

Social and Historical influences in promoting the rise of the Indian English Novel by Indian English writers

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Abstract:-

The chronological study of Indian English fiction, old, modern and contemporary with its social and historical influences project the development and rise of the Indian English Novel phenomenon. The novel as the most popular form of English literature inexplicably envisages trends in Indian society, traditions and culture to the English speaking world. Indian fiction written in English was only confined to the Raj or to the government in power. It however became vernacular during the course of time. The reflections of different trends and attitudes in India reflect different changes at different times in making up the content of the English novel. Since the time of British domination, India as a nation and society was under a dark shadow and the destiny of India was challenged only to experience the turmoil of the Hindu-Muslim divide. The influences of the Indian National Congress, the Muslim league, the tensions of the two World Wars led to the rise of Indian English writings. Ancient Indian heritage and philosophy, soon began to be taught and written in English. Indian English learning helped the reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharishi Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Dr Atmaran Pandurang, R.G. Bhandarkar, Mahadeva Govinda Ranade, Henry Vivian Derozio, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhans, Swami Vivekananda, Mrs Annie Besant, Shiv Dayal Khatri, Guru Shaligram Sahib, Satyananda Agnihotri, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghose, Maulvi Chirag Ali, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Mirza Ghulam Ahamd, Rajnarain Bose, Naba Gopal Cahtterjee, etc. The first two decades of the twentieth century led to the rise of the English novel. It was an era of socio-cultural and national consciousness where novelists could vent out their own feelings, ideas and opinions through the writings in the English Novel. Fictional reworking of mythology and history gave a new impetuous to Indian English novelists. Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor and Amitav Ghosh often return to Indian history and mythology in framing the English novel.

Keywords: Chronological Study, Novel phenomenon, Raj, Vernacular, heritage.

I. Historical Perspective towards the Rise of the Indian English Novel

The Indian English author predominantly highlights fundamental issues of post colonialism, multiculturalism, indigenization and nativism, around him in India. Modern Indian English novel preoccupied the views of the inner life and individual problems enumerating many revolutionary changes in society.

The history of English language and literature in India began with the advent of East India Company in India. It all started in the summers of 1608 when Emperor Jahangir, in the courts of the Mughals, welcomed Captain Willian Hawking, the Commander of British Naval Expedition. In 1857 the apparent tranquility of the Indian sub-continent was shattered by the revolt of a handful of Indian soldiers in Meerut. The Government of India Act of 1858 transferred the remnants of the power of the East India Company to the Crown, and in the same year a Royal Proclamation changed the direction of British policy in India. The Ilbert Bill of 1883, gave Indian judges the power to try Europeans. The tide of history turned with the Partition of Bengal in 1905 which led to such an upsurge of organized Indian protest that the measure was finally revoked in 1911. All these events led to the framing of the Indian English Novel with stories pinpointing the sufferings of colonial struggle and aspirations of gaining independence.

The first World War found Indians shelving their differences and animosities, joining whole heartedly in the war effort. The Rowalt Acts of 1919 and The Government of India Act of December 1919 attempted to pacify the outrage. The policy of ‘dyarchy’ culminated in the Government of Indian Act of 1935, which offered a new Constitution and a wide Franchise. Members of both the Hindu Congress and the Muslim League were divided. Soon the Second World War altered the course of modern Indian history. As the Japanese advanced even closer, Gandhi called upon the British to ‘Quit India’ and let the Indians come to a non-violent peace settlement with the Japanese. Gandhi’s expectations of a Japanese victory and the dawn of a new era in Asia were shared by members of the Indian National Army, and a small body of Indian prisoners-of-war recruited by Subhash Chandra Bose pursued that the future of an independent Indian lay in military co-operation with the Japanese. All these historical events were pictured in the Indian National Novel. Raja Rao was a child of the Gandhian age, and a sensitive awareness of the forces was let loose by the Gandhian

revolution. Raja Rao commented, “English is the language of our intellectual make up whereas our mother tongue is the language of our emotional set up”.

II. Shifting Themes and Thoughts of Indian English Novel Writing

Indian English Writing in the form of the Indian English Novel muses back through the ages, focusing traits about great men like Buddha, Ramkrishna Paramhans, etc. Many others tried to enforce changes both in human and social aspects of life only by persuasion and communication in English. Other factors influencing Indian Literature were the historical development of the Bhakti Movement, norms, mores, culture, traditions of Ancient and Medieval India and literary aspects of colonial and post colonial India. Further influences included were the fourteen novels in Bangla which were later translated into English. Among them were ‘Durgesh Nandini’ (1865) ‘Anandmath’ (1882) and ‘Raj Singha’ (1893)

The first English novel was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's ‘Rajmohan's Wife’ (1864). Bankim Chandra Chatterjee imbibed patriotic feelings in Bengal and exposed the shams and hypocrisies of contemporary life and society in India. The Bengali writers mainly dominated the period from 1864 to 1900. Widely known novelists of this period were - Raj Lakshmi Debi, Toru Dutt, Lal Behari Dey, K. Charkavarti, Kamala Sathianandhan, Behramji Malabari, N.V. Pai, R.K. Pant, T.C. Mookerjee, A.P. Dutta and others. Raj Lakshmi Debi's ‘The Hindu Wife’ (1876), a novel important from the cultural viewpoint, sets examples of this cultural change.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's five novels – ‘So many Hungers’ (1947), ‘Musicfor Mohini’ (1952), ‘He who Rides a Tiger’(1954), ‘A Goddess Named Gold’ (1960) and ‘Shadow from Ladakh’ (1966)’ – form an impressive trend in the English Novel. Manohar Malgaonkar has published four novels in quick succession and there is a certain maturity in plot as well as theme of these novels. ‘The first Distant Drum’ (1960) present different aspects of army life. His other novels ‘Combat of Shadows’ (1964), ‘The Princes’ (1963), ‘Bend in the Ganges’(1964) show gradual maturation in the makings of the English novelists. There were some other writers and novelists that have contributed to the spirit of the time and one of them is the ‘Twilight in Delhi’ (1940) by Ahmed Ali. Another such novel is ‘Iqbalunnisa Hussain's Purdah the Polygamy: ‘Life in an Indian Muslim Household’ (1944) conveys an intimate depiction of a mode of life. Another, writer who deserves mention at this juncture is

K.A. Abbas whose novel, 'Tomorrow is Ours: A novel of the India of Today (1943) tries to accumulate information about an India with a responsibility to participate in worldly interactions.

III. Gandhian Influence on Indian English writing

Indian English Novel, was preoccupied by the opinions of 'Gandhian consciousness' socially, culturally and politically, from 1918-1922. Mahatma Gandhi's passive resistance movement against the Black Rowalt Act, the inhuman massacre in Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, the Khilafat Movement, the boycott of the Simon Commission, the prohibition and the boycott of foreign goods, the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, the famous Dandi March, the Government of India Act of 1935, the Quit India Movement of 1942 were reflected in the novels written in English at that time. There is hardly any area in the pre or post-independence era that Gandhian thought had left untouched for the sake of Indian development and Independence. "Gandhian Influence on Indian Writing in English", finds ample exposure in the books on History of Indian English Literature, but its second half: "An assessment of the effects of Developmental Communication, as used in the political campaigns by Gandhiji, project the contemporary Indian English Novelists". Mr. M. K. Naik commented, "Indian Writing in English literature of the Gandhian age was inevitably influenced by these novelists (the then political and social) epoch-making developments in Indian life." Gandhi very aptly exploited the nationalist press, with his own journals, 'Young India', 'Navijivan', 'Indian Opinion' and 'Harijan', (though these were restricted to the literary urbans of India), He achieved identification with the masses through "Sadharanikaran" or simplification of his message in English, through common religious symbols, Vedas and myths. Dramatic reconstructions of Gandhiji's life in film and fiction range from Richard Attenborough's academy award winning film, 'Gandhi', in 1982 an inspiration to Indian English novelists like those of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan. P. Rama Moorthy in 'Gandhi's letters to the West' quotes: "For me there were only two—God & Bapu, and now they have become one."

IV. Trio of Indian English Novel

The trinity of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Ananad, and Raja Rao continued their long and illustrious career even in the post independence era and many of their novels have contributed to the enrichment of Indian writing in English. 'Kanthapura' is an account of the impact of

Gandhi's teaching of non-violent resistance against the British; style and structure adapted from Indian vernacular tales and folk-epic; told by an old woman. Raja Rao's 'The Serpent and the Rope' (1960) and 'The Cat and Shakespeare' (1965) materialized after independence. The former novel is an ambitious and commendable attempt at accomplishing an entire projection of India in stunning fictional requisites and perhaps is one of the most impressive novels by an Indian in English.

R. K. Narayan through his "last group of novels, 'Mr. Sampath'(1949), 'The Financial Expert' (1952), 'Waiting for Mahatma' (1955), 'The Guide' (1958), 'The Man Eater of Malgudi' (1961), 'The sweet Vendor' (1967)' makes his readers enter into an exotic world of half-headed and half –hearted dreamers, artists, financiers, adventures, eccentrics, cinema stars, sannyasis and many others. 'Malgudi Days' attained great acclaim. In 1951, Mulk Raj Anand published 'Seven Summers', the first of a series of seven novels which Anand planned to write as a kind of autobiography in seven parts, corresponding to the seven stages of a man's life. Anand's 'Private Life of an Indian Prince' (1953) had a certain topical appeal, whereas his later novels, 'The old woman and the cow' (1960) and 'The Road'(1961)', reveals humanity and empathy disclosing a version and antagonism with the existing reality. In the Nineteen thirties these "Big Three" of Indian Writing in English arrived on the scene. They were the founders of the true Indo-English novel, though almost all the time they inevitably visualized the village life and the concomitant effect of the freedom movement. They could not keep themselves away from the Gandhian philosophy, which consciously or unconsciously entered their creative writing. Towards Independence the Novelists of 1930's and 1940's consisted of Mulk Raj Anand's 'Peshawar' (now Pakistan); written in 1905 which is about a Hindu Coppersmith family. In 1935, he wrote 'Untouchable' which brought immense popularity, which is about the life of Bakha, an outcaste sweeper. Bakha a young man of eighteen, strong and able bodied the son of Lakha, the Jemadar of all the sweepers in the town was officially in charge of the three rows of public latrines.

In 1936 'Coolie' was written by Mulk Raj Anand a Dickension saga about the misfortunes of an orphan Munoo on his way from the Kangra hills to Bombay. He also wrote "Two leaves and a Bud" the theme of the hopes and aspirations lured into working on a tea estate in Assam. Another Indian English Novel 'Govinda Samanta' or The 'History of a Bengali Raivat' was published in 1874. Though Toru Dutt is better known as a poet, she has been the first woman novelist in Indian English and perhaps the first Indian novelist in French. Her novel 'Binaca' was written in 1878 and the 'young Spanish Maiden' is a

romantic love story set in England. Raj Lakshmi Debi's, 'The Hindu wife' or 'The Enchanted fruit' (1876) Ramesh Chunder Dutt translated his own Bengali novels into English 'The Lake of Palms: 'A story of Indian Domestic life (1902) is a novel of social reform and widow remarriage. Prof. M. K. Naik in his book "A History of Indian English Literature writes," "If Anand is the novelist as reformer, Raja Rao the novelist as a Metaphysical poet, Narayan is simply the novelist as novelist".

V. Comparative Study of the Indian English Novel with other novels of the West

British rule in India led to the writings in English and the emergence of the rise of the Indian English Novel. English education and western English literature influenced Indian authors to write in English and sometimes were set as models for Indian English Novelists in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. British fiction reared on the issue of realism as in the writings of Behn, Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. The first set of Novels were translations of Bengali and Marathi which appeared exactly after Macaulay's Educational Minutes making English a necessary part of an educated Indian's mental makeup. These Conventions of Realism depicted the Victorian synthesis of views and opinions and Styles of Dickens, Thackeray and Eliot. The turn of the English Novel from 1900 to 1945 and from 1968 to 1989 depicted glimpses of characterization of European novelists like Conrad, Ford James, Woolf and Joyce etc.

Familiarity with western classic writers was closely connected to the quotations, references and epigraphs of the writings of Shakespeare, Sterne, Jane Austen and Walter Scott. 'Don Quixote' America's first big novel, homage to Cervantes entitled 'Modern Chivalry' influenced the India English novel. Excerpts and ideas from classical novels from 1600 – 1800 like 'Tom Jones', 'Candide' and 'Dangerous Liasons' protracted English Novels in India.

VI. Novels of the Post Colonial Era

The Indian Fiction in English developed gradual maturity, observing various diversified themes and other current happenings like the Partition of India, the rise of Industrialization, Materialism and Individualism in the post colonial period by the end of the sixties and the early seventies. These themes were seen in the novels of Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal, Jatin Mohan Ganguli, P.M. Nityananda, B.K. Karanjia, Timeri Murari, R.P. Jhabvalla, Attia Hussain, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Nargis Dalal, Vimala Raina, Veena Paintal, Bharti

Mukherjee and Anita Kumar. Thinking about the responsibility, functions and contribution of the novelists of the post-Independence era, Satish Kumar writes: “The novelist minutely analyses the significant and far-reaching changes in individual passing through period of overall transition. His observant and penetrating eye is a reflection to the evolution of new values and new morality. The creative artist alone is interested in these basic changes. Hence in these novels the basic changes in the individuality of man and the evolution of new values and new morality is integral to the theme, action and characterization of the English novel. All the novelists have forwarded the revolutionary changes towards globalization and, thus, they have envisioned a new social order. G.V. Desani’s “All about Hatter” (1948) made a major breakthrough in formal experimentation winning laurels, to the piece of endeavour and talent. The narrative technique evoked after the 1950’s. Indian novelists interest moved from the public to a private domain the individual’s quest for the self in all varied complex forms. Novelists like Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Nayantara Sahgal contained the fundamentals of future structuring of the Indian English Novel. Anita Desai dealt mainly with the exploration of sensibility. Her first novel “Cry the Peacock” (1963) portrays the story of a lady who possessed her own world of passion and obsession. “Voices in the city” (1965) speaks about middle class intellectuals in the backdrop of contemporary Calcutta. In her later novels Desai has dealt with themes like German and anti-Semitism, the downfall of values and traditions and a tendency of blind aping of the west.

It is, however, after the Second World War that women novelists started enriching Indian novels in English. Kamla Markandaya, and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala started to modify novels presenting the picture of India struggling against odds and trying to surmount them. Her first novel ‘Nectar in a Sieve’ (1954) takes the readers to the heart of a South Indian village where life has apparently not changed for a thousand years. In ‘Some Inner Fury’ (1957) Markandaya’s concern is about an encounter between the tradition, loving East and the fast changing world of the west. In a ‘Silence of Desire’ (1961), she leaves politics and economics at the rear and invades into the imponderable dominion of spiritual realism Ruth Prawer Jhabvala has communicated her experiences during and after the years of independence in India. Jhabvala’s first novel, ‘To Whom She Will’, is filled with relishment of eating and in the later novels, it is the cocktail parties that exchange the traditional eating parties.

Among the other women writers of the time mention should be made of Jumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Chitra Deshmukh, Kiran Desai, and Manju Kapoor. These writers have

contributed not only in the world of woman writing but also aroused the sense of responsibility and affection towards woman. Arundhati Roy's 'The God of small Things' (1996) is semi –autobiographical and major part of the book captures the author's childhood experiences. A feministic tradition is strongly apparent in Manju Kapoor's novels and the search of control over one's destiny is the key theme. Shashi Deshpande also belongs to this genre of woman writers and her novels like, 'The Dark Holds no Terrors, That long Silence, 'The Binding Vine' and 'A Matter of Time' have created ripples in the mind of the readers and her writing has the power and the passion to ensure the changes that are required for the benefit of the society.

During the Eighties, yet another class of Indian fiction writers came to the scene. Emerging next on the scene were novelists like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Upmanyu Chatterjee, Allan Seally, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Shashi Tharoor, Farukh Dhondi, Amitav Ghosh, Bapsi Sidhwa, Brinda Mukherjee, Ipsita Roy Chakravarti, Sudhir Kakkar, Dina Mehta, Dolly Ramanujan, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shauna Singh and many more. Apart from these famous writers some lesser known writers emerged on the contemporary scene such as Shiv K. Kumar, Saros Cowasjee, Vasant A. Shahane, K.V. Subbaram, Ranga Roa, Raj Gill, Balaraj Khanna. It is observed that the most significant and praiseworthy outcome of this emergence is that the Indian English novelists are now writing with a new vision and mission, new technical and linguistic devices, and absolutely new confidence,

Amitav Ghosh's 'Circle of Reason' (1986), an imaginative fiction elongating from rural Bengal to the modern Mediterranean port, and his popularity of narration was reaffirmed in 'Shadow Lines, From Heaven Lake', Vikram Seth finally turned into fiction writing to re – assert the Indian writer's claim on the English language. Arun Joshi's 'Strange Case of Billy Biswas' (1971) is a wonderful introduction to the post – independence Indian English novel. 'The Foreigner' (1968) was on the same theme of alienation. He has also achieved recognition for his novels. 'The Apprentice' (1974) in which the life of an idealistic youth is delineated. 'The City and the River' (1990), is a political allegory that shows the cynical nature of human greed and deceit. Shashi Tharoor joined the band of novelists with his sprawling work 'The Great Indian Novel' (1990) in which he retells the political history of 20th the century Indian. 'Trying to Grow' (1990) by Firdaus Kanga presents the middle class parsis with all their interesting eccentricities. The parsi genius struck again with

Rohinton Mistry's 'Such a Long Journey' (1991), where the novelist has shown his skill of characterization with various characters vibrant with life.

Award Winning English Novels of the twentieth century

Indian English Novelists imbibed and assimilated the best of the Western and Indian cultures, the traditional and the western in both countries. Receding backwards to the list of Indian Booker prize winners, it is judged that the writers of Indian origin like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and the recent Winner Aravind Adiga have a similarity of purpose in their writings. They are not just traditional Indian English Writers, English being their first language, reflecting and reviewing English of the world, excelling in their own Indian English. Anita Desai's, "Fasting, Feasting" was shortlisted for the Booker Prize award in 1999. Her debut short story collection "Interpreter of Maladies", after facing rejection for years was finally released in 1999 and subsequently won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the O. Henry Award. She has written three other books since then – "The Namesake", "Unaccustomed Earth" and "The Lowland" which was shortlisted for the 2013 Man Booker Prize. Her writing is distinguished for her plain, yet deep, language and Indian immigrant characters. Salman Rushdie is most notably known for "The Satanic Verses" which provoked Muslims from across the world, and led to a fatwa by Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran. Knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for his contribution to literature, his famous works include "Midnight's Children", "Luka and the Fire of Life", "Shalimar the Clown", and "The Enchantress of Florence". His fictions are generally set in India, and are a captivating combination of reality and history. It is a story which reveals the deeply entrenched patriarchal family system of India. Set in a small town, it narrates the life of Uma, a grey haired spinster who feels smothered and imprisoned by her parents.

Published in 1993, Vikram Seth's 'A Suitable Boy' went on to win the Commonwealth Writer's Prize Award the following year. A thick heavy with around one thousand four hundred pages is one of the longest Indian novels ever to be published. The story is about a mother, who is in search of a suitable boy for her daughter's marriage set in post-independence India, 'The last Labyrinths' by Arun Joshi (1981), won him the Sahitya Academy Award. His novel

'Cutting For Stone' (2009) by Abraham Verghese is a novel about twins, Marion and Shiva, born to an Indian nun and British surgeon, who are orphaned with their mom's death and dad's disappearance in Addis Ababa. Set in Ethiopia and New York, it is about family,

betrayal and medicine. This bestselling novel has sold over a million copies till date. ‘Train to Pakistan’ is a historical novel that narrates the events that marked the partition of India in 1947. It revolves around the people of a village which geographically lies on the border of India and Pakistan. Amit Choudhary’s novel, set in Bombay of the 1970’s and 80’s, looks at two families whose fortunes are connected by music (he himself is a talented musician). The author, Amit Chaudhary himself being a talented musician brings much authenticity to it. The main protagonist Shyam Lal, the son of a singer, teaches music to support his family. His student Mallika Sengupta’s musical ambitions are dulled by luxury in the novel. Her son, Nirmalya, is captivated by philosophy and incredulous of Shyamji’s material pursuits.

‘An Obedient Father’ (2000) by US based Akhil Sharma was released in the year 2000. The story revolves around Ram Karan a corrupt official, who sexually abused his daughter. Now, his recently widowed daughter and eight-year-old granddaughter are forced to move in with him. The white Tiger by Aravind Adiga. Was released in the year 2008 was a debut novel and won the prestigious Booker prize for fiction. The protagonist of the story, Balram Halwai, narrates his life to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. It explains how the son of a rickshaw puller works as a chauffeur in Delhi and then flees to Bangalore, after killing his employer, stealing his money and becoming a successful businessman.

The Indian English Novel has seen many changes showing many facets of Indian culture from pre-independence to the modern era in the 21st Century an amalgamation of social, cultural mutation of ideas proliferates to bring about a healthy and legally correct environment evolving into a healthy progressive future for sustainable development. The Indian English Novel has proved to make a mark in the English novels of the world in creating an intermingling, interdependence and an exchange of thoughts and opinions, proliferating and entering into the concept of universalisation in writing a English Novel all over the world.

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