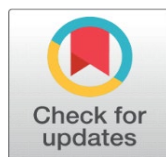


EMERGENCE AND ENRICHMENT OF INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Indian English writing refers to the literature, attempted by Indians in English, whether it is in the form of prose, poetry, drama or fiction. During the infant stage of Indian writing, the main form of writing was poetry. It was followed by other kind of writing, especially drama. Though Fiction was the last to arrive on the Indian English literary scene, later the growth of fiction left behind the most of the other forms. Indian fiction in English, like other branches of Indian English literature, originated and grew up in the inspiration or under the guidance of the British writers. Britannica-Encyclopedia defines the fiction as under: -

“Literature created from the imagination, not presented as fact, though it may be based on a true story or situation. Types of literature in fiction genre include the novel, short story and novella”¹

The definition of Fiction according to Cambridge Dictionary: -

“The type of book or story that is written about imaginary characters and events and not based on real people and events”².

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian English writing refers to the literature, attempted by Indians in English, whether it is in the form of prose, poetry, drama or fiction. During the infant stage of Indian writing, the main form of writing was poetry. It was followed by other kind of writing, especially drama. Though Fiction was the last to arrive on the Indian English literary scene, later the growth of fiction left behind the most of the other forms. Indian fiction in English, like other branches of Indian English literature, originated and grew up in the inspiration or under the guidance of the British writers. Britannica-Encyclopedia defines the fiction as under: -

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The introduction of English as a medium of instruction in India in the nineteenth century was based on the Macaulay’s vision. That was the beginning of a class of people, who were in the support of the Macaulay’s system of education. The importance and grandeur of English language was popularized by a class of people in India. These were the people, who were British-born, British-based or British-made, who tried to influence Indian people gradually. People

started to take interest in communicating their ideas in English language. In the beginning the people adopted English language to raise their problems in front of British officials in their language. As mentioned by Harish Raizada: -

“The appeal for improving the condition of Indian people and the relationship between India and England was to be made to the English rulers, many of Indian writers chose to write in English, and as novel was a literary genre most suited to the proper representation of life and its problems, they took to fiction for expressing their views”³

The earliest efforts of writing fiction were in the form of tales or travelogues rather than novels that appeared in journals. Kylas Chunder Dutt's 'A Journal of 48 hours of the year 1945' was published in the 'Calcutta literary Gazette' in 1835. The same type of work by Shoshee Chunder Dutt's 'Republic of Orissa: Annals from the twentieth century' published in the 'Saturday Evening Hurkaru' in 1845.

The Dutt family can be mentioned to be the forerunner of the English literature in India. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda are also included among the first and foremost literary figures in the history of Indian English literature. Their works presented great social, cultural and moral values. The writing style and subject matter of their literary works were basically influenced by the western literary writers in English. Sir Edmund Gosse was the person who suggested Sarojini Naidu for the first time to write about her own country and culture so that the world may know about India and its prosperous culture. In the starting period, there were many genres in Indian English writing. It was the Indo-Anglican literature which was universally accepted as a form of Indian literature. In this regard the remark of C. D. Narasimhaiah is praiseworthy:

“Indian English writing is a definite contribution to the composite culture of India. It is primarily a part of the literature of India like other literature written in various regional languages. It can represent the life of a village like Bulshah or Kanthapura, a small town like Malgudi or Kedarlam or sweep through continents and eternity itself, and so long as the operative sensibility of the writer is essentially Indian, it will be Indian literature”⁴

2. HISTORY OF WRITING FICTION IN INDIA

The fiction writing in India, whether it is translated or written in English, came only in nineteenth century after the introduction of English in the Indian universities. The journey of Indian English writing began with the translation of the fictional work of regional languages into English.

The First- Generation Novelists:

'Rajmohan's Wife' published in 1864 by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is considered to be the first full-length English novel. Some other novels published in the nineteenth century are 'The History of Bengal Raiyat' in 1874 by Lal Bihan Day, 'The Young Spanish Maiden' in Bengal Magazine in 1879 by Toru Dutt, 'The Young Zamindar' in 1883 by S. Chunder Dutt.

The Earliest historical novels include 'The History of Panipat' in 1884 by Mirza Moorad Ali Beg, 'Nur Jahan' in 1909 by Jogendra Singh, 'Clarinda' in 1915 by Madhaviah, etc. The early novels written on the East-West encounter are 'A Peep Behind the Indian Ernest' and 'The Prince of Destiny' in 1909 by S. K. Ghose. It was the phase of transition, writers like Dhan Gopal Mukherjee became known for his only novel 'My Brother's Face' in 1924. It was the first Indian English novel, which considerably connects from the beginning to the contemporary fiction as far as theme of identity crisis is concerned. Theme of identity crisis is still prominent in the modern fiction whether these are Indian or immigrant writers. In this regard, we can't forget the contribution of K. S. Venkataramani (1891-1952), who wrote his famous 'Murugan, The Tiller' in 1927 and 'Kandan, The Patriot' in 1932. Fiction writing in India comes especially from metropolitan cities. Most of the writers received their education and their writing skills from abroad such as- Mulk Raj Anand, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh and other writers like Raja Rao, Kamala Markanday, Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni who are settled abroad. There are some other writers like Anita Desai and Geeta Mehta who temporarily migrated and spent maximum period of their life in abroad.

Indian fiction in English began with the basic social issues which were spreading in the society. K. Venkata Reddy and P. Bayappa Reddy say:

“Parallel to this struggle for freedom was a social struggle- a fight against superstitions, casteism, poverty, illiteracy and many other social evils that were eating into the vitals of Indians society. The sociopolitical movement that had caught the imagination of the entire nation also inspired the Indian novelists in English who rightly realized that novel too had a vital role to play in it”⁵

The Pre-independence period of Indian English fiction is full of the diverse themes like freedom struggle, Gandhian ideology, social reforms India's modern destiny and Indian social problems etc.

The Second-Generation Novelists:

Though the fiction writing in India began in the nineteenth century, the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a fantastic growth of the fiction. The greatest achievement in the history of Indian English fiction was in the nineteen thirties with the appearance of its major novelists, known as Indian Trio: Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. The first novel of these writers published in 1935, 1937 and 1938 respectively. Anand's 'Untouchable' and 'Coolie' in 1936, Narayan's 'Swami and Friends' and 'The Bachelor of Art' and Raja Rao's 'Kanthapura' marked the beginning of a solid foundation of Indian English fiction. These three novelists continued their writing till the end of twentieth century. The 'trio-phase' - the literary period of the trio in the early twentieth century marked the beginning of writing novel as a genre in India. Since the great three appeared on the scene, a gradual flow was seen in Indian English fiction writing. As per the comments of Deshpande:

"In Indian English fiction the trio is hailed as trail blazing Indian novelists in English"⁶

During the publication of these three Indian novelists, a variety of themes like social injustice, tradition versus modern, women predicament, philosophical insight, illusion etc. were added to the novels.

Novels written by the second-generation writers are more modern and realistic. The theme of these novels deals with the problems of men and women moving through various revolutionary changes. The subject matter of the previous period novels was mainly based on the external aspects of society; it gave a little attention on inner conscious of human feelings. After the commendable development in the hands of second-generation novelists the genre of novel became more delicate, philosophical and psychological. The change in the subject-matter of novel requires the use of new technical devices for example; many novelists ingeniously used the devices of stream of consciousness technique. Satish Kumar in his 'A survey of Indian English Novel' writes:

"During the era of toddling Indian English Novel, in spite of many hindrances and handicaps, has learnt to stand firmly on its legs. A conscious and artistic pattern has evolved itself. The novel has become a great literary force, a powerful medium for social and national awareness and for suggesting ways of changing society"⁷

R. K. Narayan (1906-2001)

A south Indian writer, started his career as a novelist in the year 1935 by publishing his first novel 'Swami and Friends'. Today he is considered as one among the most popular Indian novelists in English. He was greatly inspired and even got appreciation from great English critic writers like Elizabeth Bowen, E. M. Forster and Graham Greene. None of the contemporary Indian English novelists is thematically as great as R. K. Narayan. According to S. C. Harrex:

"R. K. Narayan has no equal among the Indian novelists writing in English. He manages by miracle of perception and choice of detail to convey the Indian without a single false feeling or gesture"⁸

R. K. Narayan's themes appear more from Indian village community which is usually left behind from the main stream of society and modern life. His literary world is completely based on Indian community. His famous creations are as follows:

'Swami and Friends' published in 1935, 'The Financial Expert' in 1952, 'The Vendor Sweet' in 1967, 'The Bachelor of Arts' in 1937, 'Waiting for Mahatma' 1955, 'The Dark Room' in 1938, 'The guide' in 1958, 'The English Teacher' in 1945, 'Mr. Sampath' in 1949, 'The Man Eaters of Malgudi' in 1961, 'A Tiger For Malgudi' in 1983 and others focusing on social aspects of Indian life.

R. K. Narayan's characters in his are ordinary, fool, local and simple, with the touch of irony and light humors. He immortalized his characters. He wrote in both pre-independence and post-independence period. Narayan is the only novelist whose literary career extends for more than sixty years from 1935 to 2001.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004)

The great 'trio' started their writing career more or less in the same period, but they are different from one another as per their literary approaches and objectives. Mulk Raj Anand is a humanist. He is a deep intellectual as far as humanity is concerned. One of his critics says,

"His concern as a fiction writer has been always the redemption of the poor and oppressed of the society from the clutches of the rich and oppressor an objective which he pursues with zeal of missionary"⁹

The problem of poor and oppressed people is not the problem of India but it is the problem of the different parts of the world. So, when Anand writes for the redemption of these people that is not only concerned with Indian society but also concerned with the society of the whole world. Mulk Raj Anand was influenced with various European political ideologies such as Marxist and Russian Revolution. At the same time, he was swayed over by Indian nationalism. Besides that, he was considered as one of the chief organizers of progressive movements in England and India. He set a platform for many Indian English writers' workshops and conferences and initiated number of good social order. It is said about him:

"He has no tears, no grief but only anger and aims to change the whole Indian society"¹⁰

More than thirty books are written by Mulk Raj Anand, which include novels and short stories. His most famous novels are 'Untouchable' published in 1935, 'Coolie' in 1936, 'Two Leaves and A Bud' in 1937, 'Village' in 1939, 'Across the Black Water' in 1939, 'The Big Heart' in 1945, and 'Sword and Sickle' in 1942.

Raja Rao (1908- 2006)

Raja Rao is one of the most popular novelists today. He is known more as a post-independence novelist. He has written five novels 'Kanthapura' in 1938, 'The Serpent and The Rope' in 1960, 'The Cat and Shakespeare' in 1965, 'Comrade Kirillov' in 1976 and 'The Chessmaster and His Moves' in 1988. His only pre-independence novel published in 1938 was 'Kanthapura'. Raja Rao differs from his contemporary writers based on Structure and themes. He included both the Eastern and Western world in his literary works. He is also called an experimental novelist. He took liberty with his form and narrative of writing. He gave emphasis on the development of Indian English and for its recognition in India. He discussed philosophy and metaphysics as a subject matter in his novels.

Post-independence Indian fiction gained a momentum during the Gandhian period. The tradition of social realism was established by Mulk Raj Anand, which was continued by novelists such as, Manohar Malgaonkar, Bhabhani Bhattacharya and Khushwant Singh, who came into the scene during the nineteen fifties and the early sixties. By the end of the Sixties and early seventies new voices were raised, the most striking of them were Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal.

Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906-88)

Bhabani Bhattacharya was one of the earliest social realists of the period. He was strongly influenced with Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindra Nath Tagore. He considered that a novel must have a social purpose. He was an experimentalist like Raja Rao. The main themes of his writing were casteism, fascism, famine and Indian freedom movements. His writing was started when India was passing through a transformation phase of history. Indian struggle was in the final phase of freedom movement. There was an unending hunger of politics in Bengal. The physical hunger of Bengal swallowed more than two million people. The regional and political hunger washed down the whole country. These heart-breaking moments of the country moved the novelists often provoking them to write on the same theme. Bhabani Bhattacharya says,

"A novel must have a social purpose. It must place before reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and literature that is much in vogue does not appear to me as judgement"¹¹

Bhabani Bhattacharya's 'So Many Hungers!' in 1947 is a document on the history of draught in the West Bengal. It is unfortunate that the Sahitya Academy did not consider the novelist of such a remarkable achievement even. He wrote many novels but some famous novels are like 'Music for Mohini' in 1952, 'He Who Rides the Tiger' in 1954, 'A Goddess Named Gold' in 1960, 'Shadow from Laddakh' in 1966 for which he won the Sahitya Academy award in 1967, and 'A Dream in Hawaii' in 1975.

His sensibility of situation and mastery over the narrative techniques, the reality of his locale, his prudent concern as an Indian and his simple recognizable character types may have created a picture of real India which fits in admirably with preconceived foreign notion about our country.

Apart from Bhattacharya and the other major novelists, there were few writers of fiction with a substantial corpus to their credit in the postindependence period. Ruskin Bond, An Anglo-Indian is one among them. The Room on The Roof (1956), Love Is a Sad Story (1975) etc. are novels. He has written a number of books for children.

Khushwant Singh (1915-2014)

He is a popular journalist and a bilingual writer of modern India. He is considered a novelist of 'partition theme' his Train to Pakistan in 1956 is published in the post-independence period, but it deals with the theme of pre-independence era. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra observes about this novel as:

"It remains the best regarded novel in English on Partition"¹²

Train to Pakistan is the tragic history of Punjab happenings during the partition, when the innocent people were seized by mad communal frenzy. It was a kind of advice to the young people that they must guard themselves from the madness of communalism. His achievement was his detachment in narrating a story. His Train to Pakistan, not only the story of partition, but also a story of Jugga's love for a Muslim girl named Nooru. The tragic situation of partition didn't allow them to live together. The place of incident is Mano Majra, a village in the Punjab. In starting Mano Majra was the real title of the book, later it was changed to the present title. The author's other novels include 'I Shall not Hear the Nightingale' in 1959, 'Delhi' in 1990, and 'The Company of Women' in 1999.

Post-independence period witnessed the second-generation writers other than the writers mentioned above like Manohar Malgaonkar, Chaman Nahal, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghose etc. These writers gave new varieties and landmarks in Indian English fiction writing. These writers basically deal with political and historical writing. Another approach, in the form of psychological fiction is also seen in the novels of Arun Joshi.

Women Writers

There was an early appearance of women novelists in Indian English writing. The main four women novelists appeared in the nineteenth century. Raj Lakshmi Debi's novel 'The Hindu Wife' or 'The Enchanted Fruit' published in 1876, Toru Dutt's unfinished novel- 'Bianca' or 'The Young Spanish Maiden' in 1878, Krupabai Sathianandhan's 'Kamala: A Story of Hindu Child Wife' in 1895 and 'Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life' in 1895 and Shevantibai Nikambe's 'Ratanbai: A sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Young Wife'. The main theme of some early Indian fictions was social reforms. Themes such as- condition of women, the merciful condition of peasants and the downfall of aristocracy were dealt with in the many works. The political themes in were not in forefront in women novels. Other variety of fiction in early appearance was historical romance.

A remarkable development was the rising of an entire school of women novelists. The main novelists among them in the leading figures were Ruth Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sehgal and Anita Desai.

Ruth Jhabvala (1927-2013)

Jhabvala's novels were in two varieties and evenly matched groups- comedies of Indian middle class urban life, mainly in joint Hindu families and ironical studies of the East-West encounter. The most unique feature of her novels is the subtlety in which she unravels the silk threads of complex human relationship-especially among the women in the Hindu undivided family. 'To Whom She Will' in 1955, 'The Householder' in 1960, 'Heat and Dust' in 1975 etc. are some of her works.

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004)

An immigrant writer offers a great variety of scenes, characters and effects. Her typical themes are few. The main themes are namely the East-West encounter, and different life-roles of women. The EastWest encounter are in two forms- first, the direct relationship between Indian and British people; and second, the impact of the British modern urban culture on traditional Indian life. Her first novel 'Nectar in A Sieve' in 1954, 'Some Inner Fury' in 1952, 'Possession' in 1963, 'The Nowhere Man' in 1972, 'The Golden Honeycomb' in 1977 etc. are some of her well-known novels.

Nayantara Sehgal (1927-)

She is regarded as a forerunner of the political novel. Her novels deal not only with politics themes but also with search for the sexual freedom and self – realization of modern Indian women. Sehgal believed that:

"Everything around the writer is material for novel...ll one's material comes from real life...generally draws on one's own experience"¹³

'A Time to Be Happy' in 1963, her first novel that deals with two north Indian families at the time of last stages of the freedom-movements and the arrival of Independence. 'This Time of Morning' in 1965, 'Mistaken Identity' in 1988, 'A Situation in New Delhi' in 1989 etc. are her notable works.

Anita Desai (1937-)

Anita Desai gave more emphasis in the interior landscape of the mind in place of political and social realities. Some of her popular works are- 'Cry, The Peacock' in 1963, 'Clear Light of Day' in 1980, 'In Custody in 1984', 'Fasting, Feasting in 1999 etc.

A smaller number of other women novelists attempted fiction writing, most of them wrote a solitary or two novels each. Women offered some real history of social life in their minor fictions such as Hindu, Muslim and Parsi households. Remarkable examples of historical fictions are Vimala Raina's 'Ambapali' in 1962, Manorama Ramkrishna Modak's 'Single Is the Wheel' in 1978 etc.

The decades nineteen fifties and sixties witnessed comparatively few novels by women. Among those novels are Lotika Ghose's 'White Dawns of Awakening' 1950, Mrinalini Sarabhai's 'This Alone Is true' in 1952 and others. The novels published by women writers during the nineteen seventies are Kamala Das' 'Alphabet of Lust' 1976 and Rama Mehta's 'Inside the Haveli' 1977.

3. CONCLUSION

Indian writing in English is gaining grounds and getting recognition in the whole world now. Now the standard of Indian fiction is matured enough whether it is about language and styles or themes and narrative techniques. The Indian literary sphere is expanding day by day and new themes are being exploded. It is rightly said about Indian English Fiction:

"Indeed, the veteran masters of Indian English novel have the Indian novel in English seated fairly and firmly on a high pedestal in the literature of the world.... Indian English novel no doubt will grow from strength to strength and 'help to make us a new nation and a new people wedded to the tasks of national reconstruction and international harmony'. Its future is immense"¹⁴

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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