

SOCIETAL REFLECTIONS AND PROJECTION IN INDIAN FICTION**Dr. Khamar Jahan Sk**

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Abstract

Literature and society have always remained inseparable from each other. Literature cannot sustain without society. Most of the writers are influenced by the issues surfacing in the society and address them in their writings. The themes, subjects and style of writing keep changing with the course of time. Thus, Indian writing in English is a store house of narratives. The factors that shaped the growth of the Indian literature in English arose from the political and social problems of a colonized country and from indigenous narrative traditions of ancient culture. The socio-political movement that caught the imagination of the entire nation also inspired the Indian novelists in English. Right from the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, Indian novelists started focusing their attention largely on contemporary problems. The Indian fiction in English attained its maturity and wide acclaim in the post-independence era. The writers of this period did not concern with old fashioned ideas but imbibed a new freedom. The recent fictional writings have registered a marked shift. Instead of informing a typical Indian cultural background and traditional Indian cultural ethos, they exhibit global concerns through the presentation of multi-cultural reality. The expansion of the scope of their thematic concerns and development of new forms of expression. Literature stands as a mirror to the current happenings of the society. There are a variety of engaging narratives, traditional, innovative, literary and commercial, Women's writing, crime fiction, terror novels, science fiction, campus novels, animal novels, LGBT voices, dalit writing, children's writing, narratives of myth and fantasy, philosophical novels, historical novels, postcolonial and multicultural narratives– all presenting new structures in their portrayal of human predicament.

Keywords: Literature, Society, Socio-political, narratives, thematic concerns

Introduction

Literature and society have always remained inseparable from each other. Literature cannot sustain without society. Societal reflections are remarkably noticed in literature in one way or another. Writing is generally considered as the most suitable form of exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of time, and Indian English fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature. As a creative process, Indian fiction is an expression of the most powerful and intimate consciousness of life and society. There are developments in the society that fulfill some purposes, contemplate some thoughts and act upon some plans for the welfare of humanity. When such different things are witnessed in life and society, those changes are reflected in the fictional world. Indian English fiction also does the same thing. It expresses thoughts, feelings and emotions in a rationale and fascinating manner, and directly or indirectly throws light upon different changes in its own way. Hence, the reflection of change in different fields of the society manifests its significance in the creative writing in English.

Reflections

Most of the writers are influenced by the issues surfacing in the society and address them in their writings. The themes, subjects and style of writing keep changing with the course of time. Thus, Indian writing in English is a store house of narratives. The best reference to the societal reflections in literature can be related with Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Social

stratification of people based upon their wealth, caste and social status was the order of the day. Indian society was dominated by strict codes and social taboos. The social condition of the people was deplorable. The rigid Caste system of India with its blighting influence reigned in its full vigour. His interest included the rights of women, the freedom of press, religious tolerance, English education, the revenue and judicial systems in India. The horrible rites of Sati and Infanticide moved Ram Mohan Roy and his writings reflected the social evils like sati system, the oppressive condition of the Hindu female, Kulinism, Polygamy, and infanticide.

Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora* (1923) is rich in philosophical debate on politics and religion with a deep understanding of human emotions. A burning topic of social reform in pre-independence era, it is intertwined with various themes like love, caste discrimination, woman-emancipation, nation and nationalism, religion, spirituality provide a panoramic view of his vision and society of the times. As Krishna Kriplani rightly says, "Gora is more than a mere novel; it is an epic of India in transition at a crucial period of modern history, when the social conscience and intellectual awareness of the new intelligentsia were in the throes of a great churning. No other book gives so masterly an analysis of the complex of Indian social life with its teeming contradictions, or of the character of Indian nationalism which draws its roots from renascent Hinduism and stretches out its arms towards universal humanism." (118)

The history of Indian novels in English can be traced from the 1860's with the publication of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Raj Mohan's Wife* (1864). He imbibed patriotic feelings of Bengal and exposed the shams and hypocrisies of contemporary life and society. There was a reflection of social and cultural values in his writings. As Bankim Sudipto Kaviraj writes about Bankim's experimentation in his novels as, "Stories of his novels often turn around a conflict between two inevitabilities, two things that are equally necessary truths of human life. A social world requires definitions, a kind of a basic social map which defines permissions and prohibitions, at the same time, there are elemental drives of human nature which these social constructs are meant to discipline into reasonably safe forms but hardly can. The social and moral worlds in which men actually live are made up of these two dissimilar and contradictory elements---the desire that controls men and the constructs that make society. Much of Bankim's fictional movement arises from this central conflict between the inevitability of moral orders and inevitability of their transgressions." (2) Few other novels like Ram Krishna Punt's *The Bay of Bengal* (1866), Anand Prasad Dutt's *The Indolence* (1878), Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *The Young Zamindar* (1883), Krupabai Sathianandan's *Kamala: A Story of Hindu Child Wife* (1894) and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895), Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Bijoy Chand: An Indian Tale* (1888) and Lt. Suresh Biswas: *His Life and Adventures* (1900) and Yogendra Chattopadhyaya's *The Girl and Her Tutor* (1891) were also published on social and historical issues.

The factors that shaped the growth of the Indian literature in English arose from the political and social problems of a colonized country and from indigenous narrative traditions of ancient culture. This was exquisitely exemplified in the works of Romesh Chandra Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and few others. These writers reflect the social and political situations existing in the country are "faithfully mirrored right from the early phase of reformist exuberance to the growth of a revolutionary consciousness among

the common masses of India.” (1) It was an era of social, cultural and national consciousness in which Indian English novelists gave their contribution through their writings. Romesh Chandra Dutta's *The Lake of Palms* (1902) and *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909) aimed at the elimination of social evils and superstitions, desiring social reforms. They showed an awareness of the regional life and right values through their thoughts. Social evils, eating into the vitals of Indian society, like caste system, purdah pratha, child marriage, poverty, exploitation, disparity, cultural conflicts and historical happenings took common place in the novels of this period of national awakening. Naturally in the pre-Independence era, novels like Rabindranath Tagore's *The Wreck* (1921), M.M.Banarji's *Nanda, the Pariah Who Overcame Caste* (1923), D.G.Mukherjee's *Hari, the Jungle Lad* (1924) and *My Brother's Face* (1925), K.S.Venkatramani's *Murugan, The Tiller* (1927) and few other works gave firm footing to the Indian fiction in English focusing on social concerns, stark realism, humanism, regional colour, orthodox, liberal, progressive and Gandhian thoughts and rapidly changing historical and political situations.

The socio-political movement that caught the imagination of the entire nation also inspired the Indian novelists in English. Right from the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, Indian novelists started focusing their attention largely on contemporary problems. Motivated by political awareness and changed historical situation, they started to conceive of the state of values while presenting life and society realistically in their fictional world. The novels that emerged at different times, in different regions of India showed a preoccupation with historical romance, social or political reform fiction and psychological novel. The growth of Indian novel is seen very clearly with social or political reform middle class people by R.K.Narayan, realistic and passionate progressivism of Mulk Raj Anand, novels on rural life by K.S.Venkatramani, philosophic fiction and the emotional zeal for Gandhian ideals by Raja Rao. During 1930s and 1940s novelists of India used the medium to spread Gandhi's message, the problem of casteism and untouchability, facts related to freedom struggle. From Raja Rao to Nayantara Sahgal, the various shades of intensity with which the Indian fiction adopted a new role after independence. The socio-cultural consciousness and the growth of the feelings of nationalism and achievement of national independence gave a fantastic impetus to the growth and development of Indian English fiction.

Projection

The Indian fiction in English attained its maturity and wide acclaim in the post-independence era. The writers of this period did not concern with old fashioned ideas but imbibed a new freedom. Experiencing a change in their themes, they treated novel as a “sort of a container for a special kind of reality which may or may not resemble that ‘real reality’ which we experience outside books.”(6). They focused on the private sphere like the inner dilemma, alienation, frustration, detachment, involvement, self-condemnation, self approval, sense of guilt, loneliness, nausea, etc. became the pinpoints for the themes of the novels of this age. The themes of current writings were, cross-cultural conflict, realism and fantasy, rural events, the traumatic experiences of the partition of India and Pakistan, Indo-China and Indo-Pak wars, communal carnages, loss of faith and values, curse of industrialization and materialism, the growth of Indian ethos and sensibility, etc., are seen in the novels of the post-independence fictionists. Writers like G.V.Desani, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Nirad C.Chaudhari, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar,

S.N.Ghose, Kamala Markandeya, Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal, R.P.Jhabvala, Attia Hussain, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Nargis Dalal, Bharti Mukherjee, Anita Kumar etc. It has become the task of a novelist to present in their work faithfully the sum total of a society's thought processes, vision of life, needs, aspirations, traditions and commitments. When the most lethal incident in the history of India, partition of the country is referred to, Kushwanth Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) occupies the foremost place. He used the medium of creative writing to lay bare the brutality, inhumanity and genocide of worst type that left an indelible mark on the psyche of every Indian.

The recent fictional writings have registered a marked shift. Instead of informing a typical Indian cultural background and traditional Indian cultural ethos, they exhibit global concerns through the presentation of multi-cultural reality. The expansion of the scope of their thematic concerns and development of new forms of expression have won them many prestigious and international awards including the Nobel Prize won by V.S. Naipaul. The presentation of traditional Indian middle class society and its contradictions have been replaced with the life and experiences of the rich and to a large extent socially liberated people. The writers are making efforts to bring out new forms of life showing multiple possibilities of human existence in a new world. Their writings also exhibit a tendency of mixing fact and fiction. The writers like Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Seth Namita Gokhale, Kiran Sawhney and Shobha De exhibit this tendency in their works. Apart from an interest in global concerns that tends to broaden the scope of their fiction, they also relate to various changes in life.

Contemporary novels reflect the varied features of contemporary society and the writers are more concerned about the masses interested in popular fiction. They are giving expression to mute-voices and traditionally marginalised aspects of human experience. Khushwant Singh's *The Company of Women* (1999), Manju Kapur's *A Married Woman* (2003), Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* (2001), Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2005), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1999) also mark this tendency. Most of the novelists have touched almost all the strata of Indian society, and varied aspects are reproduced artistically and truthfully in their thought provoking novels. The novelists have tried to draw a lively picture of the modern Indian society, projecting the caste system, joint families and their disintegration, man-woman relationship, East-West encounter, traditional concept, position of women in society and the problem of urbanization. Man Booker Prize winner, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) is a book about the rigid class systems that exist in India and abroad amongst Indians, and the struggles that the people face within these classes after colonialism. It talks about this theme of living between the East and the West. The publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) was rightly hailed by *The New York Review of Books* as one of the most important novels to come out of the English-speaking world in this generation.

Conclusion

Literature stands as a mirror to the current happenings of the society. There are a variety of engaging narratives, traditional, innovative, literary and commercial, Women's writing, crime fiction, terror novels, science fiction, campus novels, animal novels, LGBT voices, dalit writing, children's writing, narratives of myth and fantasy, philosophical novels, historical novels, postcolonial and multicultural narratives— all presenting new structures in

their portrayal of human predicament. The texture and structure of this art form had made contemporary novel so rich and diverse by suitably gifted writers. The campus novel that has its literary ancestry in R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August: An Indian Story* (1988) has form the content interspersed with irony and humour, intellectual flare and emotional overbearing, dreams and disappointments, intrigues and manipulations, love and longing, friendship and rivalry, career concerns and job worries have rocked the new generation readers who identify themselves with the narratives quite temperamentally.

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