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INVESTIGATIONS ON A MODERN CONTEMPORARY FICTION IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract

The paper is an attempt to trace the emerging trends in the Indian English fiction, particularly novels in the twenty first century. Literature of the present century is very different from the previous one as it has new issues and challenges to address. In fact, the very concept of culture as well as literature has undergone enormous change over the years and with these changing paradigms, the authors too are experimenting profusely with themes, styles and techniques of writing in order to properly and effectively communicate the new sensibilities of contemporary time. History, myth, science, technology, ecology, environment, gender, politics- all are being told and re-told from myriad perspectives. Perhaps this is why we see that day-by-day fiction is getting maturity and refinement. Many divergent forces are gradually working in it and are giving it a crystalized shape.” Indian writers in English have made the most significant contributions in the field of fiction. So have the writers in other languages of India. It is generally believed that excellent novels in the modern sense have come to be written in the pre-independent and the post-independent years. This research paper to be discussed “Investigations on A Modern Contemporary Fiction in India English Literature”.

Keywords: Literary Fiction, Significant Contribution, Enormous Liberty, Conscious Writing, Living Literature, Conscious Progress, Realistic Approach.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

“Literature is one of the most interesting and significant expression of humanity”.

P.T. Barnum

A familiar American Scholar in Literature

Sahitiasabhavah sahyam implies that a good literature is one that cares for the interest of all. In Ramcharitmanas, Goswami Tulasidas too writes- kirati bhanit bhuti bhali soyi, sursarisam sab kah hit hoyi to mean that the best literary creation is that which like the holy river Ganges seeks to benefit all. It indicates that literature and society, literary aesthetics and humanity are integrally associated with each other. Hence, with the change of society not only the literature changes to adept with the change but it also defines the present and shapes the future in the larger interest of humanity. Indian society has always been dynamic and so is the literature taking birth in its soil. From ancient time to present day, pre industrial to post- industrial, pre independence to post independence, pre-colonial to postcolonial, pre modern to postmodern, and provincialism to globalization, Indian society has undergone a sea change. Literature produced in different ages at different stages of time has remarkably captured its socio-political and cultural ethos from time to time. As a new kind of world is emerging ‘with the development of a new set of cultural and technological protocols for the organization of space and time’ (Boxall 8), it becomes instructive to study the ways in which Indian society has changed so far and the cultural as well as literary trends that have emerged with the dawn of twenty first century. In consonance with the characteristics of contemporary Indian society redefined by scientific and technological advances, impact of media and information technology, digital revolution and consumerism, the writers of present generation look for new contents, themes, forms, style, and techniques for offering a faithful picture of the society they live in. Various experiments and innovations are being done today in the writing of Indian fiction in the form of graphic novels, science fiction, chick literature, gerontological fiction, hypertext, diaspora literature and others. Their approaches offer a challenge to our sedimented methodologies for studying the Indian novel, especially as the forms of novels grew and proliferate in the twenty first century.

Inspired and motivated by the rich literary tradition and legacy of India, the authors of the new millennium exhibit profound creative exuberance and exquisite aesthetic sense along with the linguistic accomplishment. They have new dreams, demands, issues and challenges which seeks expression in the form of creative writing. The need for experimentation and innovation was also realized to enable Indian English novels emerge as a powerful tool of social change and human development. The writings of Krishna Baldev Vaid, Dilip Chitre, Khushwant Singh, Mahasweta Devi, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Khushwant Singh, Sudha Murthy, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair, Aravind Adiga, Gita Hariharan, Deepa Mehta, Kiran Desai, Shiv K. Kumar, Tabish Khair, Pankaj Mishra, Amit Chaudhari, Amish Tripathi, Chetan Bhagat, Karan Mahajan, Samina Ali, Uday Prakash, Ashok Banker, Raj Kamal Jha, Aniruddha Bahal, Tarun Tejpal, Amruta Patil, Jeet Thayil, Vishwajyoti Ghosh, Vikas Swarup, Mukul Kesvan, Padma



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Vishwanathan, Hari Kunzru, Indira Sinha, Amita Ghosh, Rahul Bhattacharya, Kunal Basu, Cyrus Mistry, Sowmya Rajendra, Shahnaz Bashir, and many others tried to infuse fresh breeze in the literary environment of India.

The desire to break away from the colonial literature was paramount in these authors in one way or the other which appears in their preference for employing the techniques of hybrid language, magic realism with native themes. In 1980s and 90s, one can notice that the Indian literary scene was dominated by Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Chandra and the like who bagged international recognition for Indian fiction. Their writings registered an unprecedented impact on the writers of next generation who changed the paradigm of fiction writing in India through unprecedented experiments and innovations in theme, style and technique. These novelists preferred to adapt their writing more in tune with the changing time and contemporary issues and therefore chart a range of new themes and techniques in view of market, globalization, urbanity, new realism, gender issues, religion and technology. These efforts prove that Indian English fiction has come a long way in its journey and evolved and matured significantly over the years.

Fiction in Indian English Literature

The new century is not exception in the authors preference to write in English but the level of maturity in handling it with distinctness and proficiency shows that it is no more a mere borrowed language for them. “The sense of English as a “foreign” language on one hand and a cosmopolitan one on the other have largely dissolved”. Within the English language too, Indian English has secured its own unique texture in the recent years. Earlier, postcolonial fiction incorporated italicized words if it was from Indian language culture but in the writings produced after the year 2000, there is a use of Indian English spoken in contemporary India which also includes regional terms and phrases without italics and annotation. Thus, our English today is unquestionably one of ‘the Indian languages with perceptible resonance of the spirit of Indianness, and its history in India may be called a history of shift from linguistic imperialism to linguistic globalization’.

The postcolonial narratives expressed in some of the novels of previous generation authors built grand narratives of their time. Rushdie, Tharoor, and Ghosh tried to represent India in a wider frame addressing the then socio-political and cultural realities of India, whereas the authors of the new generation seem to dislodge the postcolonial version of their predecessors as they feel that the rushdian model was in a way supplementing to the demands of the West. A decolonial attitude is visible in the authors of present time who tend to expose the subtle strategies of the West that gained them an imperial position. They prefer to engage with the mundane, the ordinariness of the Indian life to explore immediate, regional and cultural spaces. Padma Vishwanathan’s novel *The Toss of a Lemon* (2008) best exemplifies it with the depiction of a single Tamil Brahmin family’s confrontation with the issues of caste, religion and gender against the backdrop of Tamil Nadu.

Translation of existing texts is another remarkable way to expand the horizon of knowledge. Fiction written in the regional languages and its translation done in good number also enriches the Indian English fiction in multiple ways. For example, the translation of the works of Munshi Premchandra, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Subramania Bharathi, Vijay Tendulkar, Vasudevan Nair and many other notable authors are available now in English so that it may be read by the people worldwide. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai’s *Chemmeen*, Kesava Reddy’s *He Conquered the Jungle*, Sundara Ramasamy’s *Tale of a Tamarind*, U.R. Anantha Murthy’s *Samsakara*, Mahashweta Devi’s *Draupadi* are few praiseworthy English translations.

One major recent development of this time is the birth of Graphic novels which offer great visual feast to the readers with added literary sensibility. They are thrilling and impressive with immense potential to subtly handle the serious as well as comic meticulously through painting, drawing and cartoon. Amruta Patil’s well received graphic novel *Kari* (2008) is about two close friends who jumped off their apartment building, one being saved and other falling into a sewer. *Kari*, who fell into to sewer, fights against suicidal thoughts and suffers internal turmoil throughout her life. Likewise, Vishwajyoti Ghosh’s *Delhi Calm* (2010) shows a dystopian world where the rights of people have become suspended by the forces of State. Such novels draw much from Indian mythology and political history and narrate through visual mediums and illustrations. *Hush* (2011) by Prateek Thomas, Vivek Thomas and Rajiv Eipe is one of the most experimental and impressive graphic novels produced so far in India. This silently communicating novel has no words but through moving graphic illustrations using ink and water color the misery of a victim of child sex abuse has been effectively conveyed. Suhas Sundar and Deepak Sharma’s *Odayam* (2014) set against the backdrop of feudal Kerala, Abhijeet Kini’s *Angry Maushi* (2011), set in Maharashtra on people’s rights and fight against corruption and malpractices, and Sarnath Banerjee’s *Corridor* (2004) dealing with the urban cities of India are few more examples of this genre of fiction. Malik Sajad’s *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) and Nasser Ahmed and Saurabh Singh’s *Kashmir Pending* (2007) talk about Kashmir from multiple perspectives including militancy, terrorism and violence. Visuals are an important part of another graphic novel *Moonward* (2009) by Appupen which poignantly suggests dark humour. There are several ‘silent’ pages in this book that resonate a dystopic tone.



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With the growing impact of technology in our lives, there is tremendous scope for science fiction and fantasy fiction in India. ‘Pulp fiction, characterized by fantasy, science fiction, military, suspense and thriller has a market of its own, and therefore, a good business is done by such works in present time. Payal Dhar’s science fiction trilogy- A Shadow on Eternity (2006), The Key to Chaos (2007), and The Timeless Land (2009); Samit Basu’s Turbulence (2012), The Simoqin Prophecies (2004), and Resistance (2013) are brilliant and innovative domestic science fiction. Chetan Bhagat’s Girl in Room 105 (2008)- a mystery thriller, Shatrujeet Nath’s The Guardians of the Halahala (2014)- fantasy fiction based on ‘Samudra – Manthan’, Shweta Taneja’s Cult of Chaos (2015)- based on Hindu Tantrism, Sami Ahmad Khan’s Aliens in Delhi (2017) - on Laden’s assassination and India’s first moon landing, Priya S. Chabria’s Generation 14 (2008)- about political satire via on cloning, Shiv Ramdas’s Domechild (2013)- a dystopian sci-fi novel in which humans may also be drones, and Indrapramit Das’s The Devourers (2015) are few noteworthy attempts to address contemporary realities through fantasy and science fiction. Another subgenre of this kind is ‘crime fiction’ best exemplified by Vikram Chandra’s Sacred Games (2007), K. Srilata’s Table of Four (2009), Vish Puri’s the Case of the Missing Servant (2010), Ashok Banker’s Blood Red Sari (2010), Aruna Gill’s The Indus Intercept (2012), Ashwin Sanghi’s the Krishna Key (2012)- an anthropological thriller, and none the less Swati Kaushal’s Drop Dead (2012).

Creativity in English Fiction Writing

Authors have also tried to offer an account of contemporary geopolitics, fight against terrorism, insurgency in Kashmir, Pakistan and militancy in Afghanistan. For example Gita Hariharan’s Fugitive Histories (2009), Neel Kamal Puri’s Remember to Forget (2012)- on the memories of Khalistan movement, Shashie Warriar’s The Homecoming (2008)-on the impact of insurgency in Kashmir, Omair Ahmad’s Jimmy the Terrorist (2010)- opens a window to the psyche of a terrorist, Mukul Deva’s The Dust Will Never Settle (2012)-based on terrorist strike in Jerusalem, Arvind Nayar’s Operation Karakoram (2005)- an espionage novel on Indo-Pak diplomatic relation, Peggy Mohan’s The Youngest Suspect (2012)- on Godhra Massacre and so on. Likewise, another new genre which has gained currency in this duration is that of novels in digital form-hypertexts. Revolution in the field of internet and world wide web has played an unprecedented role in the birth of these technology-based texts. Alongwith the mode of writing and publication, readers space has also undergone tremendous change. Books are being preferred to be read as PDF and Kindle which are digitally created and preserved forms.

Apart from the literature produced by the Indians in English, which can be called Indo-Anglian literature, the literature produced in different Indian regional languages seems to be effective in depicting the variety of themes related to the social conditions of the country in a finite way. It has been gaining popularity by leaps and bounds in the country. It has been rushing out with its peculiar style and idiom though some writers are undoubtedly influenced by the Western world as their minds have been haunted by the impact of the British. Inheriting a hoary tradition embodied in Indian scriptures coupled with modern education, the writers are fired with the ambition to put their ideas in their mother tongues. Thus, they paved way to the modern fiction in different Indian languages.

It is no exaggeration to say that the present age in Indian writing in different languages has had a rich harvest in fictitious works. Many writers have dived deep into modern fiction and we find it is concerned not simply with the thematic side, the truthful portrayal of modern society but also with the form entirely new and original. Almost all the great works in different languages of India have been translated into English especially the pre-independence and the post-independence fiction. These novels express most of the ideas, customs, unquestioned assumptions and the persistent doubts that have characterized Indian life for at least thousand years and more recently, after the impact of Western ways of thinking on it.

The novel, a branch of literature, has subordinated other branches of literature in the modern century. There is no doubt the creative writers of the contemporary world fiction mostly prefer to translate their inner reality through the medium of fiction. In the words of Amaranath Prasad: “It is only because novel is the most flexible means to lay bare even the dark and deep recesses of human nature. Hardly is there any part of life left now-a-days which is not incorporated in the study of a novel. Perhaps this is why we see that day-by-day fiction is getting maturity and refinement. Many divergent forces are gradually working in it and are giving it a crystallized shape.”

Indian writers in English have made the most significant contributions in the field of fiction. So have the writers in other languages of India. It is generally believed that excellent novels in the modern sense have come to be written in the pre-independent and the post-independent years. But in the beginning novels were not as mature as the later ones. It took some time to perfect the genre in the regional languages. Later there has been the flood of fiction with its different themes of excellence to the world of literature. R.S.Pathak says: “The earliest ventures were immature and derivative. The novels written between the two world wars were primarily



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concerned with the contemporary social milieu and were greatly influenced by the Gandhian Ethos. After the 1950s their interest shifted from the public sphere and most of them renounced the larger world in favour of the innermen engaging themselves in a search for the essence of human living.”

The third generation’s Indian writings in English have 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. In 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 the land of diversity with so many languages, religions, races, and cultures. This multiplicity gave the writers an enormous liberty to deal with various themes. These third-generation Indian writers also dealt with historical, cultural, philosophical and much more basing their themes around mankind. The third-generation writers have concentrated their themes around sociological, Diasporic 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 these 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.

Conscious Investigation in Indian English Literature

As far as Indian literature is concerned, it has perhaps been easier for these third-generation novelists to reflect the new challenges and changes because of the simple fact that its vehicle itself is a globalised language. Again, the writers 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. This has enabled them to give a fresh orientation to fiction. At the same time, the best of them continues to have strong roots in India, so that they remain true to the kindred points of India and the west. It is significant that the spirit of the age is more pervasively and effectively reflected in the third-generation 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 the third-generation fiction.

The new Indian writing, published in between 1980s and 1990s, has ushered in a literary renaissance is the third-generation Indian English writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Shashi Tharoor, Anitha Desai, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Desh Pande, Upamnyu Chatterjee, Gita Mehta, Bharathi Mukherjee, and Amitav Ghosh. These are the fore- most third generation novelists and who hold centrality in the contemporary literary Scenario. They have made a distinct mark on the World literary scene with their rich cultural heritage and skilled language control. They have received national and international recognition, fabulous royalties and prestigious awards. Among these novelists the most talented are: Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Sealy, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Farrukh Dhondy, Rohinton Mistry and Firdaus Kanga. The New York Times (16 December 1991) has called these new Indian writers “Rushdie’s children.” These novelists, as Anthony Spaeth has pointed out, are making conscious efforts to redefine English prose “with myths, humour or themes as vast as the subcontinent.” Moreover, Rushdie himself once told in an interview in 1982: “I think we are in a position to conquer English literature,” (Ibid, 1989:552) and this is what precisely these novelists are trying to do in their own ways. Thus, they demand a serious critical attention, analysis, classification and, finally, definition as a distinct genre of fictional literature of our times. The works of these novelists have been accorded genuine recognition in India also. For example, no less than five novels were found worthy of the Sahitya Akademi Award – the greatest literary honour of the country during the 1980s itself. These are: Arun Joshi’s The Last Labyrinth, Nayantara Sahgal’s Rich Like Us, Vikram Seth’s The Golden Gate, Amitav Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines and Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence. These facts, which are only illustrative and by no means exhaustive, clearly show that Indian English novel has been given proper response and recognition inside India and abroad.

Criticism in English Literature fiction

The Modern and Contemporary Novel is a collection of twelve critical articles whose function it is to present a panoramic view of the world literary scene as the various experiences of twelve great artists have shaped and defined it in both gHEME and form. This book is in no wise a study in comparative literature. If for editorial necessity the articles are arranged the way they are, it is



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primarily preconceived that such an arrangement would be essential to densify the literary scene and drive home the idea that a certain imaginative experience concerning human existence could squarely identify with another irrespective of the confines of space and time.

In the past twenty years, the continued relevance of the term postmodernism for literary studies has increasingly been called into question. In the wake of this re-evaluation of literary terminology, many new terms have been coined, frequently associated still with a “-modern” suffix. This paper suggests that while the new modernisms hold relevance for specific concerns of contemporary literature, they have yet to provide an alternative framing for dominant trends. This is the case even when, as for metamodernism, a term has begun to move into general usage. The new modernisms, we suggest, are caught in a reductive association to the past which minimises their applicability to the dynamic newness of contemporary writing, particularly as it responds to ethico-political concerns. As an alternative to these terminologies, we suggest “transglossic”, capturing the movement across forms and identities that uniquely defines contemporary literature.

Alienation is the basic form of rootlessness, which forms the subject of many psychological, sociological, literary and philosophical studies. Alienation is a major theme of human condition in the contemporary epoch. It is only natural that a pervasive phenomenon like alienation should leave such an indelible impact upon the contemporary literature. Alienation emerges as natural consequence of existential predicament both in intrinsic and extrinsic terms. The theme of alienation has been variously dealt with persistently and unflinchingly in modern literature. The alienated protagonist is a recurrent figure in much of the twentieth century American and European fiction. Alienation in its various forms, has been dealt with in the existentialistic literature. Owing to its historical and socio-cultural reasons, the Indo-English literature also, could not remain unaffected by it. Alienation is the result of loss of identity. The dispossessed personality's search for identity is a common place theme in modern fiction. Man fails to perceive today the very purpose behind life and the relevance of his existence in a hostile world. Edmund Fuller remarks that in our age “man suffers not only from war, persecution, famine and ruin, but from inner problems ----- a conviction of isolation, randomness, meaninglessness in his way of existence “. The paper will discuss and analyze theme of alienation in modern literature in general and Indo-English literature in particular from different angles. It will be contextualized by referring profusely the works of renowned writers. Nuances of the word alienation will also be discussed thoroughly.

Reading serves many ends. Some readers report that works of fiction provide an imaginative escape from the rigors of life, others report reading in order to be intellectually challenged. While various characterizations of readers' engagement with prose fiction have been proposed, few have been checked using representative samples of readers. Our research reports on reader self-descriptions observed in a representative sample of 501 adults in the Netherlands. Reader self-descriptions exhibit regularities, with certain self-descriptions predicting others. Contrary to existing theories which posit two types of readers characterized by non-overlapping concerns (identifying readers and distanced readers), we find that while some readers attend to plot structure or read in order to be intellectually challenged, reader self-descriptions overlap more than received theories predict. We hypothesize that some readers have cultivated more reading techniques than others, with educated or experienced readers tending to report deriving additional experiences from reading.

Considerably, literature has influenced in the life of human being. It has an empowered language to display the inner world of man. There is a space for memories, introspection, retrospection, foreshadow, flashback and awful remembrances that are colored by pain, wound and trauma. Now is the time of producing the plot of anxiety in modern world. Margaret Atwood as a distinguished writer and poet criticizes the social, political, and spiritual bonds for female characters in her stories and poems. She has an aim to illustrate the pain and suffering of female characters in order to gain self-knowledge of and self-confidence for women. In *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *Cat's Eye* (1988), and *The Robber Bride* (1993) she has elaborately examined her understanding of creativity in the dream, fantasy and art of the protagonists. She takes the data from the current emphasis on trauma, inter-subjectivity, mentalization, association, dissociation, nonlinear dynamic theory, and mental enactments. In conclusion, she discusses the effect of language on the developing self. She uses Sigmund Freud's views, as a psychoanalytic, of how the stormy life, difficult relationship with family, friends and not speaking cause the wound in female characters' mind. Key Words: trauma, Margaret Atwood, interdisciplinary, psychoanalysis.

Summing Up

In the contemporary Indian Literary scenario, Indian writers in English who reflect the truth of Indian reality. They bear numerous responsibilities in the world of literature. They execute with admirable aplomb as the anthropologists, sociologists, novelists, essayists, travel writers, teachers and slip into global responsibility for establishing peace as the ambassadors. They have excelled the global literary standards set by the post-colonial and postmodern writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Vikram



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Chandra, Sashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy etc. These have become the colossal central socio literary figures with the substantial bodies of work drawing the global attention. They also have become the only negotiators to mediate the core social and cultural problems of India and other colonized nations. All their major works have enjoyed immense academic attention across the globe and which have invited and produced a great amount of literary criticism especially on feminism. They have created a wide readership and a strong critical endorsement that reflect the attention of serious academicians and scholars. All the post-colonial and postmodern predicaments are wrestled to demonstrate a high level of self-consciousness, which continue, interrogate the social, philosophical, cultural issues of rape and sexual harassment of innocent women in the contemporary Indian society. Their works have initiated the emergence of critique of feminism with nationalism. Their intellectual insights, conceptual, theoretical and textual experiments have engaged and interpreted the complex colonial and postcolonial situations. They have also established a peculiar paradox of reading and appreciation eloquently responding to the issues of sexually harassed women both in post-colonial and postmodern issues of rape and exploitation on the Indian women in the contemporary society.

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