
DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN NOVEL IN ENGLISH A SHORT VIEW.

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Abstract:

The possible literary form for a writer to keep himself always in touch with the common readers is the fiction. It is in this area we find that the Indian writers in English have made the most significant contribution. So, of all genres, the novel is the most popular form today. According to H. M. Williams (1976: 109), "It is undoubtedly the most popular vehicle for the transmission of Indian ideas to the wider English speaking world." We in India, on a greater extent are indebted to the European and English novel because as an art form, it has been imported to India from the West. In other words, it is a gift of Western literature.

Keywords; Managerial Capitalism , Literature Review , literature pertaining.

INTRODUCTION

In the nineteenth century with the publication of Bunkim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) and LalBehari Day's *GovindSamanta*(1874), Indian novel in English has grown by leaps and bounds in respect of thematic variety and linguistic maturity.

Both of them have used an acquired language to comment on the Indian social context. But compared to the recent output, most early novels in English were almost imitative and faulty. It is assumed that Indian novel in English has its roots in the nineteenth century realistic tradition of English novel.

The impact of English education, national awakening and the influence of European models are the chief factors responsible for the rise and development of Indian novel in English. But with the passage of time the Indian novel in English has become thoroughly Indian in terms of the themes, techniques and the human values. In this regard, Meenakshi Mukherjee (1985: viii) observes that: 'The novel in India can be seen as the product of configurations in philosophical, aesthetic, economic and political forces in the larger life of the country'. "Despite obvious, regional variations, a basic pattern seems to emerge from shared factors like the Puranic heritage, hierarchical social structure, colonial education, disjunction of agrarian life and many others that affect the form of novel as well as its content."

In order to understand rise and development of Indian English Novel, it is necessary to take into consideration its emergence, developing stages and continuing traditions. The Indian novel in English has-been divided into three successive periods such as: a) novel from 1875 to 1920, b) novel from 1920 to 1947, and c) novel from 1947 onwards, by the Indian scholars like K.R.S. Iyengar (1962), M.K.Naik (1982) and Meenakshi Mukherjee (1985), considering the

socio-political changes in India before and after the Independence. On the other hand, the classification of the novel by P. K. Rajan (1995: 9) refers to a) Early Realism: From 1864 to 1935, b) Critical Realism: From 1935 to the 1960's, c) Modernism: From the 1960s to the 1980s, and d) The New Novel: From 1981 onwards. However, such classification has its own limitations as placing an individual writer in a specific period creates several problems. Besides an individual writer practices several literary modes and values of representation at the time of writing. Hence, the whole corpus of Indian novel in English may be divided into three broad groups:

- a) The traditional novel of social realism before Independence.
- b) The modern novel of experimentation after Independence.
- c) A new contemporary novel since 1981.

The intellectuals in India before Independence concentrated on the national awakening and the society in a realistic manner. Bengal seems to be the source of the Indian novel in English for the prominent pioneers of the nineteenth century were upper-class Bengali writers, for instance, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Toru Dutt, and Rabindranath Tagore, who dealt with the social problems within their reach. These writers were not merely the imitators of the West but they had in the words of Meenakshi Mukherjee (1971: 19), "direct involvement in values and experiences which are valid in the Indian context." The pioneer novelists were trying to establish a new sense of social morality in place of the age-old social values. They were social reformers and with them, the novel became an exercise in social realism.

"The Indian novelists in English have their roots in two traditions – the Indian and the Western. It was a challenge for them to express distinctly an Indian sensibility in an acquired language."

Though the novels were being written in the regional languages, for instance, in Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Malayalam, they had no English tradition. Naturally, at the formative stage, the Indian writers were greatly influenced by the European masterpieces of Leo Tolstoy, Honoré Balzac and Fyodor Dostoevsky in English translations. There was a great impact of the novels of the romantics and the early Victorians, Dickens and Thackeray. Yet they were not the blind imitators of the Western models. On the other hand, they tried to establish their own tradition of novel writing in accordance with the age-old Indian tradition of story-telling. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's only novel in English *Rajmohan's Wife* laid down the foundation for the first generation novelists to record the rich heritage and social transformation in India. Both the male and female novelists who emphasized their personal and private experiences followed him. The early novels were, therefore, sketchy, domestic and aloof from the political happenings. The early novelists depicted rural and domestic life, filled with superstitions and religious whims, with an equal emphasis on morals and social ills. In spite of that their creative efforts were very poor. "The deeper issues of national as well as human life do not enter into their novels. The

women writers wrote about nubile romances and marital male adjustment and their male counterparts wrote about socio-political issues.”⁴

There is no comparison between the British women novelists and our Indian English women novelists. However, their world was different from the socio-ethical world of the British novelists. The early novelists in India imitated the Western novel in respect of plot-construction, characterization and narrative technique.

In spite of this the Indian novel in English has definitely taken many steps forward after the First World War. The First World War stimulated the nationalist spirit among the Indians and further the freedom movement led by Mahatma Gandhi became an all India experience.

Indian Novel in English was affected by socio-political upheavals during the 1930's onwards. The writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao attempted to explore the contemporary Indian society from their specific views without distorting the reality. They were reformists and didactic, yet, the motive of propaganda remained with them.

Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao emerged on the literary scene in 1930. It was the real beginning of Indian novel in English. They were labelled by William Walsh (1990: 62) as “The founding fathers”, “the genuine novelists”, “and inaugurators of the form.” They made their appearance in the thirties with the publication of *Untouchable* (1935), *Swami and Friends* (1935) and *Kanthapura* (1938) respectively and established the tradition of Indian English fiction.

Indian novel in English around 1930s needed the novelists who could grasp the social scene with an insight into the human consciousness and who could interpret the real Indian world, distinctive in themes, issues and treatment in their fiction. Mulk Raj Anand is humanist and a novelist with a purpose. He writes from his personal experience and the experiences of real people. For Mulk Raj Anand (2000: 65), the novel is “the creative weapon for attaining humanness – it is the weapon of humanism.” He writes basically about the lower class life. Widely read novelist Anand is influenced by Charles Dickens, H. G. Wells and Tolstoy in both form and characterization. He followed the ancient Indian tradition of story-telling, but his approach to themes and events, is of a social realist. Therefore, his novels are the novels of protest and social realism. Anand is influenced by the two ideologies – the Western Marxism and the Eastern Gandhism.

He deals with the themes related to human predicament such as protest against social and industrial evils, the status of women in India, exploitation caused by caste system, class system and imperialism. G. S. Balarama Gupta (1977: 115) aptly says, “The moot point to be noted about Anand is that he has firmly believed in the role of a writer as essentially a crusader in the cause of humanity: no hotchpotch of Vendanta's, no hazy mysticism, but inalienable faith in man”. Anand's early novels, *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940) *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Big Heart* (1942) justify this point, as Anand has brought in them the lower class down-trodden people such as the scavengers, the coolies, the leather-workers, and the untouchables who form the bulk of Indian society. His novel *Untouchable* is a classic experimentation in respect of theme and technique. It represents a day from morning till evening in the life of a sweeper boy named Bakha who is in

the words of E. M. Forster (1981: 9) “a real individual, lovable thwarted, sometimes grand, sometimes weak, and thoroughly Indian.”

R. K. Narayan, on the other hand, is the novelist of middleclass sensibility. He is a natural story-teller in his novels from *Swami and Friends* (1935) to *The Painter of Signs* (1976). His novels *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945) and *Mr.Sampath* (1949) brilliantly and realistically describe the South-Indian life. William Walsh (1983: 250), says that R. K. Narayan’s writing is “a distinctive blend of Western technique and Eastern material.” The world of R. K. Narayan’s novels is Malgudi, an imaginary South-Indian town. In the words of Alan Warner (1961: 190) Narayan “writes admirably plain English.” His is a very simple and straight-forward style of narration.

Raja Rao is another prominent Indian novelist writing in English. But he is not as prolific writer as Mulk Raj Anand and R. K.Narayan. His concern with philosophical and mythological aspects distinguishes him from Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan. His first novel *Kanthapura*, a masterpiece, describes the village life and peasant sensibility. It shows the influence of Gandhian ideology on an ordinary Indian. R. K. Srivastava (1987: 15) remarks: “Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* is a garrulous account of primitivistic, religious, political and social activities of rural people. The novel is not a two-dimensional picture of villagers but a colourful audio-visual presentationcharacterizing the entire country *Kanthapura* is India in miniature.”

On language crisis, Raja Rao, in his ‘forward’ to *Kanthapura*(1938,rpt. 1971:5-6), says: “We cannot write like English. We should not. We can write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us.” He adds that English is “the language of our intellectual make up.... but not of our emotional make up.” About the rich contribution of Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao, the makers of Indian novel in English C.D.Narasimhaiah (1973: 63) observes that the ‘human centrality’ of Mulk Raj Anand, ‘the comic as a mode of study in maturity’ in R.K.Narayan, and the ‘metaphysical aspect’ of Raja Rao have really enriched the realm of Indian novel in English. Besides, these three stalwarts, K.S.Venkataramani, A.S.P.Ayyar, Ahmed Ali, DhanGopalMukherji, K. A. Abbas and HumayunKabir have also written novels on rural, political and social life of India.

Thus the major contribution to the Indian novel in English in the pre-Independence era is of men and not of women. Novel became an established art form in the works of the ‘Three Musketeers’ (M. K. Naik, 1977: 375) – Mulk Raj Anand, R. K.Narayan and Raja Rao- who were still actively engaged in creative writing at the turn of the century. The novel form further evolved and matured in the hands of scholars like Bhabhani Bhattacharya, ManoharMalgonkar, Khushwant Singh, ChamanNahal, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, NayantaraSahgal, Anita Desai, ShashiDeshpande etc. in the post-Independence period.

The post-Independence Indian novel in English has been termed as the modern novel. It is not radically different from the novel in the pre-Independence India. It is no longer imitative. Instead, it has the modern tendencies of experimentation in form, content and technique.

Modernism, though came late to India, it has played an important role in shaping the second generation novelists such as Bhabhani Bhattacharya, B. Rajan, Malgonkar, Khushwant Singh, ChamanNahal, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, R.P.Jhabvala, NayantaraSahgal, Anita

Desai, ShashiDeshpande and a few others who have made a tremendous contribution to novel in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

The Indian novelists before Independence were mainly interested in social, political and historical concerns. But later in 1950s a new kind of novel dealing with the contemporary issues appeared on the Indian literary scene. The psychological novel depicting the human personality and inner realities of life replaced the realistic novel. MakarandParanjape says (1991: 25), “The novel interprets or creates reality.” But the novel cannot be realistic or completely devoid of social reality; therefore, there should be balance between the personal and the social. The novels written in the post-Independence period successfully render the Indian reality.

A number of novelists like Arun Joshi and Anita Desai have explored the psychological and sociological conflicts in the social and the individual’s life. There is a kind of shift from socio-political concerns to the inner life of human being. The modern Indian writers write about the socio-cultural predicament of the modern man. Many modern novels dealt with man’s alienation from his self, his class, his society and humanity at large. In other words, the centre of their novels shifted from the society to an individual. C. Paul Verghese’s comment in this regard is worth quoting (1971: 25). Most of the novelists in their eagerness to find new themes ‘renounced the larger world in favour of the inner man’ and continued ‘a search for the Essence of human living’. It is this trend that continued in the seventies and it also shaped the novels of the eighties.

Unlike 1930’s and 50s, the year 1980s marks the significant stage in the growth and development of Indian novel in English. It is during the 80s that some very promising Indian English novelists and their novels earned great honours and distinctions in the academic world. The Indian novel in English “has now attained luxuriant growth and branched off in more directions than one,” says R. S. Pathak in his ‘Preface’ to *Recent Indian Fiction* (1994: 9). It followed a definite pattern of development making tremendous progress in the eighties and nineties in the hands of old masters as well as the new talented novelists like Salman Rushdie and others.

Their achievement lies in finding out the new fictional themes and techniques. In a sense they are contemporary novelists as they deal with the history of the post-Independence India, the predicament of the modern man and the contemporary reality in modern India. They made the novel a medium of global expression.

Thus the novel, with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s Booker prize-winner *Midnight’s Children* (1981) received an international acclaim and became a major force in the world literature. It has created the Indian tradition of fiction to which belong “Rushdie’s Children” (The New York Times, 16 December, 1991), viz. AmitavGhosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, UpamanyuChatterjee, ShashiTharoor, FarrukhDhondy, RohintonMistry and Firdaus Kanga. Each one of them produced prize-winning novel. In their hands, the Indian novel in English made tremendous progress.

Besides these makers of ‘new novel’ some other novelists were concerned with the life and the experiences of the minorities in India, for example, Pratap Sharma, RangaRao, Boman Desai, MukundaRao, Gopal Gandhi and so many others enriched the realm of Indian novel in

English beyond the expectations. According to K.R.S.Iyengar (1985: 322) novel is “a living and evolving literary genre, and is trying, in the hands of its practitioners, a fusion of form, substance and expression that is recognizably Indian yet also bearing the marks of universality.

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