



Review of Post-Independence Selected Women Writers in India

Dr. Udhan A. S.

The 20th century brought with it the promise of empowerment of women. In the Indian sub-continent this took a prominent form post-Independence. India has some of the finest and internationally acclaimed women authors today, but this journey wasn't easy for some of the earliest women authors. The life and works of selected Women Writers have been analyzed as below:

Amrita Pritam

Amrita Pritam is a widely known and loved author and poet, for documenting the struggles faced by women during partition. Considered to be the first major woman Punjabi poet, novelist, and essayist, Pritam was also the first woman to win the Sahitya Akademi Award, amongst many other accolades. A pioneer in women's writing post-independence, she opened the door for thousands of women who up until then were never given a voice. Amrita Pritam is most remembered for her poignant poem "Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu" (Today I Invoke Waris Shah), addressed to Punjabi Sufi poet Waris Shah in which she laments the tragedy of the partition of Pakistan from India. In 1956, Amrita Pritam became the first woman to win the Sahitya Akademi Award for her long poem, 'Sunehade' (Messages). In 1981, she won the Bharatiya Jnanpith for the novel 'Kagaz Te Canvas' (The Paper and the Canvas). In 1969, she was conferred with the Padma Shri and in 2004 the Padma Vibhushan. She was also awarded the highest honour conferred by the Sahitya Akademi - 'Immortals of Literature' in 2005. In 1986, Amrita Pritam was nominated to the Rajya Sabha. Noted lyricist Gulzar released an audio album, 'Amrita recited by Gulzar' in the year 2007.

Ismat Chughtai

Ismat Chughtai was a liberal Muslim writer and considered to be a path-breaking woman writer of the region. Her work was often deemed controversial but that never stopped her from pursuing her passion. Chughtai was also the first Indian Muslim woman to have earned both- a B.A degree and B.Ed, according to Urdu Studies.com and was a part of the Progressive Writers Association. Speaking of her works that created a spark through the world, "Lihaaf" is a short story that will always gain attention. It revolves around the affair of a begum and her masseuse in Aligarh. The novel speaks about the sexual awakening of Begum Jan, who is



otherwise very unhappy in her married life. Lihaaf attracted a lot of controversy after it was first published, as it spoke about delicate themes like female homosexuality. Chughtai was also pressed with charges of obscenity.

Chughtai later wrote *Tedhi Lakeer* which was a quasi-autobiographical work. The novel met with success almost immediately. In the novel, she recounts the difficult circumstances that the Muslim community, and especially women, found themselves in with the waning of the British Raj in the backdrop. Ismat Chughtai, hereby, became the queen of Urdu literature with her novels and short stories. She later wrote many more novels like *Masooma*, *Saudai*, *Dil Ki Duniya*, and *Ajeb Aadmi*.

Shivani

Also known as Gaura Pant, Shivani was a fiction writer and had a cult status as a Hindi magazine novelist. Along with her popular fictional stories, Pant also penned her travels to Russia and London, and later moved onto her autobiographical work. In her stories, she always portrayed the central women characters as strong women; who many believed was her alter-ego.

She wrote mainly about women and her characters were usually good-looking like her though often they had tragic destinies. Her women were mostly upper-caste, living in traditional kumaoun families, fighting oppression in a gentle and non-threatening way, expressing solidarity with similar oppression among lower caste women. Often her stories had links with Bengali way of life, influenced by her stay at Shantiniketan university in far-eastern part of India, a university established by poet-writer and nobel laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore. She herself agreed that her writings were influenced by the Bengali writer, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

The literary critics were often dismissive towards the writings of Shivani, looking at her primarily as a writer of romantic fiction for women. In my opinion, Shivani presents some similarities to the British writer Rosamunde Pilcher, writer of acclaimed books like *The Shell-seekers*, *September* and *Coming Home* - writing in a gentle and evocative style, setting her most of her stories in Scotland, like Shivani's Kumaoun. Apart from *Krishnakali*, her more important novels include the following: *Bhairavi*, *Kalindi*, *Rati Vilaap*, *Vishkanya* and *Shamshan Champa*. She herself prefers her travel-book, *Charaiveti*.

Anita Desai



Shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times, Anita Desai is one of the gems India has produced in the recent years. The English graduate from the University of Delhi, Desai, started writing right in her childhood and published her first novel in her mid-twenties. A fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and of Girton College, Cambridge; she has also taught at some of the finest institutes in the US. Anita Desai is one of those privileged writers whose work was chosen by Ismail Merchant, a well-established writer and director for screen adaptation. Her book "In Custody" was adapted by the production house and won the President of India Gold Medal for Best Picture. Over the years, Anita Desai has been honored for her work by many national and internationally prestigious rewards. The Winifred Holtby Memorial Prize, Sahitya Akademi Award, Shortlisted, Booker Prize for Clear Light of Day, Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, Shortlisted, Booker Prize, Neil Gunn Prize, Shortlisted, Booker Prize for Fasting, Feasting, Alberto Moravia Prize 2000, Benson Medal of Royal Society of Literature in 2003 are some of the most well known awards that she has received.

in the early 1960s that Desai came out with her first publication 'Cry The Peacock' (1963). In the following years, she went on to publish a slew of books including 'Bye-bye Blackbird', 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?', 'Fire on the Mountain', 'Games at Twilight', 'Clear Light of Day', 'In Custody', and 'The Village by Sea'. Apart from these, Anita has written scores of short stories that have won her great accolades. Most of her plot line are either a representation or influenced by her personal experience of life. She never patronized a single theme or message, but instead believed in citing the truth as it is. In most of her works, she stressed on the lives of the Indian middle-class women as most of her female characters highlighted on their strained relationships. In her books, Anita has managed to deal with topics ranging from anti-Semitism to western quintessential ideologies of India and the death of Indian traditions and customs. Anita Desai never restricted limited herself to writing, but also spent time shaping young minds by teaching at Mount Holyoke College in United States and as a professor of humanities at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Baruch and Smith College.

Namita Gokhale

Namita Gokhale's writing has been revolutionary. Despite uproars from different parts of the country, following her satirical work due to its candid sexual humour; Gokhale has continued



to write about subjects that are considered controversial. She is also the co-founder-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival and the member-secretary of Indian Literature Abroad (ILA). *Dreams of Passion*, was published in 1984 and has remained continuously in print for the last three decades. *Paro* is a cult classic even today because of its candid observations of Indian society, and this marks much of Gokhale's work. Later, she battled illness and personal loss to write memorable works like *A Himalayan Love Story*, *The Book of Shadows* and *Shakuntala*, the *Play of Memory*. The Himalayan trilogy, which began with *The Book of Shadows* and includes *A Himalayan Love Story*, continues with *Things to Leave Behind*, published in 2016, described as her most ambitious novel yet. It brings to life the mixed legacy of the British Indian past and chronicles Nainital's reluctant entry into modern India. Gokhale's works of non-fiction include *Mountain Echoes*, which explores the Kumaoni way of life through the eyes of four highly talented and individualistic women. She has also worked extensively with Indian myth through *The Book of Shiva*, an introduction to Shaivite philosophy. She retold the Indian epic *The Mahabharata* in an illustrated version for young and first time readers in *The Puffin Mahabharata*. The anthology *In Search of Sita – Revisiting Mythology*, which she co-edited with Dr. Malashri Lal, presents fresh interpretations of this enigmatic goddess and her indelible impact on the lives of Indian women through essays, conversations and commentaries. A new forthcoming anthology along these lines focuses on Radha. Gokhale edited *Travelling In, Travelling Out*, a wide-ranging anthology of travel pieces that is a departure from the traditional travel narrative. *Himalaya: Adventures, Meditations, Life* co-edited with Ruskin Bond, is also a travel anthology and brings together a dazzling range of voices that spans the entire region: from the foothills to the highest peaks of the Himalayas. This was followed by *The Himalayan Arc: Journeys East of South-east*, which chronicles the eastern Himalayas with stories, essays and poems. *Lost in Time : Ghatotkacha and the Game of Illusions* , a novel for young readers, was published in November 2017. Gokhale was awarded the prestigious First Asam Sahitya Sabha Centenary National Award for Literature in October 2017.

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