



FICTION IN NEW INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELS

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INTRODUCTION

New Indian English Fiction examines the origin of Indian writings in English. It identifies mysticism as the subject of literature in the writings of Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudhan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Aru Dutt etc. The efforts of R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao in effectively carrying the task of interpretation of the East to the West are examined. The article establishes how Mulk Raj Anand carved niche with distinctive socio literary approach. In this process biographical sketch of Anand is etched out and a brief synoptically view of all his works is provided in this article.

Indian writing in English in the contemporary literary scenario enjoys equal status with the literatures of the other countries. Indian writers have made their voice heard around the world in the Indian way, expressing too artistically. Earlier the African writing, Afro-American writing has made impact on the literature. Indian writers in English too in the recent times have managed to excel in all areas of literature and achieved global recognition. Indian writing in English is greatly influenced and we have had our own “Romantics”, “Victorians”, “Georgians” and “Modernists”. But in its own way Indian literature in English too has contributed to the common pool of world writing in English. An accident of history brought us into contact with the English Language: during the 150 years of our association with, we have marched to nationhood and Independence, and the English language too has during this period waxed in importance, out distanced it’s Rivals – French, German and Spanish and acquired a prominent status in the counsels of the world.

English is the veritable Suez Canal for intellectual intercourse between the West and the East between England and India especially; and the traffic is by no means altogether one-sided. Not only Indian thought from Vedic to Modern times has found its way to the West, but eminent Indian thinkers of yesterday and today – from Ram Mohan Roy and Keshub.

Chundersen to Vivekananda, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi and Radha Krishna have made themselves heard in the west. They have rendered the cultural offensive easier by their mastery of the English language. Indian writing in English has enlightened the literature with its quality and vividness. Truly, it represented the culture, history and all the variants necessary for the enrichment of the literature worldwide. And to the fact India is the third largest producer of the Novels after USA and UK. Although the writings profoundly deal with regionalism, they crossed the natural boundaries with universal themes. India is land of diversity with many languages, religions, races and cultures. This multiplicity gave the writers an enormous liberty to deal with various themes. The Indian writers dealt with historical, cultural, philosophical and much more basing their themes around mankind.

The first generation writers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo dealt mainly with philosophy in their works. They presented their works for the western readers because in the old books that were written by the travelers and officers of the ruling class it was well maintained that the Englishman

initially had an aversion for Indian customs and habits especially those connected with Hinduism. In their view Hindu gods were “Absolute monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness and cruelty” and they considered our religious system as “One Grand Abomination”. So, the first generation writers who were educated in the western universities wanted to redeem Indian spirituality from the negative perspective of the westerners. So, the literary works philosophical approach dealing with the very roots of Hinduism. Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and many other writers succeeded in presenting the true spirit and the philosophical views of Hinduism. The profound achievement of the writers of the first generation was the winning of Noble prize by Rabindranath Tagore. This has also remarked the achievement of Indian writing and also for wiping away the false attitude of the westerners towards Indian religious system. This helped in enriching the Indian spirituality worldwide.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy could be named as the first of Indian masters of English prose. Ram Mohan Roy’s interests and inquiries ranged from the rights of women and the freedom of the press to English education, the revenue and judicial systems in India, religious toleration and the plight and the Indian peasantry. He wanted India to become a new and modern country and the Indians to become a virile new people. Not of course, by cutting off our moorings from the past, but by achieving a new integration of our traditional strength with the new scientific disciplines from the west.

R.K. Narayana is one of the few writers in India who pursued with a sense of dedication what may often seem to be the mirage of technical perfection. There is a norm of excellence below which Narayan cannot possibly lower himself. In Narayan’s novels, there is generally a flight, an uprooting, a disturbance of order – followed by a return, a renewal, a restoration of normalcy. In Narayan’s latest novels, amid all the small talk and crazed thoughts, we witness comic gestures and frantic movements.

His *Swami and Friends* (1935) struck a totally different note, catching bemusedly the slow pace of life in Malgudi, a fictional microcosm of India. His other important works are *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The Dark Room* (1938) placed him as a comic ironist. In *The Dark Room* the proud heroine, Savitri having discovered her husband’s infidelity, sulks and goes to the dark room; i.e. “Kopbhavan”. Eventually she abandons her husband and children. But tormented by memories of her family, she returns submitting herself to obligations. Despite protagonist’s ‘resignation’ the novel carries the ironical social comedy.

As a contemporary with Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao makes with them a remarkable triad, affiliated in the choices of themes and with his enchanting prose style. He too is a product of Gandhian age, and revels in his work his sensitive awareness of the forces let loose by Gandhian revolution as also of the thwarting or steadying pulls of past tradition.

Raja Rao’s first novel “*Kanthapura*” presents life seen through a believer’s perspective. India is portrayed like Sita in the toils of the Ravana. Gandhi as avatar of Vishnu to save India from the “Redmen”. Moorthy is the local hero, a Gandhian leader. All political education is conveyed through the Harikath Man, Jayaramchar, who retells the Rama epic equating it with Gandhi’s struggle for Swaraj. The narrator is an old woman, given to gossiping and breathless narration of whatever comes to her tradition stepped mind.

The third generation writers have concentrated their themes around sociological, Diaspora elements, feminine subjects, science and technologies, explorative writings, and much more. India has significantly contributed to the overall world literature. This contribution of India has been chiefly through the Indian writing in English, novelists being in the forefront in this respect. A number of novelists on the contemporary scene have given expression to their creative urge in no other language than English and have brought credit to the Indian English fiction as a distinctive force in the world fiction. To attempt creative expression on a national scale in an alien medium has seldom happened in human history; and it speaks of the prolific quality of the Indian mind to assimilate the newly confronting situations and the complex dilemmas of modern world.

The new English fiction exhibits confidence in tackling new themes and experiments with new techniques and approaches to handle three themes. The novelists come to their task without any preconceived notions of what constitutes literary content. This encourages them to focus on a vast and comprehensive canvas and to invest their themes with epic dimensions.

The new writer could compete with best in the world, perhaps that best in their own right; “it would be no exaggeration to say that the best English fiction in the world is being written by the Indians or those of Indian origin” Certain factors ensured the rise and proliferation of the new fiction. As Edward Said has noted, the gradual dismantling of the empires and the freeing of the colonies after World War – II generated a great deal of interest in the tradition “orient” and the understood, in the light of its changed relationships with the west.

As far as Indian literature is concerned, it has perhaps been easier for it to reflect the new challenges and changes because of the simple fact that its vehicle itself is a globalized language. Again, the leaders of the new fiction have mostly been a part of the Indian Diaspora. Living in the west, and using English almost like a mother tongue, they have been thoroughly exposed to significant modern western literary movements like post-modernism and to various narrative techniques like Magic realism, and Meta-fiction etc. this has enabled them to give a fresh orientation to fiction. At the same time, the best of them continue to have strong roots in India, so that they remain true to the kindred points of India and the west.

It is significant the spirit of the age is more pervasively and effectively reflected in the fiction than in other forms like poetry and drama. The novel, by its very nature, is better equipped to deal with social reality, whatever, liberties it may take in projecting it. It is hardly surprising therefore that the most substantial contribution of the period comes from fiction.

The first of the new novelists to arrive was Salman Rushdie who’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980) heralded a new era in the history of Indian English fiction. His main assets are a vaunting imagination, which often makes the bizarre its business, a carnivalesque sense of the comic and an irrepressible love of word play. When these powers are under perfect artistic control, and are geared to meaningful central concerns. Rushdie’s word play descends to the level of compulsive jesting. He seems to fall back on puerile puns, juvenile jokes and worn out witticisms. It is his hyperactive imagination that must have drawn Rushdie to surrealism and its modern cousin, Magic Realism. He strategically carves affinities with the strong oral traditions and narrative pattern of the Third World Societies. Rushdie’s novel *Satanic Verses* (1988) brought him considerable notoriety, as devout Muslims found it blasphemous.

Vikram Seth’s novel *A Suitable Boy* (1994) was on the high water marks of the Indian literary scene of the early nineties. The novel was short listed for the Booker Award but could not get it in the final round because the Booker Committee Chairman felt that the novel needed editing. Nonetheless the novel registered a tremendous sale and fired the imagination of many aspiring fiction writers in the country.

A number of women novelists have debut in the nineties. Their first novels are quiet effective in revealing the true state of Indian society when it comes to the treatment of women. All these writers were born after Indian Independence and English does not have any colonial associations for them. Their work is marked by an impressive feel for language and completely authentic presentation of contemporary India, with all its regional variations. They generally wrote about the urban middle class, the stratum of society they know best.

There are many women writers both novelists and poets based in the USA and Britain. Some like Jhabvala and Anita Desai are late immigrants while others, like JhumpaLahiri belong to the second generation of

Indians abroad. Most expatriate writers have a weak grasp of actual conditions in contemporary India and tend to recreate it through the lens of nostalgia. Their best works deal with Indian immigrants the section of society they know at first hand. Sunithi Nam Joshi and Bharathi Mukherjee are the oldest and naturally the most prolific.

As Indian novelist, short-story writer and art critic writing in English, Mulk Raj Anand was among the first writers to render Punjabi and Hindustani idioms into English. Called the Zola or Balzac of India, Anand drew a realistic and sympathetic portrait of the poor of his country. With Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan he has been regarded as on the “Founding Fathers” of the Indian English Novel.

“And he had soon become possessed with an overwhelming desire to live their life. He had been told they were sahibs, superior people. He had felt that to put on their clothes made one sahib too. So, he tried to copy them as well as he could in the exigencies of his peculiarly Indian circumstances” Mulk Raj Anand was born in Peshawar, as the son of Lal Chand, a coppersmith and soldier and IshwarKaur. Anand rebelled early on against his father’s subservience to the British authorities. His first texts were born as a reaction to the trauma of the suicide of an aunt, who had been excommunicated for dining with a Muslim woman. An unhappy love for a Muslim girl, who was married, inspired some of his poetry. Anand attended Khalsa College, Amritsar and entered the University of Punjab in 1921, graduating with honors in 1924. Thereafter Anand did his additional studies at Cambridge and at London University, receiving his Ph.D. in 1929. He studied and later lectured at League of Nations School of Intellectual Cooperation in Geneva. Between 1932 and 1945 Anand lectured, on and off, at workers Educational Association in London.

In the 1930s and 1940s, Anand divided his time between literary London and Gandhi’s India. He joined the struggle for independence, but also fought with the republicans in the Spanish Civil War. During World War – II, he worked as a broadcaster and scriptwriter in the film division of the BBC in London. Among his friends was George Orwell.

After the war Anand returned permanently to India, making Bombay his home town and center of activity. In 1946 he founded the fine-arts magazine Marg. He also became a director of Kutub Publishers. From 1948 to 1966 Anand taught at Indian Universities. In the 1960s he was Tagore professor of literature and Fine Art at the University of Punjab and visiting professor at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Simla (1967-68). Between the years 1965 and 1970 Anand was fine art chairman at Lalit Kala Akademi . In 1970 he was appointed president of Lokayata Trust, for creating a community and cultural center in the village of HauzKhas, New Delhi. Anand started to write at an early age. Although Punjabi and Hindustani were Anand’s mother tongues, he wrote in English, because English language publisher did not reject his books due to their themes. His career as a writer Anand began in England by publishing short notes on books in T.S. Eliot’s magazine criterion. His acquaintances from this time included such authors as E.M. Forster, Herbert Read, Henry Miller and George Orwell, who tried to get Anand a full-time post at the BBC. The most important influence upon Anand was Gandhi, who shaped his social conscience.

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