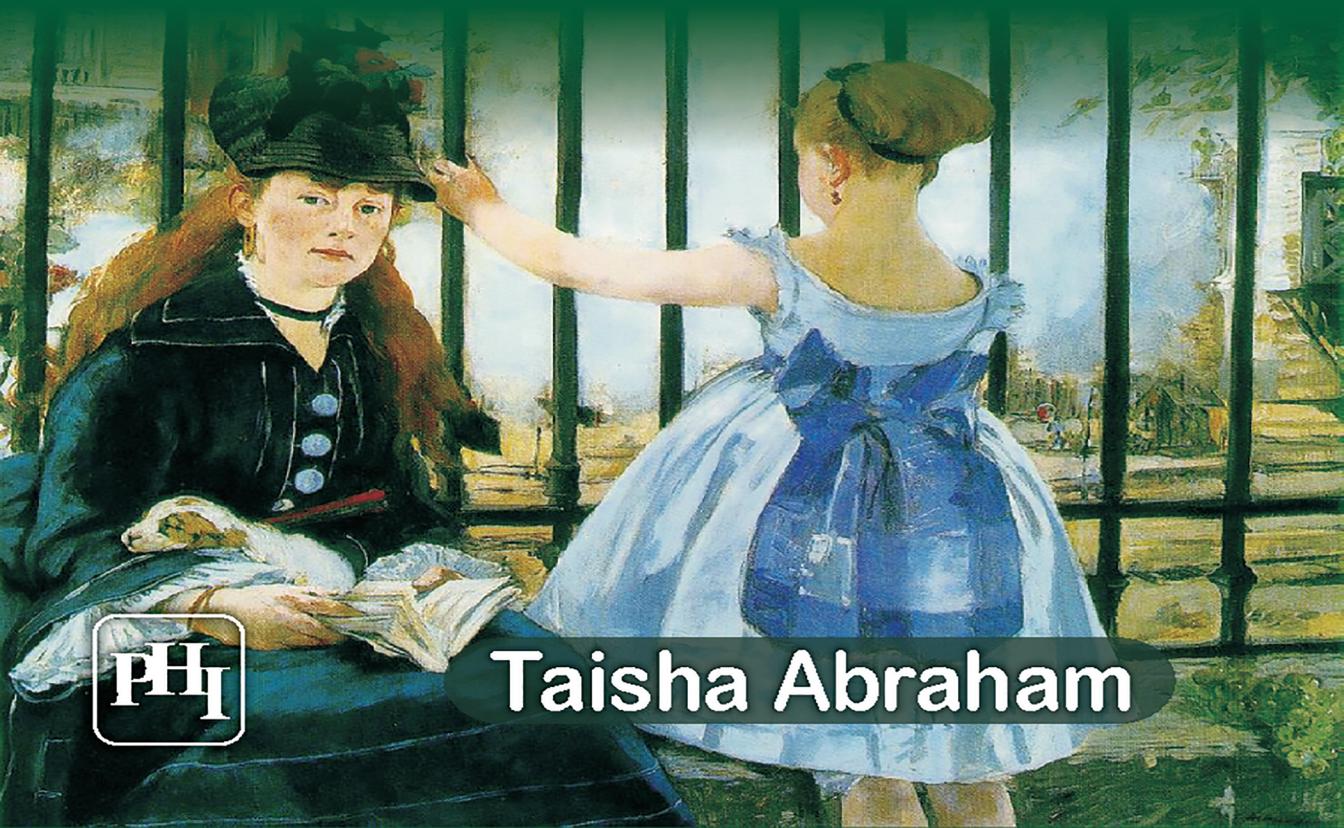


Women's Writings in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries



SHORT STORIES



Taisha Abraham

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2013

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Short Stories

Taisha Abraham

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Cover Design: The famous painting by Édouard Manet (1872–1873)—The Railway.

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Preface

Increasingly, universities across India are realizing the need to revise traditional literary canons to include the categories of gender, race, class and caste in the syllabus. The significance of the intersections of these categories in texts is now being viewed as recognition of the intellectual demands of changed pedagogical approaches to the teaching of literature today.

The endeavour has particular relevance at this historical conjuncture when universities across India are also undergoing major structural changes. Radical challenges are being thrown up within the globalization debate that is centring on notions of exclusion and inclusion. Typically, such challenges necessitate critiques of existing social and political relations and the conditions of their production so as to create critical self awareness among students. The inclusion of literary courses on women writers is one such attempt to facilitate new modes of thinking that provide sharp insights into the operations of power and its historical reconfigurations across cultures.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part provides the historical and feminist frame within which the short stories by the Anglo-American women writers should be read. The second part gives critical introductions to the four authors studied in the book along with detailed biographical time lines and bibliographies. This is followed by the stories written by Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Willa Cather and Katherine Mansfield. The third part comprises three critical essays that are important in providing further insights into the period in which the four women writers were writing. These three essays map the reading practices, notions of female authorship, and the development of gay literary traditions that had an impact on the women writers.

Édouard Manet's painting, "The Railway" on the cover, was chosen for several reasons. It is a late nineteenth-century painting that coincides with the period in which some of the women writers in this book were writing. Several women writers were influenced by the techniques of the impressionists in the writing of their short stories. Three of these can be identified as: capturing through short sentences the essence of situations in all their complexities, showing the vibrancy of nature, and portraying truth in shades of grey rather than in black and white. Although Michel Foucault had stated that Manet had done for painting what Gustave Flaubert had done for literature, I would argue that Manet along with other impressionists did as much for the development of the short story as Flaubert did for the novel. What is also interesting is the fact that the picture depicts the dual roles demanded of Victorian women in general, and women writers in particular. The painting, which is set in Paris by the railroad outside the Gare Saint-Lazare, shows a little girl looking through the iron railing of the station facing her back to the young woman who is seen with a book in her hand, looking in another direction. It is not in her home that the woman is seen with the book, but in transit, in a railway station, before catching the train ...

The book is addressed to undergraduate students of English for their course on Women's Writings in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Besides, feminist scholars will find the women writers discussed both valuable and interesting.

TAISHA ABRAHAM

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