
Recent Trends & Developments in Indian English Fiction

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Abstract

There are many new trends and developments in the humanities and literature. Indian English Literature is not the exception to this. There are many new literary movements in Indian English Fiction. We have a gallery of writers who are writing, translating and transcreating into English. Creativity, translation, transcreation, Dalit Literature, Diasporic writing, postcolonial writing, postmodern and feminist writings are emerging speedily in Indian English Fiction. Today, we can find a lot of technocrats, management professionals especially from abroad making bestsellers in India. The credits can be given both to marketing skills and creative writing skills. The social networking Medias are also helping in marketing. Many authors like ChetanBhagat, Shobha De, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai have Facebook fan pages and the writers are also active in Twitter and Blog. This helps them to know more about the wants of the audience and helps indirect interaction. Even books are available on e-reading. Many authors publish excerpts of their books online for encouraging sales. Today, the habit of reading is decreasing. So the writers have got to keep up more to the tastes of audience and their fast paced lives. The audience needs maximum entertainment in minimum time and effort. However, the Indian English popular fiction portrays the tastes of Indian writers and hence can be analyzed as a cultural study material.

INTRODUCTION

Literature is the mirror of society. Literature reflects the social, cultural, economical and historical life of human beings. Literature no longer remains limited to particular geographical, national or cultural circumstances. The global concerns and shifting paradigms informing different art forms have transformed the nature and the understanding of literature. The diversity of the reading material available in the market has changed the desires and expectations of the readers also. There has been a spurt of writings that not only mark interdisciplinary nature of literature but also provide an impetus for competition under unreasonable pressures to innovate. It has resulted in a form of writings that contests categorization based on traditionally accepted literary canons.

According to the 1965 National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, the term “humanities” includes, but is not limited to, the study of the following: language, both modern and classical

linguistics, literature, history, jurisprudence, philosophy, archaeology, comparative religion, ethics, the history, criticism, and theory of the arts, those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods, the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life. As stressed by Monika Fludernik:

The humanities enrich our experience through cross-cultural comparison and informed criticism of current dogma or received opinion, and by employing multiple perspectives on events and situations, especially in the domain of ethics. (2005: 59)

The 21st century has proved to the world that English literature is no longer the sole province of the imperial England. Although English literature started and flourished in England, it has gone on to sow the seeds of creativity in English in other parts of the world.

Interestingly, the English people themselves paved the way for the unexpected developments that we witness today Indian English Literature. Indian English fiction has always been responsive to the changes in material reality and theoretical perspectives that have impacted and governed its study since the time of its inception. At the earlier stage, the fictional works of the major Indian English writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao were mainly concerned with the down-trodden of the society, the Indian middle-class life and the expression of traditional cultural ethos of India. At that time, even to a much later stage when writers like K. S. Venkataramani, Kamala Markandaya, Bhabani Bhattacharya, ChamanNahal, Ruth PraverJhabvala, NayantaraSahagal, Arun Joshi, and Khushwant Singh wrote, Indian English fiction concentrated on the depiction of social reality of the times.

The advent of the 20th century marked a significant paradigm shift in almost all walks of life. The century witnessed extraordinary seminal happenings wherein life itself got redefined. Literature, which has always been the index of various hues of life, too witnessed watershed moments. Peter Childs in *Modernism* says:

. . . modes of literary discourse blur . . . or overwrite . . . the ones before. Hence, there is an undeniable interrelationship between life, literature, thought and language. The ever-changing paradigms of the global world have given literature not only an opportunity to revisit its own theories and practices but chartered a course for new ones to emerge. The issues of society, culture, politics, gender, etc. need to be oriented and explored with reference to the changing necessities of the society. Moreover, the rise of a global world has made the medium of imitation a complex phenomenon as the linguistic diversities have paved the way for a multilingualism that co-exists with the ever-increasing territory of a single Global Language, English, which in turn comes with its own set of adaptations and "englishes". (2007: 66) Indian English literature (IEL)

refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Its early history began with the works of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, RajaRao who contributed to Indian fiction in the 1930s. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian diaspora, such as V.S. Naipaul, Kiran Desai, JhumpaLahiri, Agha Shahid Ali, RohintonMistry and Salman Rushdie, who are of Indian descent. It is frequently referred to as Indo-Anglian literature. Indo-Anglian is a specific term in the sole context of writing that should not be confused with the term Anglo-Indian. As a category, this production comes under the broader realm of postcolonial literature - the production from previously colonised countries such as India. A major trend is the original creative writing in English in the Indian subcontinent, among others. After the trio of Raja Rao, R K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand in the middle of the 20th century, we have a multitude of writers both men and women from different walks of life on various themes. While economic and social development was a priority for political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the psychological and sociological consequences of development became a major preoccupation for writers like R K Narayan and Kamala Markandaya as in *The Painter of Signs* and *A Handful of Rice*, respectively. They dealt with a less complicated and largely rural life in a leisurely fashion. Their overtly political and social themes required a slow space for introspection at every stage. The changed perception informing a different nature of the relationship between the author and his work has also impacted the contemporary Indian-English fiction writing. Instead of being the creator or the producer of a literary work, his role gets approximated to that of the manufacturer of a work of art. The writers settled abroad and the ones who divide their time between India and abroad have contributed much to this rapidly developing Indian Literature, sub-genre of English literature. Now Indian English literature no longer remains limited to the writings necessarily of

the “sons of the soil”. It has broadened the scope of fictional concerns of these writers from purely Indian to the global and transnational. Today Indian English as well as Indian writing in English has got its own identity. A number of recent Indian novelists have produced significant novels, making a mark in the literary world. The fictional writings of many of the recent Indo-English fiction writers also register a marked shift. Instead of informing a typical Indian cultural background and traditional Indian cultural ethos, their works exhibit global concerns through the presentation of multi-cultural reality. The changed nature of their concerns has resulted in their ever-increasing readership. The expansion of the scope of their thematic concerns and development of new forms of expression have won them many prestigious International Awards including the Nobel Prize won by V.S. Naipaul. Their writings have won acclaim far and wide. Instead of the presentation of typical Indian socio-cultural background and typography, these writers concentrate on different forms of life concerning various cultures. Similarly, the presentation of traditional Indian middle-class society and its contradictions has been replaced with the life and experiences of the rich and to a large extent socially liberated people. Their works are not limited to the representation of commonly experienced epistemological world of the poor and the socially down-trodden. The 1980s witnessed a second coming for the Indian novel in English. Its messiah seems to have been Salman Rushdie. The appearance of *Midnight's Children* in 1981 brought about a renaissance in Indian writing in English which has outdone that of the 1930s. Its influence, acknowledged by critics and novelists alike, has been apparent in numerous ways: the appearance of a certain post-modern playfulness, the turn too history, a new exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness, even the prominent references to Bollywood, all seem to owe something to Rushdie's novel. The issue of imagining the nation, the issue of the fate of the children of the midnight hour of

independence, has become a pressing one throughout India. It is an issue which has been debated in all languages. The better novels in English of the past thirtyfive years participate in this larger debate. If Rushdie ushered in a new era of Indian writing in English, it has to be acknowledged that he was more a sign of the times than their creator. A great Indian writer in English and a critic K.R. Srinivasalyengar rightly remarks:

When an Indian writer of fiction uses a learnt second language like English, he is actually recording a kind of half-conscious translation (from mother tongue into English) that has taken place in the mind. Most of our writers are bi-lingual, some equally proficient in English and the mother tongue, and some more in one than in the other. The background and the situations are usually Indian but the characters may often be drawn from bilingual milieus. The need for expressing the values verities and heartbeats of one culture in the language of another poses its own problems and there is doubtless the inner urge to render in English the rhythms, idiosyncrasies, images, idioms and proverbs of the local speech. (1990: 22)

Thus, one of the most outstanding characteristics of Indian writing in English is that the background is Indian and the language though foreign has adopted itself to the needs of the Indians. Today Indian English as well as Indian writing in English has got its own identity. The most interesting aspect of the fiction at the turn of the present century from the Indian point of view is the emergence of new talent. A number of recent Indian novelists have produced significant novels, making a mark in the literary world

Feminism with its thrust on women's concerns has also brought a major change in contemporary Indian English fiction. Women writers seem to deliberately concentrate on women's experiences. Their concern for the marginalization and subordination of women in different walks of life can be ascertained from the

fictionalization of different forms of women's life in their works. A notable change in their depiction of women can be observed from the presentation of the women characters different from their traditional counterparts. Instead of submissive, docile and passive women, we find assertive and aggressive women characters in the writings of contemporary Indian English women writers

Postcolonial perspectives have also impacted the critical and the creative aspects of Indian English fiction. How the colonial rulers created a particular image of their subject races to perpetrate their hold on them forms an important feature of the emerging forms of narrative. Contemporary writers hailing from the previously colonized nations, particularly India, explore forms of life that existed during the British rule. They also expose the subtle strategies employed to make the colonized people, to take their subjugated position as something natural and transcendental. These writers also bring out the functioning of almost the same power politics that defines the relations between the power wielding people and the people kept at the margins even after the end of political imperialism

Although diasporic writers like Bahrathi Mukherjee, ChitraDivakaruni Banerjee, JhumpaLahiri and Kiran Desai have different windows on the world of their lives in India and abroad, they too share the common concerns of Indian writers in terms of cultural bondings and bindings that help and also hinder us from evolving into a higher level of life, especially a higher standard of peaceful life for all Indians all over the world. JhumpaLahiri's *The Interpreters of Maladies* has smacks of disease. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* is a poignant story of an Indian unable to live here or there or anywhere, for the social and political forces against him

Most of these women seem to be free from economic worries and traditional moral dilemmas resulting from incompatible marriage. Now marriage and a life of

domesticity do not seem to absorb all of women's energies. They no longer treat marriage as the ultimate goal of their life. Traditional moral values particularly enjoined upon women are challenged by them. They assert their control on life and human affairs including female sexuality. The new aspects of women's experiences fictionalized as a form of feminist understanding of life find expression in the novels of NayantaraSahgal, Shobha De, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Nair, ManjuKapur, NamitaGokhale, GeethaHariharan, KiranSawhney, Anita Desai, BharatiMukherjee, ShashiDeshpande, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and others

Another significant development that brings out a perceptible change in Indian English fiction is the depiction of cross-cultural context. Earlier this theme was mainly concerned with the conflicting aspects of the East and the West. Indian life was presented to highlight its exotic features that had a specific appeal for the western readers. The western reason and scientific point of view juxtaposed against the Indian perspective governed by faith in spiritualism and highly emotional response to life formed the major thrust in the writings of earlier Indian English fiction writers. It tended to create specific cultural stereotypes representing two major cultures coming in a close contact due to political compulsions. The understanding that governed the depiction of this theme was usually based on the perspective that viewed life in binary terms. The two different cultures in question were seen from the consciousness of the colonizers. The essential qualities of both the cultures were considered to result in a conflict. The differences between the Eastern and the Western cultures depicted in this kind of fiction were treated to be fundamental, transcendental and eternal. New novelists of the 1980s such as UpamanyaChatterjee (b. 1959) have tried to demonstrate that, on the contrary, the Indian 'tang' is not a pure essence but the masala mix of a culture that has always been able to appropriate influences from

outside the subcontinent. From this point of view, English is implicated in the polyphony of Indian languages, its colonial authority relativized by entering into the complexity which it describes. Yet translations between the languages that participate in this polyphony are not likely to be an easy process of matching like to like. Hierarchies exist that structure the relationships between India's languages. The English language has a privileged place in Indian culture. It is the language of the former colonizer and remains an elite language, the language of getting on, the language of business, the language identified, above all, with modernity. The best of the novelists bring to their writing an awareness of the inequality of access to English and the problems of communication between different classes and cultures within India. The trend of Magic Realism which was conspicuous by its absence in the novels produced before independence became the dominant genre in the post-independence period. Emergence of Magic Realism led to the weakening of the tradition of social realism. As M.K. Naik says, "Magic Realism is a jealous mistress, once you set up house with her, social realism becomes an unwelcome guest."(1984: 123)

G.V. Desai's *All About Hatter* is the most sterling example of Magic Realism. Most of the post Independence novelists followed the tradition of Magic Realism set by G.V. Desai got strengthen in the hands of Salman Rushdie after G.V. Desai. Salman Rushdie's first novel *The Midnight's Children* which won the Booker Prize is an outstanding example of the trend of Magic Realism. Although he employed this technique in his subsequent novels such as *Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, he was not as successful as when he wrote *The Midnight's Children* in this genre. ShashiTharoor's first novel *The Great Indian Novel*, Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants*,

RanjitLal's *The Crow Chronicles*, AmitavGhosh's *The Circle of Reason*, G.J.V. Prasad's *A Clean Breast*, KiranNagerkar's *Ravan and Eldie*, TabishKher's *An Angel in Pyjamas*, RukunAdvani's *Beat hoven among the Cows*, MukulKesavan's *Looking Through Glass*, Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, and MakarandParanjape's *The Narrator* are the typical examples of Magic Realism. Another trend is the translation of regional literatures into English. For example, almost the entire works of Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore, SubramaniaBharathi, Vijay Tendulkar and VasudevanNair are available in English not only for the English people but also for the people of the world who have some knowledge of English as a second or foreign language. TakazhiSivasankarapillai's *Chemmeen*, Kesava Reddy's *He Conquered the Jungle*, SundaraRamasamy's *Tale of a Tamarind Tree*, U R Anantha Murthy's *Samsara* and so on are great contributions to literature in English translation. Of these translated texts, we have a unique trend of women writers emerging on the national scene. The new trend and development is the Dalit literature which has been also translated into English. The contemporary fiction writers concentrate on the minute and subtle aspects of human behaviour that makes the diasporic people experience a sense of alienation and being kept at a distance. Different writers have tried to bring out multiple shades of this experience. On the one hand, there are writers who concentrate on the diasporic experience at an alien place informing the supremacist attitude of the natives towards them. There are other writers who see this experience as an outcome of cultural interaction that facilitates the emergence of a universal civilization

Another related aspect of postcolonial perspectives that marks the emergence of a different trend in Indian English fiction is that instead of presenting the British empire as the culture representing colonial oppression and the eastern culture, particularly Indian culture, as the other, the contemporary writers tend to bring out

the internal contradictions of the national culture. The conflicting interests of different communities and the fear psychosis resulting from minority or majority syndrome find expression in the recent fictional works of different Indian English fiction writers. The presentation of this theme involves the expression of a sense of resentment, in the sub-cultures within the main culture, against the false sense of inclusion of their voice by the majority culture

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