

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY

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In the very beginning, Indian English literature initiated as a necessary consequence of the introduction of English education in India under colonial rule. In recent years, it “has attracted widespread interest, both in India and abroad.”(Dhawan 5)It is now documented that Indian English literature is not only fragment of Commonwealth literature, but also inhabits much significance in the World literature. The Indian English Novel, moreover, has now been extensively applauded all over the world, as it has been effective in carving its own niche not only in the world of commonwealth literature but also in the ‘World literature’ at large. To speak truly, the origin of Indian English literature as a whole is necessarily the English education spread in India and the introduction of British literature, the Indian English Novel emerged as a necessary outcome of its own story telling tradition and the tradition of English novel. Today, a number of Indian writers in English have contributed substantially to modern English literature. Ram Mohan Roy who heralded the Indian Renaissance and Macaulay who suggested English language education in India were possibly conscious of what was in store for the Indians in relations of literary consciousness.

The twentieth century began with the blessed novelists of more significant and conscientious novels. Firstly, it began at the hands of Romesh Chandra Dutt who translated two of his own Bengali novels into English i.e. *The Lake of Palms: A Study of Indian Domestic Life* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra, An Indian Historical Romance* (1909). The first, *The Lake of Palms: A Study of Indian Domestic Life* (1902) is a realistic novel that is written with the object of social reform which bear the theme of widow remarriage and the latter *The Slave Girl of Agra, An Indian Historical Romance* (1909) is set in the Mughal period. Another was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who was a member of Provincial Civil Service and had been bestowed with all the qualities of a true novelist. He had immense hold on human emotions and passions and his English novel *Rajmohan’s Wife* was a step into the world of novels which was serialized in *The Indian Field* in 1864. His Bengali novels- *Kapalkunda*, *Durgesh Nandni* and *Krishnakanta’s Will* were translated into English. Then comes Toru Dutt, a pioneer poetess and novelist came in the light with her romance *Bianca* or *The Young Spanish Maiden* which was published after her death.

Another notable Indian English novelist was Jogendra Singh who was best known for Guru Nanak’s biography *Sikh Ceremonies*. His fictional works are *Nur Jahan* (1909), *The Romance of an Indian Queen* (1909), *An Indian Medley* (1911), *Nasrin* (1915), *Kamala* (1925) and *Kamni* (1931), which deal with social themes. The first three were published in London and the last in Lahore.

Then S. K. Ghose is known as a talented Indian English novelist whose *1001 Indian Nights* (1950) and *The Prince of Destiny* (1909) are the two famous novels. His *1001 Indian Nights* is compared to *The Arabian Nights* in structure and story. In his another novel *The Prince of Destiny*, the characters are vividly drawn with great observation and sympathy.

The point of difference between Indian and English novels from the very beginning has been that of their social concern, realism and their never failing interest in man. Ralf Fox says:

The novel is not merely fictional prose, it is the prose of man's life, and the first art to attempt to take the whole man and give him expression... the great feature which distinguishes novel from other arts is that it has the power to make the secret life visible. (Fox 82)

The Indian English novelist has been true to this fundamental rule of novel writing. All significant Indian English novelists right from Bankim Chandra who is more known as father of Indian novel to Arun Joshi and Salman Rushdie have unflinchingly been honest to this dictum. C. Paul Verghese says:

A novelist, it may be said, is in search of a unity in the diversity of life and civilization. He, therefore, cannot turn his back on the social realities of his time, but should carve man's image in his art with his social awareness and insight into life. (Verghese 25)

Novelists from all parts of India contributed their novels to the development of Indian English novel. These early attempts were immature but have been noticeable for synthesizing the old forms with new. The study into the works of the major novelists of this time can be of immense help in regard to the evolution of Indian English novel. P. P. Mehta is of the view, "Literary periods cannot well be grouped into watertight compartments and there are bound to be certain authors who are the fore-runners of the shape of things, to come as such overlapping of tendencies is inevitable." (P.P. 35)

Social reformers, thinkers, writers and novelists are attracted towards the rampant Economic backwardness of millions of Indians, social inequalities and the mistreatment of women and Feudalism which had completely vanished in European countries. Raja Rammohan Roy, MohaGovindRanade, Vivekananda, Swami Ramatirtha who had been Christian missionaries, servant of Indian society, theosophical society and many social reformers castigated these appalling social tribulations and besought for an impartial social order. A written war was waged against these troubles and tribulations and political awakening was interrelated with social and economic betterment of the people of India. These written testimonials aroused national awakening and the rise of political consciousness which ultimately gave a great motivation to the advance and development of Indian English novel in its pivotal juncture. Accounting for the popularity of fiction in the nineteenth century Harish Raizada says:

As 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 the 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. (Harish 22)

The English models were the major outside influence on Indian English novel. The technique and pattern of early Victorian novelist was imitated. Indian English novelists tried a variety of subject-social, historical and romantic, and they endeavored to reveal fundamentally an Indian vision. However, from the viewpoint of technique, these novels are not worth noticing but they contain the potential of future development, so they cannot be ignored. Indian English

novelists were still grouping their way at the cross roads of Western models and Eastern subjects. Their works are immature and have only one antiquarian interest for us. Indian English fiction remained in swaddling clothes during pre-independence time.

Novelists who come from different parts of the country, show an awareness of local colour and regional life. The novelists of this period were mostly from English educated families who were considered as privileged class. So, their novels are related to characters taken from the feudal class. Most of them have written about kings,princes, jagirdars, rajahs, nawabs and zamindars. None of the novelists of this period is the champion of the underdog. This period is remarkable for the introduction of various fictional genres-the social and realistic novel, historical novel, romances, detective fiction and short story. Very few novels of this period have achieved even a tolerable measure of artistic beauty. Only a student of literary history would like to turn their pages in want of readability. Technical skill, vivid character portrayal and various artistic methods of storytelling are conspicuous by their absence in the novels of this period. These novelists are pathetic both in their plot construction and characterization and they lean towards didacticism and allegory. The importance “of these novels is only historical as milestones on the path of achievements to come.”(P.P. 58)

Human was shaken and stimulated by world of events and ideas. There was not an abrupt discontinuity from the old tradition. Emotions became often consciously dramatic. Old topics, old technique and old sentimental didactic novels did not disappear. Quite interestingly, the novels presenting real life with a purpose look as if in its own right transporting with it a first-hand benevolence of inspiration, new technique and new vision. The themes are also not the same. A literary spirit like Mulk Raj Anand would upright the wisdom of unassuming life and divulge self-esteem or magnificence in the manhood of an most commoner like an untouchable or a coolie; another like regional novelist R. K. Narayan who depict the middle class man of South India; another Raja Rao or a Karaka soaring high into Utopias of the emotion and announce, “the world’s greatest age begins a new”, yet others novelists like Muhammad Habib or Ahmad Ali would discover his elucidation in interlacings sumptuous word pictures from “Faery lands forlorn”, another like A.S.P. Ayyar turned away from predominant tribulations and undercurrents to live with the great men of ancient Indian Gupta period.

This period of literary development marks a great spring onward. Here we find a clear-cut advance in technique, form and style. Raja Rao’s contribution lies in the fact that he enriched the novel with highly poetic prose and imaginative description. This period threw up men like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Ahmed Abbas, D. F. Karaka, Ahmed Ali and many others novelists whose involvement in the growth of the Indo-Anglian novel is immense value.

The Indian Independence Movement was not simply a political scuffle, but it was an all unescapable passionate experience for all Indians of the 1920s and 1930s; and that was an experience which had much passionate impulse in nature. In fact, no Indian writer could neglect this high spirited national upsurge. The English novels by Indians written during that century deal with the same national experience in the form of theme or meanderingly in the form of substantial public background to a personal narrative. The National upsurge is greatly a moving force for the ideology of M. K. Gandhi which not only became a philosophy of life but a way of life. The Indian English writers made Gandhian ideology as the basic background for their writings. The Indian English novel and its story would be incomplete without the lest light on the influence of the Mahatma. Meenakshi Mukherjee writes:

The most potent force behind the whole movement, the Mahatma is a recurring presence in these novels, and he is used in different ways to suit

the design of each writer. He has been treated variously as an idea, a myth a symbol, a tangible reality, and a benevolent human being. In a few novels he appears in person, in most others his is an invisible presence.(Meenakshi 61)

Mahatma Gandhi's stimulus on Indian literature of pre- independence period has been double. First, as a writer he developed chaste, eloquent and artless style which influenced contemporary writing. Secondly, he influenced the thematic content. K.R.S. Iyengar remarks:

Besides, whatever the language medium chosen, the stress has been more on simplicity and clarity and immediate effectiveness than on ornateness or profundity or laborious artistry and this has been as marked in English writing as in writing in the regional languages. As regards the choice of themes and the portrayal of character, the Gandhian influence has been no less marked. There has been a more or less conscious shift of emphasis from the city to the village or there is implied a contrast between the two-urban luxury and sophistication on the hand and rural modes and manners on the other.(K.R.S. 278)

The Indian political movement was not only a political movement for independence but it united diverse forces which gathered together for marshalling India as a sovereign independent nation purged of all social, economic, political and communal tribulations which had eaten into the very vitals of national life. In point of technique they brought the Indo-Anglian novel within welcoming distance of the up-to-the-minute novels of the West.

Mulk Raj Anand along with R.K. Narayana and Raja Rao established Indian novel in the array of Indian and world literature. Mulk Raj Anand was the master of storyteller of the subjugated and of the touchable who writhe in the unending story of exploitation. He shapes out epics from the actual Indian life of the pre-Independence epoch. He looked Indian life fully in the face with unblinking and yielding eyes, challenged it, fought with the audacity and boldness of a true Indian. He was sophisticated and cosmopolitan in his outlook and philosophy of life, but was impatient of transcendentalism and skeptical of religion. He attempted to give a new consciousness to literature. He states:

I had to enter new consciousness which had never been seen before in polite literature. I had to do it without being high minded or low minded. My heroes and heroines could not be heroic in the epic sense of the Ramayan, Mahabharata, or the Illiad, in our tragic age, but I had to launch upon the eternal quest.(Anand 77)

R. K. Narayan wrote novels on his own region originally in English but they achieved admiration not only in India but also in Europe for his penetrating reflection on human nature and his predicament. Most of his stories deal with Indian life and its patterns and are written in a style which is both unassuming and coherent and lucid. Though, he has written complete novels like *The Bachelor of Arts*, *Mr. Sampath*, *Swami and Friends*, *Waiting for Mahatma*, *Financial Expert* but his magnum opus work is *The Guide*, for which he gained universal commendation. The novel became so popular that it was translated into number of languages in the world and even a film was made on it. Narayan's virtuoso was appropriately documented when he was awarded Sahitya Academy Award for *The Guide* in 1960, but the writer is known for his short-stories and this has given him a permanent place in modern Indian English Literature. He has written more than one hundred and fifty short-stories. Some

worth noticing of them are 'Golden Belt', 'The Snake Dogs', 'A Career', 'End of Troubles', 'Man Hunt', and 'A Hica'. They were published in magazines and newspapers.

R. K. Narayan did not track the European flair of story writing but he bore like-mindedness with American short-story writer O Henry. His stories have a conclusion that aims at an astounding finish in the story. He has been an adroit storyteller of realistic and human scenes. His narration is straight, unpretentious and piercing. Narayan is looked upon as an unadulterated artist, especially, when compared with his contemporaries like Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. His is 'art for art's sake' novelist in real sense. He did not write to promulgate his ideas on social or political concerns though, when he began his literary career, India was passing through the crucial period of her struggle for independence. Narayan experienced a shock when Rajam, his sweet heart, died of typhoid, only five years after their marriage. Her death proved a great disaster for the young writer. It was probably this tragic incident which gave maturity and depth to his character. This incident made him comprehend the unforgiving veracities of a lifespan. Naturally, knowledge comes through passionate travail and pain and Narayan might have gained knowledge by his personal misery. His grief and suffering find expression in most of his works.

Indian society in a conversion from the old to the new norms, the disturbing experience of the fragmentation of the deep-rooted ethics and values and the uncertainty of the new ones, mounting concentration in modernism and progressivism, national emerging and enthrallment for Gandhi and Gandhian ideology, the rise of realism and humanism, the development of fictitious practice and the progression of numerous fictional categories are some major features of novel during post-independence period. The novels of this period show a remarkable advance over the novels before 1920 there has been a major shift in the selection of the themes. The scorching problems of the people now occupy Indo-Anglian novelist. He has seen the life as it is actually lived around him and he has consciously tried to portray it in his novel.

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