

**SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN WRITERS' CONTRIBUTION IN
ENGLISH FICTION**

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Abstract

The term 'South Asian Literature' refers to the literary works of writers from the Indian subcontinent and its Diaspora. Countries to which South Asian Literature's writers are linked include India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. South Asian women writers are largely categorized as those who are either indigenous to India, Pakistan and those who are of South Asian decent but reside in the diasporas. The fiction these women write differs from that of their male counterparts in several ways, including their depiction of female characters. The writers assert their own definitions of femininity through the female protagonist. The literature of the subcontinent presents a 'mosaic of cultures' representing the system of values, meaning and social. Women writer from Pakistan, Bangladesh, SriLanka, India etc have contributed significantly to South Asian English Fiction. Writers including Kamla Markanday, Anita Desai, and Nayanatara Sahgal, Talat Abbasi, Moni Mohsin, Tamima Anam, Suvimalee Karunaratna etc have portrayed the contemporary society in their fictional writing.

Key words: *South Asian women writers, diaspora, femininity, globalization*

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What do women writers talk about? And the answer is everything—gender, caste, pain, loneliness, struggle, poverty, rootedness, rootlessness, family issues, politics, revolution, creativity, etc.

Expectedly, religious based identity in a world increasingly dominated by conservative 'fundamentalism', 'sectarian', 'communalism', and the now ubiquitous 'war on terror' emerged as a major issue confronting several writers cutting across countries and faiths.

Literature in South Asia has long been criticized by the perpetuation of the traditional 'Sita Savitri' stereotype. Women are often projected in Indian women's fiction as trapped and daughter. These women are usually depicted as victims of social and political injustice, cruelty and exploitation.

Writers including Kamla Markanday, Anita Desai, and Nayanatara Sahgal have documented dissatisfaction with the cultural and sexual roles assigned to Indian women through the issues raised in their stories and the

protagonists, characteristics, evoking their internal psychic turmoil.

Shashi Deshpande depicts the middle class Indian women who seek an identity beyond that of the familial one, who seek a role outside of the culturally prescribed one. Her writing continues subtle understated, as has always been her style. She weaves her tapestry with quiet cloured threads, but the picture which emerges is vivid.

Booker Prize winner Arundhati Roy is an Indian novelist. She won the booker prize in 1997 for her first novel 'The God of Small Things'. Since, she has concern trated writing on political issues, like globalization, Nuclear Weapons, Narmada Dam project, etc.

The literature of the subcontinent presents a 'mosaic of cultures' representing the system of values, meaning and social. Recently, Pakistani women writers have focused on the social injustice prevailing throughout contemporary society in Pakistan.

Talat Abbasi's stories depict the silent and often internal struggle prevalent between the empowered and the disempowered, those accepting their fate and those rebelling against it. Talat Abbasi opens new vistas for the hitherto unrepresenting class and hints at the necessity of change.

'Bitter Gourd' is a collection of seventeen stories which explore the worlds of Pakistanis in Karachi and its environs. The stories speak of the entrapment of gendered roles of class and culture as a force determining relations between masters and servants, husbands and wives and of the struggle for freedom from this entrapment, sometimes successful.

Moni Mohsin's 'The End of Innonce' is yet another example of very high quality fiction in English from Pakistani women writers. Her characters are deftly sketched, instantly recognizable and remarkably fresh. The juxtaposition of the lifestyle of different classes intricate threads of social proprieties and customs and norms displaying a fine discernment and the ability to represent of complex issues in an enthralling manner.

Bangladeshi women novelists Monika Ali, Tahmima Anam and Shaheen

Akhter, explore the painful history of their country, Ali by looking at its current relations; Akhter and Anam by looking at the 1971 war.

Monica Ali was born in Dhaka in 1967 and came with her parents to England when she was 3. Her mother is English and her father Bangladeshi. She was named one of Granta's "Best Young British Novelist" in 2003.

Monica Ali attempts to bring her readers everything she knows or has learned about Bangladesh. Not only does she focus on life in Tower Hamlets, giving us a glimpse of class and gender relations there, but she also tries to impart life in rural Bangladesh.

Unlike Monica Ali whose novel "Brick Lane" looked at the lives of Bangladeshi immigrants in London, Anam focuses on those who live through the cataclysm that transformed East Pakistan into an independent nation.

Tamima Anam was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1975. Yet from her family's stories and her own research, she has crafted a compelling tale steeped in her native land's diverse culture. A Golden Age Chronicles a young widow's hesitant heroism during the convulsive year 1971. When rebels including the widow's teenaged son and daughter battle, an army employing genocide and torture to subdue Pakistani's breakaway eastern region.

Set in the dusty streets of Dhaka and the villages and river-islands of rural Bangladesh, at a time when the rise of religious fundamentalism was a whisper in the wind, The Good Muslim is an epic, unforgettable story- the challenges of peace in the long shadow of war. It is a novel that clears the simple truths that shape all of our lives: that the bonds of family and love often strain to bear the weight of history.

Samantha Sirimanne Hyde's debut collection of short stories makes an interesting addition to the growing body of Sri Lankan- Australian expatriate fiction in the tradition of writers.

The writer migrated to Australia in 1990 where she worked for 10 years as immigration officer. Her duties had their dangerous side, which including taking part in raids, many conducted in some of the more dubious

neighbourhoods of Sydney. The impact of these experiences is reflected in her stories.

Her well-crafted stories are concerned with real human issues, and the characters are not figures merely dressed up to represent issues of expatriation and contemporary politics. Although the political concerns underlying the stories are often grim, the politics never overwhelm over the human aspect.

The stories also peopled with characters that society might dismiss as losers: the jilted and the deceived, such as the illegal migrant who isn't shrewd enough to avoid getting caught by the authorities, and the middle-aged everyman whose marriage ends in a series of events that he has unwittingly initiated.

Suvmalee Karunaratna was born in 1939. She took creative writing in 1964 and a number of her short stories appeared in English language in Sri Lanka. She also was a free lance journalist. Her short story has been broadcast by the world service of the BBC and has contributed regularly to local literary journals. Her first collection of short stories, including the prize winning 'The golden oriole' appeared under the title Bili Pooja [1973]. In 1993 her first novel Lake-Marsh, was published. The main theme of the novel has to do with lethargy, corruption and ethnic strife which bedevil Sri Lanka society today, laying wide open the doors to exploitation and which threaten to clog up the arteries of national life.

Punyakante Wijenaike is a Sri Lankan writer of short stories and novels. Her first tale took up traditional village themes, although she has lived most of her life in Colombo and later turned to urban themes as well. In a preface to *The Waiting Earth*, her first novel, she herself wrote, "As in my book of short stories *The Third Women*; there is no high endeavour and no moralizing. The characters and the incidents in the book were real to me and I hope they will be romantically read to the reader." Nevertheless, she has been called "one of the most underestimated fiction writers currently at work in the English language and her fiction has been taught in university courses in Britain, Australia and other countries. The tyranny of community or a group towards its weaker members is recurrent theme in her writing. Her latest novel *Amulet* was the

winner of a literary prize for the best Sri Lankan boo in English in 1994.

Emerging women writers show no sign of being hemmed in by topics intimately familiar to them, such as name, family and their immediate social milieu. The economic recession, the war against terrorism, natural disasters, the tsunami female migration of domestic labour and the growing number of women going to university offer a wealth of ideas.

Tilled Earth is a collection of some twenty short stories and 'micro-stories' by Nepali writer Manjushree Thapa through which readers are given an up-close and, at times, uncomfortably personal look into the lives of Nepalis and foreigners in rural and urban Nepal, as well as they travel or live abroad.

A recurring theme in some of the stories seems to be that of a journey, not always in the literal sense, which often doesn't turn out as planned. Original intentions are questioned, destinations and goals change, what once seemed right, or desirable, in the end wasn't what the characters wanted' or ended up with at all.

In other stories, one gets a sense of 'overload' for some living in Nepal....so much is happening, politically, socially, culturally.

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