



PERIODICAL CHANGES IN THE THEMES OF LITERATURE

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“Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity.”

- G. K. Chesterton

Abstract

Literature plays a paramount social function in the transformation of the society. With the expansion of English education by the Christian Missionaries in India, the development and patronage to the English language had taken a new direction. The advent of 20th century marked a significant paradigm shift in almost all walks of both personal and professional life. Globalization is one of the reasons for the rise of recent changes in contemporary literature. There is a paradigm shift in the writing style of Indian writers after independence. Literature at present deals with realities, the topics are on expatriation, alienation, insecurity, drugs usage, trafficking of women, child prostitution, sexual harassment and case of transsexuals and their plight. Their arduous journey from pre-independence to post-independence is an excellent achievement in the history of English. The main study of this paper is to depict the constant changes that have been made in the literature right before the independence to at present.

Keywords: Literature, technology, pre-independence, post-independence, trio, women writers, variation of themes

Introduction

The beginning of English literature received its impetus from three sources: the British government's educational reforms; the work of missionaries; and, the use of English language and literature by the upper-class Indians. Indian writing in English had changed over the decades. Indian writing was called “Indo-Anglian.”

History of Indian Literature

Researchers had brought to light that Indian writing in English was rooted in the expatriate experience of the 18th century when a writer like Din Muhammad (1759 – 1851) in Scotland; and, he had written travelogues in English. It had been widely acknowledged by many literary historians that the reader and writer of Indian English fiction belong to the privileged classes of India who understood English and were exposed to European or Western influences through their work, education, friendship or travel. Interracial friendships between English and Indians during the 1660-1760 played a significant role in developing English prose in India. “To appreciate the art of another period one must, to a certain extent enter into its Spirit, accept its conventions; adopt a willing suspension of disbelief in its values.” (David Lord Cecil, 1979:36)

The rise of Novel

The stories written in the first nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth century highlighted social evils, the admirable qualities of Indian womanhood and portrayed Indian



rural life. The novels written by them were a “replica” of their life and were mostly related to their own lives. “The novel was beautifully constructed brick by brick with care, leaving sufficient room for readers to break into and open up a new plethora of meaning. The characters in the novel carry two ‘selves’ within their psyche. On the one hand the inner self rebels to break away from traditions; while on the other, the cultural archetypes thrust upon their psyche blind them to the traditions.”(MQ Khan, 1995:88)

The first Indo–Anglian novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* published in 1864 by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee establishes him more as a path maker rather than a creative artist with extraordinary skill. Native Indian literatures dealt with more serious themes than fables, stories and tales of romantic adventure. Novels that were written on the theme of history during pre-independence period failed to exhibit originality or sense of historical perspective; they were finally labeled as historical romances. “Their novels had all the familiar Scott silhouettes—high romance, barehanded struggles, feats of prowess, protestations of lifelong Love, songs and poems within the novel, bards and seers, women and talisman, tales of old retold and relived, damsels in distress and knights arrant, and loyalty—unto— death followers”.(Uma Parameshwaran, 1976:17).

The First World War brought forward new sources of inspiration. One of the main reasons for the short stories to emerge fast during that period was the rise of the demand for English newspapers and magazines. “There was something of an actual demand for short stories in English and occasionally even for serial novels.” (KRS Iyengar, 1945:178).

The first generation writers

Indian writing in English had enlightened the literature with its vividness and quality. The Indian writers in their writing did not hold on to one aspect; and, they dealt with all the spheres with historical, philosophical and cultural themes around the mankind. The writers of the first generation were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), with the expansion of Indian press, had excellently contributed to the rise of journalistic prose. His interests ranged from women empowerment and expressed in his writings to denounce practices such as widow-burning, polygamy and gender discrimination in the inheritance laws. Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941) prose writings on religious and philosophical subjects were a major development during Tagore's period with brilliant achievements. Sri Aurobindo (1872 – 1950) introduced various aspects on human progress and spiritual evolution. He was an outstanding figure in Indian literature in English. In addition, he also had written on different themes of philosophy and poetry. Nirad C Chaudury (1897 – 1999) was an Indian Bengali–English writer and a man of letters. His oeuvre provides a magisterial appraisal of the histories and cultures of India, especially in the context of British colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The three towering figures “Trio”

The writers of the next generation, who emerged in Indian writing in English, had brought sweeping changes with their writing works. They were the “Trio,” Mulk Raj Anand, RK



Narayan and Raja Rao. The big three great and towering figures follow not with the same concepts, but followed different routes of fictionalizing with distinct identity of their unique style. The themes that they chose emerged from the social, economic and political issues which influenced the masses at that time.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905 – 2004) had been the prolific writer of the “Trio His writings were with a strong criticism on caste and class in Indian society with the themes of poverty, hunger and suffering of Indian people. His main motive in his novels was to eradicate taboos prevalent in the society. Bhabani Bhattacharya (1906 – 1988) writings exhibit the influence of Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. The central theme of Bhattacharya works or novels was poverty and hunger. Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Iyer Narayanaswami, popularly known as RK Narayan (1906 – 2001), was a prolific writer; best known for his imaginary town set up in his novels is Malgudi. The themes depicted in Narayan’s novels and the ironies of Indian daily life, in which modern urban existence clashes with the ancient tradition, conventions, codes and beliefs of the family and the society. Raja Rao (1908 – 2006) was one of the enigmatic writers, whose novels had been received with whole-heartedness. Myth played a pivotal role in his writings. Myth conveys the everlasting duration of a theme with all the possibility of dissimilarities. “Every novel must have some myth to serve as a frame of reference and the question is precisely one of knowing to what extent that particular myth is pertinent to the actual historical, society and consequently can ‘account for it.’” (Arundati Roy, 1999:70).

The towering figures had a strong commitment to expose the harsh realities of life to effect the desired transformation in the society. Nationalism, partition, peasantry, poverty, rural–urban divide, subjugated women, East–West encounter, casteism, communism and the feudal practices were some of the themes quite close to their heart.

Changes in the themes over the time

The novels of 1920s to 1950s showed a remarkable development in respect to all the vistas. There had been a major shift in the selection of the themes. After Indian Independence, the writers had contributed immensely for the development of Indian English which had taken a new direction. The Indian writers perceived post-independence in a different view. The old ideas that existed started slowly fading giving birth to new and fresh ones. National Movement, the partition, the communal riots after partition, the problems of casteism, subjugation of women, the poverty of illiterate masses became the main theme of the hour, drew the attention of the creative writers. Many writers VS Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Chetan Bhagat, Kushwant Singh etc., enhanced the view of the literature with the passage of time. Many successful and talented writers emerged after Indian Independence following the footsteps of Pre Independence writers.



New branch of Literature: Diaspora

Post-independence India witnessed apparent changes, sporadic authors and the writers had taken the task to be conscious of social norms, on their shoulders. The other interesting feature of this period is: it had given birth to the Indian "Diaspora" with clusters unsuccessful at identifying themselves with the native mode of administration, migration to another land which was once called the "white master's." The abstract anxiety of helplessness, the angry young man restlessness were the marked features of every Independent Indian human mind in the core of literature, which however had taken towards fresh directions under the gradual arriving of globalization and its influence on Indian literature. Genres of unforeseen miracles began to crop up every day in literature from India, modernizing Indian literature. Modernization was not confined to a restricted sense of being omnipresent in the 21st century. The contribution of the eminent writers in Indian writing in English by men has been discussed briefly.

Emergence of women writers

Women were educated after many reforms, which opened vistas to liberate themselves and walk into different realms on the society. Women obtained freedom from the clutches of illiteracy and ignorance in the wake of independence. The First Woman Writer was Aphra Behn. Emergence of Women Novelists from Post-Independence was a significant development in the Indian Writing in English. "Being a woman is a terribly difficult trade it consists of principally dealing with men." (Joseph Conrad, 2016: The Hindu).

The themes depicted by the pre-Independence women, were very contemporary on the clash between tradition and modernity, women's struggle for empowerment and psychological turmoil in a patriarchal milieu. Within a short span of life Toru Dutt had become a remarkable writer. Another significant writer Sarojini Naidu with her tremendous works not only shared the exciting roles in struggle for independence, but also had articulated the national aspirations in the realm of literature.

The writers of the next generation such as Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Uma Vasudev, Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri represent a new era of emancipation for women with increased opportunities, and dynamic participation in the social and intellectual life. They continued their quench for writing with the same inspiration from the early writers without hiatus.

Women writers of the first generation engaged themselves with issues of women in conventional marriage systems, human relationships, and contemporary social and political developments from a woman's point of view, along with the psychological influences of the contemporary world. The next generation women writers highlighted on identity crises, loneliness, poverty, racial discrimination, social realism and search for home also find expression within the domain of their works differently discussed by a plethora of writers. It had become the main phenomenon in their works. The novelists expressed in their writings



about their discontent with the plight of upper caste and women chained in repressive institutions such as child marriage, dowry, arranged marriage and enforced widowhood. The role of woman also changed from Deity to Devadasi, from Shakti to Abala, from home bound creature to a professional. To what was expressed by Lord Tennyson, in "*Princess*," women writers proved it wrong by rendering their excellent contribution towards literary works with robust energy, optimism and bagged several astonishing awards of their success.

"Man for the field and woman for the hearth: Man for the sword and for the needle she: Man with the head and woman with the heart: Man to command and woman to obey; All else confusion." (Dr. Viswanath Bite, 2015:1).

During the last two decades, Indian women writers had taken fiction as their own object in the mirror of their life and had dexterously woven plots with their ideas and philosophy.

Kamala Markandaya witnessed many political upheavals and depicted various aspects in her writings. She, highlighted on the changing socio-economic scene, making her novels wonderful and realistic. "Kamala Markandaya is one of the major novelists on the Common Wealth scene". (Uma Parameswaran, 1976:50). Ruth PraverJhabvala (1927-2013) wrote novels and tales based on Indian subjects. The themes in her novels were love and marriage in the bourgeois society. The characters in her Novels, dealt with their identity crisis and how they handled their trauma and how they created new identities were vividly portrayed. NayantaraSahgal (1927 – 2003) was a well-known novelist, in her novels some of the characters broke the norms of the society in order to make a peaceful life and involve in extra-marital relationship. Uma Vasudev (1931) dealt with fiction and non-fictional works. She handled every minute single topic with utmost delicacy and was known for her distinctive style and approach in her write ups. Kamala Das (1934 – 2009) preferred to write poetry her poems reveal that she was known for her bold and candid expression. Anita Desai (1937) was the foremost Indian women novelist in English. Desai's women characters in her novels rebelled against patriarchal community in order to explore their own potential to live on their own terms regardless of the consequences that faced in their lives. Shashi Deshpande (1938) candidly articulated a thematic and technical maturity with an acute feminine sensibility. Her novels are concerned with woman's quest on exploration into the female psyche, an understanding of the mysteries of life and the protagonists place in it. Bharati Mukherjee (1940) constructed the inner consciousness of Indian women immigrants in her writings. She presented the picture of an immigrant who was caught in a Sisyphean cycle of insecurity, isolation and dehumanization. Shobhaa De (1948) is candid in portraying the feelings of her characters and never hesitated to portray their emotions in her novels. She is a positive and an optimistic person which was strongly shown in her writings. Manju Kapur (1948) had highlighted the issue of patriarchy, inter-religious marriages, family bonds, male-female relationships, and the co-existence of past and present times. Meena Alexander (1951) themes of her novels centered on migration, dislocation, conflict, love and divinity. Githa Hariharan (1954), was an integral part of the tradition of Indian women writers. The crisis of identity plays a pivotal role in the thematic design of the novels of Githa Hariharan. Chitra Banerjee (1956) works focused on the South Asian Immigrant's experiences and



partially autobiographical. She dealt with a variety of themes in her novels including inter-racial relationships, racism, economic disparity, abortion and divorce. Arundhati Roy (1961) is the famous writer. Her writings were unique with a deep insight into the contemporary political issues. They are a true reflection of the experiences she encountered in her personal life. The novel was unique in every aspect and it was a linguistic experiment with the English language. The literary skills were observed in Roy's novels with a close observation on minute aspects. Jhumpa Lahiri (1967), her themes are universal like marital harmony, loss of a loved one or parenting which make her narratives easily consumable by various categories of readers. Her writings delved into the heterogeneity of identities. Kiran Desai (1971) did not restrict herself to one theme in her writings; but wrote from different dimensions. She handled various issues of modern civilization in her second novel. The concept of globalization was multisided. She used the technique of magic realism and social realism in her novels.

Variation of themes from Pre-Independence to Post-Independence

The themes of Indian women writers varied from Pre-Independence to Post-Independence, from the writer's point of view which was the major contribution to the Indian novel in English. As per the studies it was found that during the pre-Independence era the participation was of men and not of women. The post-Independence Indian novel had been termed as the modern novel; and, it was not radically different from the novel in the pre-Independence India. With all the efforts and endeavour of erudite people, literature is lighted all over the world; and, opened new vistas with the horizon of Indian writers that resonated the readers. Though women writers had come across vicissitudes in their life, taken it challengingly and moved ahead with their passion and dedication towards their literary works which are still admired and ebullient.

Realistic Portraits by contemporary writers

The themes of the present generation writers, who had routes to their roots, was very much linked to a psychological return to one's self such as, VS Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth, Amitav Gosh and few others made a tremendous contributions to novel in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. For these writers, India represents a primeval and psychological rootedness, perhaps even stability, authenticity, and, of course, the much touted spirituality. The topics they preferred were on exile, experiences of immigration, displacement, restlessness, alienation, communal riots after partition and reminiscences of the past. "Displacement means as the act of displacement, establishment, removal, mutation, permanence and transfer." (Francis Andrew, 1903:202). They had taken the fiction as the strong weapon to portray their angst in their works which, not only had given them solace but also given them with a new identity in the other soil. The novels written in the post-Independence period successfully rendered the Indian nativity and it had opened with the new horizons to the Indian Diaspora. They made the novel a medium of global expression.



Technology and its reflection

Technology today also enables one-to-one correspondence between an author and a reader, simplifying access to and understanding of literature by students, researchers, and readers. Online literature access by academics is increasing day by day. The development of multimedia, featuring Hypertext and E-books, brought radical changes in the field of literature because they revolutionized the way of writing and reading. Indian writings in English are a product of the historical encounter between the two cultures—Indian and the western—for about one hundred and ninety years. “Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols and languages.” (James, Clifford, 1988:14).

Globalization

Industrialization, urbanization, globalization and modernization constitute the minor themes recurrently and consistently treated in the Post-Independence Indian English novel. “Globalization....means wider access, but not equal access for everyone....The problem with globalization is its aspiration to guarantee a tendentially egalitarian access to products in a world naturally unequal and varied.” (HimadriLahiri, 2011:85). Literary work exhibits the writer's keen observation of the global and national environment and creatively portraying it in their works. Earlier, writers who contributed their writings remained in one particular area, but did not enter into other fields, whereas present writers are technocrats, celebrities, management professionals. Internet, ICT, VLE, digital media and software as such have heralded a new era in many aspects of our lives, to which education is no exception. In this paper, I have tried to present the immense changes that have occurred over the past century in the choice of themes and how they evolved over time to suit to the current changes in the society.

Conclusion

To conclude, over a period of time Indian Writing in English, the writers had experienced initial hiccups to withstood lot many challenges. But, it had witnessed multitude of notable changes in the selection of themes of their own domain from pre-independent to post-independent period. There were laudable efforts put forward by plethora of writers not of one gender but both men and women from different walks of life. The 20th century witnessed extraordinary influential happenings, wherein life itself got redefined. Literature always been the index of various hues of life. At present, industrialization, urbanization, globalization and modernization constitute minor themes recurrently and consistently treated in the Post-Independence Indian English novel. The last decade has seen the increase of popular novels portraying contemporary Indian society. Today, a lot of Technocrats, Celebrities, Management Professionals etc., making bestsellers in India. They have not taken it as their profession, but, ventured on it as their passion and contributed to Indian Writing in English giving a universal recognition.



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