

A Brief Study of the Emergence and Development of Indian English Novels

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Abstract

Indian English fiction is a vast area today. Ever since the British introduced English as a medium of education in India, people started to write prose literature. The educated middle-class people wrote works in prose as well as poetry. The genre of fiction began at the close of the 19th century. Indian English literature begins from around 1800 A.D. The intension of this paper is to focus on Indian English Writers of pre and post-independence period with special reference to the emergence of Indian English Novelists.

Keywords: Indian English Novels, History of Indian Fiction, Early Novelists in India

Indian English fiction is a vast area today. Ever since the British introduced English as a medium of education in India, people started to write prose literature. The educated middle-class people wrote works in prose as well as poetry. The genre of fiction began at the close of the 19th century. Indian English literature begins from around 1800 A.D. The Battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764) changed the destiny of the British as well as the Indians altogether. Dean Mohamed (1759-1851) was affected by this. Originally from Patna, he served the Mughals and he left them when they lost power, and he settled in the UK. His book *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* (1794) was the first book ever written by an Indian in English. Lord Clive received Mughal Emperor Shah Alam's Grant of the Duanney in 1795. Clive made Capt. James Rennell the first Surveyor-General of Bengal. Capt. Colin Mackenzie did the surveying in the Deccan. The British did the mapping of the Indians' intellectual, cultural and historical dimensions. The Orientalists Sir Charles Wilkins, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, Sir William Jones, John Gilchrist and Henry Colebroke worked in comparative philology, lexicography and translation. In his *Asiatic Researches*, Jones laying foundation for historical linguistics, said 'Sanskrit, Greek and Latin have sprung from a common source.' Gradually Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Lord Macaulay's 'Minute on Education' introduced English as a medium of education in India. Macaulay observed: "We must at present do our best to

form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect." (Macaulay 37)

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a great scholar in Bengali, Persian and Sanskrit, learnt English. He loved the knowledge that was available in English. He said English is non-hierarchical; and it is a coin of exchange. It gave him a voice. Therefore, he advocated English to be used as a new medium of education in India. Besides, as a social reformer, he stopped Sati; he founded Atmiya Sabha and Brahma Sabha and Anglo-Hindu School. Roy felt language was neutral; it is just a territorial means for communication, whereas Gandhi felt it is a civilizational marker. Great Europeans like Jeremy Bentham liked Roy's global vision.

The British thought introduction of English for Indians would facilitate their power of rule. So, English education institutions like Sherbourne's and Drummond's academies and Presidency College (Hindu College, 1817) came into existence. Macaulay said, "a single shelf of a good European library, was worth of the whole native literature of India and Arabia." (Macaulay 38) Accordingly, one lecturer of the college, Henry Derozio, a Eurasian, stirred the Indians. The romantic poets influenced him. He mixed both eastern and western myths in his poems. His *The Fakeer of Jungheera* is well-known. Michael Madhusudhan Dutt (1824-73), a student of Hindu College, embraced Christianity and valued English as an important language. His *Captive Lady* (1854) is interesting. His *Meghanadavadha Kavya* (1861) is a response to the *Ramayana*.

Amongst the beginners of Indian English fiction mention must be made of Bankimchandra Chatterjee who was a pioneer of Indian English novel. Harish Raizada observes, "The creative energy of promising writers who were hesitant and shy of writing novels. By writing historical, social and philosophical novels, he decided the future course of this literary form in India and came to be known as the father of Indian novel." (Trevor111) Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohun's Wife* (1864) is the first Indian English novel.

Other Indian writers followed Bankimchandra Chatterjee. Raj Laxmi Devi published her work *The Hindu Wife* in 1876. A Kerala Christian missionary Mrs. Richard Collin wrote *The Slayer Slain* in 1877. Kali Krishna Lahiri published his work *Rasinarain* 1881. H. Dutt published *Bijay Chand* in 1888; and Kshetrapal Chakrabarti published his *Sarataand Hinganain* 1895. Rabindranath Tagore wrote several works in English and Bengali.

Toru Dutt (1856-1877), an eminent poetess of the period, wrote a novel called *Bianca* in 1878. The novel is "more a product of imagination than of experience." (Sathish Kumar 4)

Indian writing in English continued to flourish. There are many more Indian writers in English. Mention must be made of the following writers. K. E. Ghamat wrote *My Friend, the Barrister* (1908); Bal Krishna wrote *Love of Kusuma* (1910); B. K. Sarkar wrote *Man of Letters* (1911); R. P. De wrote *Mother and Daughters* (1923); and Sir Hari Singh Gaur wrote *His Only Love* (1930). R. C. Chattopadhyaya wrote *The Sorrows of a Sub-Post Master* (1932); N. C. Sen Gupta wrote *The Idiot's Wife* (1935); H. Kaveribai wrote *Meenakshi's Memories* (1937), Shankar Ram wrote *Love of Dust* (1938); C. N. Zutshi wrote *Motherland* (1944) and Manjeri Ishwaran wrote five volumes of short stories under the title *Naked Shingles* (1941).

The Indian English fiction of the bygone age was rather about the physical realities such as imperialism, British rule, European history, Indian freedom movement and the like. Whereas, the second-generation Indian English writers did not have the problems which the first-generation writers faced. For instance, the country already had its independence in 1947. So, their works are modern and realistic, dealing with the problems of men and women. That is to say, they are free from the colonial hangover. Some of them attempted psychological and philosophical novels and short stories. This change in the content and also of the form compelled them to experiment in diverse ways. They made use of modern story-writing techniques and ways. One can notice this in Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie* and *Untouchable* (1935). Anand's perspective is social and realistic. Folklore and myth were used as a technique to illustrate the writers' personal vision of life. This can be seen in R. K. Narayan, whereas Raja Rao made use of philosophical dimension.

R. K. Narayan was one of the three great Indian novelists in English. Narayan received inspiration from great critic-writers of the West like Elizabeth Bowen, E. M. Forster and Graham Greene. His first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) is memorable. His other novels are *The English Teacher*, *Financial Expert* (1952), *Mr. Sampath*, *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1936), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), *The World of Nagaraj* (1990) and *The Man Eaters of Malgudi* (1961). His masterpiece *The Guide* is a technical *tour de force*. The novel is about the fake hero Raju's elevation to sainthood. It is about false Indian values. It is a romantic novel. R. K. Narayan's characters are ordinary and queer. Narayan's works evince the kind of comic sense which we see in modern English fiction.

Likewise, Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is another great Indian English writer of international fame. Anand was as great as R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Some critics rank him as the topmost Indian writer of fiction. He was a humanist, a socialist and a realist. He had a deep intellectual concern for man. It is said of him that "His concern as a fiction writer has been always the redemption of the poor and oppressed of the society from the clutches of the rich and the oppressor - an objective which he pursues with the zeal of a missionary." (Sharma 102)

The third great Indian English novelist is Raja Rao (1908-2004). Like the other two of the trio - R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand - Raja Rao worked greatly to represent Indian metaphysics. His novel *Kanthapura* (1936) is a classic of its kind. He has written four other novels *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960), *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Chessmaster and his Moves* (1988).

Khushwant Singh is a modern Indian novelist of fame and controversy. A London-trained lawyer of Sikh background, he began his literary career while holding a diplomatic post in Canada. His first novel *Train to Pakistan* is also his best novel. It is a powerful account of trauma and violence of Indian partition in 1947. Khushwant Singh depicts the downfall of Indian values as well. Singh is also a good short story writer. His books of stories are *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories* (1950) and *The Voice of God and Other Stories* (1957).

Manohar Malgonkar is one of the prominent Indo-Anglian novelists of the times. Like Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and others, he is a prolific and voluminous writer. He is also a historian. He served the nation in Indian army and began his literary career in the middle of his life. His famous novels are *The Distant Drum* (1960), *Combat of Shadows* (1962), *The Princes* (1963) and *A Bend In The Ganges* (1964).

Govindas Vishnoodas Desani (1909-2000) was a great diaspora novelist. Born in Nairobi of Sindhi parents, he spent World War II in Britain and subsequently he lived in the USA. His reputation rests on a single novel *All About H. Hatterr* (1948), an eccentric and comic book about an Anglo-Indian in search of wisdom, which combines linguistic dexterity and philosophical curiosity.

Arun Joshi (1939-1993) was a wonderful litterateur. He did not establish his literary reputation abroad. But his fiction is well read in India though he was reticent. His first two novels *The Foreigner* (1968) and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) which move from the USA to India, are his most widely read works. In the latter, the eponymous hero's retreat into a primitive wilderness evokes the situation of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*.

Kamala Markandaya is an India-born novelist in England today. Born and educated in South India, Markandaya has lived in London since her marriage to an Englishman John Taylor in 1948. She is a sensitive chronicler of the intricacies of relationships and the plight of the victims of industrialization in India. Her masterpiece *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) is a bleak account of a peasant family dislocated by industrialization. In *A Handful of Rice* (1966) urban poverty utterly overwhelms individual effort.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is a German-born Indian novelist and script-writer. Born in Cologne into a German-Jewish family, who fled to London in 1939, and educated in England,

she migrated to India after marriage in 1951 and to the USA 30 years later. Though a satirically minded outsider, she experienced Indian joint family life, and skillfully exploits this duality in her early fiction. *The Nature of Passion* (1956) and *The Householder* (1960) deal with personality clashes and 'westernized' attitudes within urban families. *Esmond in India* (1958) and *Heat and Dust* (1975) are about westerners trying to understand India and Indians.

Nayantara Sahgal is a famed Indian novelist in English. She is a relative of Indira Gandhi. She was born and brought up in the Nehru family. So, she knew the Indian politics closely. She has written several novels like *Storm in Chandigarh* and *Rich Like Us* which got Sinclair Prize. *Plans for Departure* won the Commonwealth Prize for Fiction.

Anita Desai, born to Polish father and Bengali mother, has written several novels in English. Her novels like *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City* (1965), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *In Custody* (1984) and *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) are notable. *Games at Twilight* (1978) and *Diamond Dust* (2001) are collections of Desai's short stories.

Once the British decided to quit India, Muslim intellectuals thought of their destiny. They had doubts and fears about the majority Hindus and more so about the preservation of their own religion and culture. It is said, "Muslim communalization too had a solid psychological basis, the inferiority complex of a community, which had lost her empire but found an ally in British administration." (Rau 154) Some dominant Muslim leaders like Mohammed Ali Jinnah thought that the creation of a separate nation was the only solution for their political impasse. Naturally Mr. Jinnah hit upon the idea of a separate state Pakistan. Muslim writers and intellectuals reflected about their social life, culture and political prospects. They were afraid of Hindu domination and discrimination. Some well-educated Muslim writers like Ahmed Ali, K. A. Abbas and Amir Ali started writing about Muslim life. Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) is an epoch-making novel. James Trevor says, "Ahmed Ali laid the foundation for a new modest literary tradition in English with his first novel *Twilight in Delhi*. He had shown the way to new writers in English." (Trevor 111) Ahmed Ali's novel attracted the attention of the West, particularly E. M. Forster. Ahmed Ali's other works include *Ocean of Night* and *Rats and Diplomats*. M. K. Naik rates him highly and calls Muslim writings as 'an interesting phenomenon' and he says it is the "The rise of the ethnic novels." (Naik 107)

After Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, the novels in the 1980s and 1990s are rather post-modern. If the first golden phase of Indian English fiction was the turbulent 1930s and 1940s, the second phase was the 1980s Rushdie era. As Jon Mee says, here we find 'an exuberance of language, the reinvention of allegory, the sexual frankness, a reference to Bollywood and all that.'

Delhi's St Stephanite novelists like Allan Sealy, Amitav Ghosh (b. 1956), appear on the scene and also Shashi Taroor, Upamanya Chatterjee (b. 1959), Rukan Advani (b. 1955). Amitav Ghosh is a diasporic writer. Born in Calcutta, he has lived in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, England, Egypt and now in America. He was educated in Delhi and Oxford. His novel *In An Antique Land* (1992) is about his trip in Egypt; *The Circle of Reason* (1986) is a magic realist work; and *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is a Partition novel. *The Glass Palace* (2000) is a multi-generational saga, set in Burma, India and Malaya. Ghosh's humanism has affinities with the work of earlier Bengali writers like Tagore and artist Satyajit Ray.

Rohinton Mistry was born in India in 1952. He is a novelist and short story writer. He is a Parsi. Now he has migrated to Canada. His first novel *Such A Long Journey* (1991) won him the Commonwealth Writers' Prize.

Shashi Deshpande is an Indian novelist, short-story writer and an author for children. Her short stories were first published in various English-language periodicals in India, but some have since appeared in the collections *The Legacy* (1971), *The Miracle* (1986) and *It was Dark* (1986). Her main works are *The Dark Holds No Terror* (1980) which has been translated into Russian and German; *Come Up and Be Dead* (1983), *Roots and Shadows* (1983) and *Binding Wine*. Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows* was awarded the 1984 Thirumathi Rangammal prize for the best Indian novel in English. Shashi Deshpande has written several books for children.

Arundhati Roy is one of the female Indian writers in English who has attempted to radically react to the solidarity of Indian nationality. She is a feminist, a new historicist, a post-modern and a post structuralist writer, her remarkable work *God of Small Things* substantiates the status of women in the Indian social saga after independence and during the colonial period. The novel *The God of Small Things* dramatizes the social life and brings out an artistic representation of various cultural aspects. Arundhati Roy builds the story at the outset incorporating three generations in the structure of the novel, there is the layer of Syrian Christian creed and the communist layer of political patterns. The novel opens with a description of Kerala of its geographical landscape centered around a village in Kerala by name Ayemenem.

Kiran Desai (born 3 September 1971) is an Indian author. Her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the 2006 Man Booker Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. Kiran Desai is the daughter of Anita Desai, herself short-listed for the Booker Prize on three occasions. Her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, was published in 1998 and received accolades from such notable figures as Salman Rushdie. It won the Betty Trask Award, a prize given by the Society of Authors for the best new novels by citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations under the age of 35.

Her second book, *The Inheritance of Loss*, (2006) was widely praised by critics throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. It won the 2006 Man Booker Prize, as well as the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award.

Aravind Adiga was born in Madras (now Chennai) on 23 October 1974. His debut novel, *The White Tiger*, won the 2008 Booker Prize. He is the fourth Indian-born author to win the prize, after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. Adiga's second book, *Between the Assassinations*, was released in India in November 2008 and in the US and UK in mid-2009. The book features 12 interlinked short stories. His second novel and third published book, *Last Man in Tower*, was published in the UK in 2011.

This is a brief sketch of Indian English fiction until today. Of course, there are a host of new writers writing in English with equal degree of mastery over plot and technique.

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