

INDO-NOSTALGIC WRITING: A NOVEL EXPERIMENT IN CREATIVE MUTATION

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ABSTRACT

Indian English literature is a skilled endeavor of Indian literary artists. It is an ocean of Indian identity and ethos. Without studying Indian English literature, a foreigner cannot understand what India is. The Indian writings in English are nothing but nostalgic expressions of these writers, who always crave for their golden yesteryears. The present research paper is a modest attempt to visualize this untouched and typical Indian phenomenon of Indo-nostalgia which operates on the entire course of Indian writings in English. It also attempts to define it by taking illustrations from Indian English writers.

Keywords: Indo-nostalgia, anglo-Indian, wistful psychosis, Third Culture Kids (TCKs), long-distance-nationalism.

Introduction:

Indo-nostalgia cannot be defined in a single sentence. It is more a thing of realisation, of perception. It is a direct access to an Indian mind. It is a striking mania of making and remaking of India through fictional forms and styles. It does not lie in exotic content but in the mind behind the organisation of that content. Whether, one writes about apples or flowers or mangoes or mountains. The point 'life attitudes', 'modes of perception' is important in this connection. In other words, 'It is India in microcosm'. It is the sum total of all that is reflected in the mode of life of Indian people- their thought processes and outlook on life and their needs, aims and aspirations. It is an escaping mode of lamenting for India. Moreover, it is an 'alien sensibility.' Indian consciousness is deep-rooted philosophy; hence there is no better yardstick than Indo-nostalgia to measure the culture of the nation and to value Indian fiction. However, Indo-nostalgia is a fictional technique to project the image of India, not only to transmit it, with her own cultural identity but also to create an awareness of this identity in the minds of her own people and the rest of the world.

Indian past is a land of treasure for rich fictional and artistic creation.

Literature does not produce in vaccum, but it is a conscious and an honest nostalgic experience of the writer or the poet. In my opinion, what the writer does, he just pen out his nostalgic experience and emotions on the paper in a literary form. Nostalgia is dominant and can be found in any type of literary expression. But what triggers me after much consulting the

Indian writers, is the predominant trend which has not been found/searched out by the researchers in the field of literature. I think, the only notion which suffices to study the entire corpus of Indian English Literature is: Indo-nostalgia. What do you mean by it? The answer to this question can only be understood by reading and understanding Indian English Literature. It is a type of fictional operation which a writer uses to explore his/her intense nostalgic experience about India. In other words, the elements of Indo-nostalgia can help the reader to find out true Indian consciousness of the writer. So, it can also be termed as the touchstone method to assess, understand and evaluate the entire ethos of Indian writings in English. (IWE)

As nostalgia is a culturally acquired feeling, it can be conceptually linked to some basic emotions most notably those of grief and depression. This is particularly so in Freud's discussion of these emotions in his *Mourning and Melancholia* (1957) where melancholia may be represented in current usage by the term depression. Grief and depression are reactions to the loss of a loved object, though in depression the sufferer may not be able to perceive what the actual lost object was; because it may be masked by repression. There is some similarity between the depression reaction and the nostalgic reaction, since both are responses to loss. It would be possible to see the nostalgic feeling as a stage in the healing process of grief. The symptoms of both involve feelings of misery focused on the lost object. This pain is accompanied by withdrawal of interest in the world and loss of the capacity and the desire to form or sustain relationship with other people. Freud (1957:244) explains that:

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libidos shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition... This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a... wistful psychosis.

Indo-nostalgic writing is a somewhat loosely defined term, encompassing writings, in the English language, wherein nostalgia regarding the Indian subcontinent, typically about India, represent a dominant theme or strong undercurrent. The writings may be memoirs, or quasi-fictionalized memoirs, travelogues, or inspired in part by real-life experiences and in part by the writer's imagination. This would include both mass-distributed "Indo-Anglian" literatures put out by major publishing houses and also much shorter articles (e.g. feature pieces in mainstream or literary magazines) or poetry, including material published initially or solely in webzines.

Certainly, Indo-Nostalgic writings have much overlap with post-colonial literature but are generally not about 'heavy' topics such as cultural identity, conflicted identities, multilingualism or rootlessness. The writings are often less self-conscious and more light-hearted, perhaps dealing with impressionistic memories of places, people, cuisines, Only-in-India situations, or simply vignettes of "the way things were". Of late, a few Indo-nostalgic writers are beginning to show signs of "long-distance nationalism", concomitant with the rise of nationalism within India against the backdrop of a booming economy.

A large Anglo-Indian Diaspora is the result of the condition of unhomeliness experienced in India. This nostalgia produces the fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry and stories that can function to reclaim India as homeland. Indo-Nostalgia is a culturally derived emotion. Unlike basic primary emotions such as anger and fear, it is a secondary emotion composed of both positive and negative feelings. It is a personal contemplation of a valued experience in the past. It has a dual nature- it is both an experience of pleasure and of regret, is a central theme of

Tharoorian Fiction. In relation to secularisation, Shaw and Chase (1989:3) comment that: Redemptive histories are infertile ground for nostalgia.

Typically, the authors are either western-based writers of Indian origin (e.g. Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Vijay Singh, Suketu Mehta,), or Western writers who have spent long periods of time in the subcontinent, possibly having been born or raised in India, perhaps as the children of British Raj, European expatriates or missionaries (e.g. Jim Corbett, Stephen Alter. Or, they may even be Anglo-Indians who have emigrated from the subcontinent to the West. Third Culture Kids (TCKs) often grow up to produce Indo-nostalgic writings that exhibit palpably deep (and perhaps somewhat romanticized) feelings for their childhoods in the subcontinent. Accordingly, another common theme in Indo-Nostalgic writing is ‘rediscovery’ or its cousin, ‘reconnection.’

Of course, for mass-distributed authors, Indo-nostalgic writings may not necessarily represent all of their literary output, but certainly would represent a high percentage. Finally, it is worth noting that the markets for such writers are almost entirely in the West; despite the rapid growth in the incomes of urban Indians, the sales of English-language literature within India (other than books required for educational degrees or professional purposes) are minuscule compared to sales in the West, even if, one includes pirated copies.

From an Indo-nostalgic perspective, ‘India’ is not only a physical, exterior experience but that ‘Living in India and leaving India’ is internalised so that, it becomes the very core of Anglo-Indian identity and the Indo-nostalgic mode in an emotional and spiritual sense. In expressing longing for India, through the recollection of personal relationships and sensory experiences between the community and India, the bond between identity and place is cemented. The process of writing ‘home’ in a nostalgic mode is central to establishing these bonds, as this type of writing produces a culturally specific history. As the experience of nostalgia unveils feelings, associations and ways of living that are a part of the memory of community, Anglo-Indians can claim their rightful place in Indian history and India as home through the production of their own history.

The notion ‘Indian consciousness’ means the awareness that, India historically has her own cultural identity and to project the image of India is not only a means to transmit her own cultural identity but also to create an awareness of this identity in the minds of her own people and the rest of the world. India has undergone profound changes throughout the ages and simultaneously formed and preserved a sense of identity. The dynamics of her contemporary evolution as well as her traditions and the realities of her modern life naturally are reflected in the novels written in modern India. The Indian novelist in English makes an attempt to deal with the cultural problems of a modern India. The awareness of India as a nation is at the back of his mind, mainly because he is writing for a larger audience both inside and outside India. In this regard Shukla (2002:8) admits:

...A peculiar thing about the Indian novel written in English is its diasporic nature. This trend gets strengthened and confirmed in the nineties. Many novelists like Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Shashi Tharoor, Amitov Ghosh, Gita Mehta and Amit Chaudhari are exploring the life in this country from afar.

Indian English literature is an endeavour of showcasing the rare charms of native writing in English. From being an inquisitive national explosion, Indian English has become a new form of Indian culture, and voice in which India speaks. While Indian authors have been making

momentous contributions to world literature since the pre-Independence era, the past few years have seen a massive boom of Indian English writing in the international market. Not only are the works of Indian authors writing in English soaring on the best-seller list, they are also receiving a great deal of critical acclaim. Starting from Mulk Raj Anand, Vikram Chandra, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Gita Mehta, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Raj Kamal Jha, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharti Kirchner, Khushwant Singh, Vijay Singh, Tarun Tejpal, Amit Chaudhari, Amitav Ghosh, Vikas Swarup, Rohinton Mistry, Suketu Mehta, Kiran Nagarkar, Dr. Birbal Jha and C. R. Krishnan, Shashi Tharoor.... The parade of fine Indian writers is long and lengthening.

For instance, R.K. Narayan is a writer; who contributed over many decades and who continued to write till his death recently. He was discovered by Graham Greene in the sense that the latter helped him find a publisher in England. Graham Greene and Narayan remained close friends till the end. Similar to Thomas Hardy's Wessex, Narayan created the fictitious town of Malgudi where he set his novels. Some criticize Narayan for the parochial, detached and closed world that he created in the face of the changing conditions in India at the times in which the stories are set. Others, such as Graham Greene, however, feel that through Malgudi they could vividly understand the Indian experience. His evocation of small town life and its experiences through the eyes of the endearing child protagonist Swaminathan in *Swami and Friends* is a good sample of his writing style. Simultaneous with Narayan's *pastoral idylls*, a very different writer. Mulk Raj Anand, was similarly gaining recognition for his writing set in rural India; but his stories were harsher, and engaged, sometimes brutally, with divisions of caste, class and religion.

Thus, one of the key issues raised in this context is the operating influence of Indo-nostalgia on these writers. It makes the readers and the writers form India as homeland restless to express themselves to validate their Indo-nostalgia. These writers may be an expatriate writers or diasporic writers such as, Amitov Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie etc. Therefore, it would be appropriate to contend that, as man is incomplete without soul, in the same way, Indian English literature is incomplete without the expressions of India. So, Indo-nostalgia is a touch stone method that can be applied to any work of Indian English literature, to recommend its Indian identity or to search out hallmarks of Indian culture, cuisine, custom, tradition, and locality so and so forth. It is a type of fictional operation by which a writer can remember meditate and recast India in fictional terms.

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