

**THE WORLD WITHIN:
A STUDY OF NOVELS IN ENGLISH
BY INDIAN WOMEN, 1950—1980.**

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CERTIFICATE

I am satisfied that the thesis entitled "The World Within: A Study of Novels in English by Indian Women, 1950-1980", being submitted by Chandra Chatterjee is worthy of consideration for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and is a record of the original bonafide research work carried out by her under my guidance and supervision and that the results contained in it have not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma. I certify that she has pursued the prescribed course of research.

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ABSTRACT

The extra language ability which the educated Indian acquired within a few decades of Macaulay's Minutes led inevitably to the use of English creatively. The weak and imitative initial efforts were the necessary groundwork for the fast-paced growth at the end of the nineteenth century. The spurt came in the first quarter of the present century from the double onslaught of the freedom fervour on the one hand and the exposure to the West through its literature on the other. The novel as a genre was particularly exploitable in this rapidly shifting political and social national scene. The rich literary tradition and sensibility manifest in the literature of the regional languages helped bring the novel in English to a quick maturity. By the time the nation gained its Independence, even the debate whether a first rate book can be written in a language not one's mother tongue, became redundant. The host of talent which surfaced on a pan-Indian level and the sheer number of creative output, led to the concession that the choice of language was a matter of the fundamental right of the artist, and it did not repair or impair one's quality of writing.

It was at this juncture in the growth of Indian writing in English that women writers began to contribute

in a major way. The creative release of the feminine sensibility has been "an interesting aspect of the modern Indian enlightenment." After having shared the exciting and dangerous burdens of the freedom movement, women were now able to "articulate the national impulse and consciousness in the realm of letters." The body of literature produced by women fictionists since Independence is replete with a keen awareness of the day-to-day world. It is impressive in its improvisation of technique, and supple in its graft of a new language onto a long and living literary heritage. A study of their novels written between the years 1950-1980 reveals that whether autobiographical, political or social, the works of Indian women writing in English have a strong and distinct perspective which awaits critical attention and evaluation.

Through a close analysis of their novels in chronological order, it is the endeavour of my thesis to establish (a) that because of an inbuilt introspective bent in the novels of Indian women writing in English, an emerging awareness of the self's separateness constitutes the central tension in each work; (b) that the choice of artistic material i.e. theme, setting and technique, consequently has an organic relationship to this overriding emerging awareness of the individual self.

The above analysis enables me to point out that from 1950 to 1980, the novels by women authors pass through three discernible phases: (i) The novels of the first phase delineate protagonists who are aware of themselves at the emotional plane; but when faced with crisis they lack the preparedness to break away from their fast crumbling worlds of family, and conventions. Chapter II of my thesis takes up the following novels as representative of this phase: Kamala Markandaya's Nectar in a Sieve (1954), Some Inner Fury (1955), Santha Rama Rau's Remember the House (1956), and Attia Hossain's Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961).

(ii) The middle phase begins in the sixties, and in the novels of this phase the protagonists seem to be actively searching for new worlds to relate to. The emphasis is on the steps one takes to relocate oneself despite hostilities. Chapter III takes up Anita Desai's Cry, the Peacock (1963), Voices in the City (1965), Kamala Markandaya's A Handful of Rice (1967), and Nayantara Sahgal's The Day in Shadow (1971).

(iii) In the third and final phase, the emerging awareness of the self seems more to be the result of an intellectual probing. Instead of searching outside themselves, the protagonists find their inner selves to be of clinical interest. Chapter IV takes up Anita Desai's Fire on the Mountain (1977), Uma Vasudev's The Song of Anasuya (1978), Raji Narasimhan's Forever Free (1979), and Anita Desai's Clear Light of Day (1980).

The conclusion sums up the ever increasing thematic sophistication and finesse in the style of the novelists with each successive phase.

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