your family. I am still an outsider. Now I want to live for myself. I have my job, my school, and my

⁵ Sudha Murthy, *Dollar Bahu* 2005 Pg 14, Penguin publishers, New Delhi

⁶ Sudha Murthy, *Dollar Bahu* 2005 Pg 11, Penguin publishers, New Delhi

⁷ Sudha Murthy, *Gently Falls Bakula* 2008 Pg 103, Penguin publishers, New Delhi

⁸ Sudha Murthy, *Dollar Bahu* 2005 Pg 152, Penguin publishers, New Delhi

⁹ Sudha Murthy, *House of Cards* 2013 Pg 186, Penguin publishers, New Delhi

village. You don't have to worry about me any longer.¹⁰ (HOCs 218) Mridula was honest, caring, and bold. She had enormous enthusiasm for life and unlimited energy. She wants to spend every minute of it fruitfully.

Sudha Murthy has successfully woven the thread of feminist analysis of women's problems, which has universal relevance. She understands the gravity of the situation facing Indian women and the age-old struggles that led to it, but she also holds the opinion that changing a woman's thinking is necessary before bringing about a change in a society.

Jai Nimbkar

Jai Nimbkar is one of the most prominent women writers. She belongs to a middle-class Brahmin family. She started her career as a creative writer with short stories and then turned them into novels. She is a meticulous craftsman and a conscientious, stylish writer. Through her writings, she presents her female protagonist, who faces all the hurdles and rigidity that arise out of the social system. Her stories for her novels are drawn from the trivia of daily life. She breaks new ground in the world of Indian English fiction. Her female protagonist, who strives to fulfill their pursuit of self-identity in her first novel, *Temporary Answers*, throws light on disputes between parents and children in a very heart-touching manner.

Jai Nimbkar brilliantly brings out the female assertion and their self-realizing to avoid socio-cultural association in their personal, domestic, and professional lives. There is a pathetic, cruel, and unequal fight between women and society. When the individual happens to be a woman, this attitude heightens, and it has been beautifully touched. This fundamental truth about the human situation comes not only as an abstraction but also as a self-felt and self-realized reality.

Temporary Answers:

Vineeta is very happy in her early days of marriage; Nagendra takes care of her; he attends pleasantly; and they enjoyed each other's company fully at home. In Indian culture, it is very pathetic that after marriage, a woman must change and adjust herself according to the norms of her in-laws. Nagendra's mother teaches her how to behave and treat others in the family. It's only after her marriage that she comes to know that Nagendra had proposed to her and married her only because she is a doctor. But Vineeta is so submerged in the marriage that she eagerly tries to learn to fit in with the scheme that her husband has for her. "Nagendra had his groups, and the same faces turned up everywhere. I tried to feel part of rebel against it all."¹¹ (23) As Vineeta understood that she had cheated, she started rebelling against him.

After the sudden death of her husband, Vineeta finds an undefinable emotional release. As Vineeta is professionally trained as a pediatrician, she is heavily dependent on her husband; she cannot justify her existence as a non-working woman. She indeed wonders why she has developed such abilities. She is not bold enough to start her practice; she finds it extremely difficult to stand on her own. "I wanted to go out for a walk in the cold night air, but I knew I couldn't without walking, Mother. Even if I could, I probably wouldn't anyway; the habit

¹⁰ Sudha Murthy, *House of Cards* 2013 Pg 218, Penguin publishers, New Delhi

¹¹ Jai Nimbkar, *Temporary Answers*. Pg 23 Disha Books, 1974

of being a woman, a helpless creature threatened by the forces of evil that lurked under the bland daytime face of society, was too deeply ingrained in me.”¹² (9)

Staying at home with parents, particularly her mother, is a big ordeal for her. Vineeta experiences her mother’s dominance at the age of twenty-eight; “Her parents think that even at twenty-eight she is not old enough to choose her friends.”¹³ (23) Vineeta’s first marriage has crippled her fully, but nobody seems to be aware of the damage. She seems to be fully convinced that social marriage has a damaging effect on human personality, particularly on the personality of women. Vineeta’s second encounter is with Vilash, her childhood friend who has given up his practice as a doctor in the U.S.A. He comes to Pune to meet widowed Vineeta. He encourages her to take up medical practice again and arranges for it in a joint setup. When he proposes to her, she considers Vilash only as a friend but not as her future life partner.

The third one is the most decisive of Vineeta's relationship with Prof. Abhijit Gokhale, who was introduced to her by her friend Kishori at a party. When she encounters Abhijeet, she at once feels that he is a totally unique person, a person of solidity and substance. She is attracted to him and desirous of more and more of his company. But finally, she realizes that love is also a temporary answer after going through intimate physical contact with Abhijit, who has nothing more to give. Vineeta observes: In any marriage, if one person asks more than the other is willing to give, then it's not a good relationship. It can destroy them both.¹⁴ (117)

Therefore, marriage, like love, is another temporary answer for her. Betty Frieden says that the core problem for women is not sex but identity, which has always been denied to them. Friedan opines about it in her book *The Feminine Mystic* 1963: “For women, as for man, the need for self-fulfillment, autonomy, self-realization, and independence is more important than the sexual need, with serious consequences when it is thwarted.”¹⁵ (TFM 282)

Come Rain

Ann, a newly married American wife, feels that she was left out and neglected by Ravi, an Indian husband always dominated by her mother, Mrs. Gogte. Mrs. Gogte humiliates and expresses her dissatisfaction in bitter words to her son: "Overnight, you forget all that I did for you and can be rude to me for the sake of this white monkey." ¹⁶ (CR 33) Ann’s encounter with Mohini, Ravi’s sister, and her lack of foresight makes her amazed and worried. Ravi measures a woman’s self-respect in her engagement with “shopping, cooking, and looking after the baby.” ¹⁷(CR 255). Ann stands firmly for her identity. Despite her mother-in-law's unbending stance, she decides to set up a separate house and stands under obligation. “Getting together has to be a conscious act of will.” ¹⁸ (CR 4) Ann, in response to her resolution, walked out and strongly refused her mother-in-law, “Thank you, Aai. I

¹² Jai Nimbkar, *Temporary Answers*. Pg 9 Disha Books, 1974

¹³ Jai Nimbkar, *Temporary Answers*. Pg 23 Disha Books, 1974

¹⁴ Jai Nimbkar, *Temporary Answers*. Disha Books, 1974

¹⁵ Freidan, *The Feminine Mystic*. pg. 282 published in 1963

¹⁶ Jai Nimbkar, *Come Rain*. Pg 33 Orient Black swan, 1993.

¹⁷ Jai Nimbkar, *Come Rain*. Pg 255 Orient Black swan, 1993.

¹⁸ Jai Nimbkar, *Come Rain*. Pg 4 Orient Black swan, 1993.

appreciate your offer, but I would rather be independent.”¹⁹ (CR 266) Jai Nimbkar projects and elevates Ann’s character to celebrate her heroine’s refraining and create a new female verbal oration.

Jai Nimbkar has successfully presented the real social conditions and families in India. However, she doesn’t take credit for her realistic portrayals. In an interview, she explains, “I am just a writer and perhaps put forward the woman’s point of view more effectively because I am a woman. It is just like writing about the place and the people that I really know. I can get inside the woman because I am a woman.” In fact, Jai Nambiar's vision of a woman’s predicament is sharper than that of the other writers. Her ability to capture the subtle nuances of interpersonal relationships and to breathe life into her characters so that they remain rooted in the social reality around them are her assets.

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¹⁹ Jai Nimbkar, Come Rain. Pg 266 Orient Black swan, 1993.