



ENGLISH LITERATURE: THE AESTHETIC HERITAGE BEYOND LIMITATIONS

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Abstract:

The SAARC region is bestowed not only with the paradise of natural heritage but also with the horizon of cultural bounty that is acknowledged with literature sweeping the shores of unity in diversity. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is an eminent forum that had pledged to develop the region forgoing the hurdles of social and economic distress through the reigning regional cooperation that it is trying to sustain. And literature paves the way for such regional cooperation; if not people, atleast their thoughts can cross the borders underlining the regional regime. The paper ponders over the some of the majestic masterpieces that have drenched the universe of English literature with the drizzle of divinity. These extraordinary executions of literature have implanted their aesthetic aroma of adherence over every country, every region and over every border that flags for cooperation. Distinguishing a country from cooperation through literary landmarks, the paper gushes into potential peripheries of SAARC English Literature that can not only generate unity among the SAARC member countries but can also erase the bilateral issues of literature that have been deepened over time.

I. Introduction:

Literature is the historical acknowledgment of a region's cultural and aesthetic heritage. It is rather a penned tourism that enshrines new rays of understanding every time it is read. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been extensively executing numerous programs and policies for the social and economic development of the region by inducing cooperation, coordination, amity, peace and unity among the people of various national anthems within the regional boundary that has erased the notifying national boundaries. The forum had pillared seventeen recognised bodies and six apex bodies namely, SAARC Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCI), SAARCLAW (South Asian Association For Regional Cooperation In Law), South Asian Federation of Accountants (SAFA), South Asia Foundation (SAF), South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (FOSWAL) under the banner of SAARC to comprehend and realise its objectives that have been multiplying with the statured SAARC summits. Established in 1987, FOSWAL is the only non-governmental organisation authorised to nurture cultural connectivity among the SAARC nations by organising culture and literature related seminars, meetings, conferences, festivals, etc, under the legitimacy of the SAARC authentication. Literature derived its prominence in the SAARC summits only after the institution of FOSWAL that has been intensively initiating programs to put forth some of the greatest of literary works which have stepped out of the boundaries of the SAARC nations. And since literature celebrates cultures and traditions that aren't confined to the geographical boundaries of any country, it inherently sublimates the spectrum of cultures and thereby forges fraternity among the SAARC countries which have been sharing a history of cultures which had initiated their historical civilizations. Over the glide of time, many writers imprinted their writings over the soil of their nation and even beyond their patriotism for their literary works streamed as the unending flow wrenching into the common waters. The SAARC nations are adorned with literary heritage that redrew their borders over cultural and social calamities that have been ruling their past that couldn't change



its tense. And SAARC English literature which not only communicates language but also culture has the abounding ability to convert this cooperation into a country of prosperity.

II. From a country to a region: the variability of literature in SAARC

The SAARC region is well acclaimed for its culture and literature which can not only be dated as old as hills and also as magnificent as they are. Literature has been the living reflection of the people who had been scattered over the borders of the SAARC region for more a chaotic history that painted the countries of the region. And during this process of discovering nationalism literature sketched the myth of misery and happiness of the people as they found their nation through the winds of war and history that delocalised their birth and ancestry. Today we have divided the literature over the countries' heritage but we can never fade the truth that there was a time when the borders of the so acclaimed countries were unclear over the oceanic waves of migration that strengthened internationalism. The high tides of Literature if can create nationalism from cooperation then surely it can rewrite cooperation from nationalism. A country's literature can flood only its people with the flow of patriotism but regional literature has the propounding power to change the borders of patriotism. Let us glance into the literary works of some of the great Indian English writers and then we shall drive into the exemplary works of the SAARC writers in English. As we string into the melody of these works we can not only distinguish a country's literature from a regional literature but can also analyse how a country's history cannot be made without the regions overflowing its boundaries.

III. Works from Indian English Literature:

***Swami and friends* by R.K Narayan:**

R.K.Narayan had coined the humour of patriotism through his Malgudi days, a series of short stories set up in Malgudi, a microcosm of India. *Swami and friends* is frequently visited page of Narayan's abounding book of literature that discerns Malgudi Schooldays from the well acclaimed Malgudi days through the screwing nostalgia of English literature during the colonial power. *Swami and friends* is the tale of a ten year old boy called Swaminathan, a curious, innocent and high spirited boy intruding his story over the lands of Malgudi. The novel recounts the adventures of Swami and his friends, a group of schoolboys in British India.

The novel ponders over an unexpected understanding of colonial and colloquial adversities. The central character of the novel, Swaminathan is driven by English literature, Christianity and education. His life takes an ironical shift when he meets Rajam, a symbol of colonial power who eventually becomes his closest friend. Thus Narayan portrayed the budding nationalism in the young hands of the future that had shaken the colonialism with the war of friendship and realisation.

***The Great Indian Novel* by Shashi Tharoor:**

The Great Indian Novel is a rhetorically satirical novel that recasts the history of India's independence in the picture of the great epic Mahabharata. The Legends of the Indian history are transformed into the classical characters of the epic. The plotting phrase "The Great Indian Novel" is an allusion of the orating idea of "The Great American Novel". The Novel retells the Indian History through Indian mythology. Tharoor presented a mythological nationalism that is written over the constitution of patriotism. By stipulating the Indian Independence movement over the greatest of epic poems of the country, he transformed the Indian history into an epic for the world.



The novel is streamed into eighteen sections and thereby mirrors the eighteen books of Mahabharata reciprocating the Battle of Kurukshetra which lasted for eighteen days. Stressing over the researchers of Indian Independence such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the novel adheres to the abode of a country of muting mythology.

IV. Works from SAARC English Literature:

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*:

A historical novel that enshrined the history of a borderless colonial space in the whispering words of an Indian writer rather a SAARC writer, Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace* is the saga of a chronicled century from 1885 to 1956 which is set in Burma, Bengal (comprising of the nation of Bangladesh and Indian state of West Bengal), India and Malaya (area containing the southernmost tip of Myanmar, Peninsular Malaysia and Southern Thailand). By setting itself with the realities of the archival events of the World history such as Anglo-Burmese War of 1865, the fall of Konbaung Dynasty in Mandalay (the last royal capital of Burma), World War 2, Partition of India, the novel realms into the myth of internationalism. There is an unusual overlap of events wherein the novel sails through the formation of new bonds in the extinction of exile and isolation, wraps the budding nationalism over the conquering colonisation, and celebrates the mixing of races and castes over the dawn of modernity. The novel floats between the boundaries of both geography and class, thus impounding over the social chaos in the British Asia.

Echoing into the voice of the novel, *The Glass Palace* upraises its curtains with the downfall of the Burmese sovereign king Thebaw as is evident in the heavy accented tone of a poor eleven year old Indian boy, Rajkumar who recognises the dwindled neighing of the horses, the uprising storm of sand, the charismatic brutality of the colonisers which had way back portrayed his present wretchedness. The novel fades the social and economic division of people by ironically uniting the royal family-Thebaw, Queen Supayalat and the Burmese princesses; and commoners like Dolly, Rajkumar, Saya John and Uma by the gales of colonial displacement that winded the unthreaded history of more than a continent. From a poor immigrant clutched in the dynasty of an unwithered nationality, Rajkumar grew unto a rich merchant under Saya John only after imperialism defeated nationalism. As a well off in the circles of trading timbre, Rajkumar was though identified for his riches, but his real identity was discoloured even from his memories. In the words of Amitav Ghosh:

“Rajkumar was at a loss to understand his greed. He was in a way, a feral creature, unaware that there exist invisible bonds linking people to one another through personifications of their commonality. In the Bengal of his birth these ties had been sundered by a century of conquests and no longer existed even as a memory but that, there should exist a universe of loyalties that was unrelated to himself and his own immediate needs, this was very nearly incomprehensible” (Amitav Ghosh 47)

Dolly, the royal maid of the Thebaw dynasty which was denounced in exile to the rare traces of Ratnagiri, India, also expounds over her nerving nationality that was ruthlessly scrambled from the screaming voidances of identity, as she says:

“If I went to Burma now I would be a foreigner – they would call me a Kalaa like they do Indians – a trespasser, an outsider from across the sea. I’d find that very hard I think. I’d never be able to rid myself of the idea that I would have to leave again one day, just as I knew what it was like when we left”(Amitav Ghosh 113)



The betrothal alliance of Dolly and Rajkumar was somewhere strengthened through the situation of unconscious nationhood that they could hook up with. Even in the avaricious banishment of her royal dynasty, Dolly could undertone the rhyme of friendship with Uma, the wife of collector commanding over Ratnagiri. For Dolly, the life with the royal family is the only outsource that she could connect to, so she is assertive even in her place of exile for she feels it is not the place that patronages but it is the people who bind the land with their unity that fosters their true blue patriotism, which gets painted as she rhythms her words over the tone of anguish: “where would I go, this is home” (Amitav Ghosh 119)

Both Dolly and Uma stitched their livelihood over the shadow of colonisation that breathed over their sufferings. Amitav Ghosh beautifully carved a conversation between the ladies of a stretched land, thus illuminating the illustrious illusion of post-colonial disillusionment:

“One night, plucking up her courage, Uma remarked: ‘One hears some awful things about Queen Supayalat.’

‘What?’

‘That she had a lot of people killed... in Mandalay...’

Dolly was quiet for a moment and Uma began to worry that she had offended her. Then Dolly spoke up. ‘You know Uma’ she said in her softest voice. ‘Every time I come to your house, I notice that picture you have hanging by your front door...’

‘Of Queen Victoria, you mean’

‘Yes’

Uma was puzzled. ‘What about it?’

‘Don’t you sometimes wonder how many people have been killed in Queen Victoria’s name? It must be millions wouldn’t you say? I think I’d be frightened to live with one of those pictures.’

A few days later Uma put the picture down and sent it to the Cutchery, to be hung in the Collector’s office” (Amitav Ghosh 114)

Uma’s nephew Arjun, a British soldier, but an Indian *sepo*y, condenses from being privileged to being prejudiced as he realises the words of a third generation army officer:

“Where is this country? The fact is that you and I don’t have a country, so where is this place whose safety, honour and welfare are to come first, always and every time?”(Amitav Ghosh 330)

But Arjun was brutally torn between the dawn of British imperialism and the dusk of British empiricism as he breaks his identity through the words that question a concreting country:

“We rebelled against an empire that shaped everything in our lives...We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves” (Amitav Ghosh 518)

While the boundaries were drawn and redrawn thus defining the nations and nationalism in The Glass Palace, the author seems to confuse the chaos of nationhood by collapsing these margins with the waters of internationalism.



Even the title of the novel reflects the brittleness of a nation as it crowns every nation as to be a Glass Palace always at the risk of being broken by the winds of mistrust and disbelief. By connecting the history of the SAARC nations which were flagged with the brutality of British Asia, Amitav Ghosh tried to tie up the nations with a future that has to be shared. And the reason that Ghosh presented a novel but not a history because he knows that a novel can question a history over the horizon of its vision.

Postcard from Kashmir by Agha Shahid Ali

Agha Shahid Ali though was born in Delhi in 1949, but grew up, so did his poetic inclination in the swaying land of Kashmir that imprinted the verses of visual poetry over his mind and soul. But ironically his poetry penned neither the acoustic winds that winded over the historical Himalayas nor the ravishing rivers that sprinkled the spectrum over the dew of the dawn. His poetry yearned to poem the land of lustre that was erected in his rare of memories after he left it in exile. The poet laments over the nationalism that denationalised the identity that his memories remind him of.

The poem “Postcard from Kashmir” is one such harbinger of persuasion for something more than nationalism. As the poet says that Kashmir shrinks into his mailbox, he also shrinks his memories into a poem of three stanzas. He dusts his past over the “four by six inches” postcard that he claims as his biggest home. And as he retorts, “half inch Himalayas”, he proclaims that the grandeur of the majestic nature lost its glory over the magnitude of dictating discord of partition. And as the poet flows his rhyme:

“This is home. And this the closest
 I'll ever be to home. When I return, the colours won't be so brilliant,

the Jhelum's waters so clean,
 so ultramarine. My love
 so overexposed.”¹⁰(Shahid Ali Agha 1)

He deepens his sorrow over the tide of reality that he can never return back to his home in Kashmir atleast till the pathetic patriotism prevails. Finally the poet ends his literary thread with the hope in despair as he verses:

“... a giant negative, black
 and white, still undeveloped.”¹¹(Shahid Ali Agha 1)

By quoting these lines in his poetry, the poet comments over such nationalism that is fonder of war than development. The poem voices the chord of every such civilian, every such citizen of SAARC who is caught in the adversities of boundless boundaries. The free verse urges the nations to wave their development together as does their flags wave coherently at the sun rise of the SAARC summits.

Kishwar Naheed's I am not that woman:

It is true that the SAARC countries share culture, tradition, heritage, language etc, but it is equally true that these cordial countries share poverty, under-development, and a borderless history of male dominance. The plight of women has darkened the shades of humanity. Kishwar Naheed, a feminist poet from Pakistan, born in Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh, India aroused her anguish against every tear that curses the birth of a girl child, as she knits the poem ‘I am not that woman’. Naheed didn't plot a particular situation, but rather condensed a general



outcry into a situation that every woman can connect to. The title of the poem pleads for an earnest equality where the woman confesses that she is not that woman so she shouldn't receive the brutalities, the inhuman affliction, and the callous tortures which that woman suffered because of keeping quiet.

Naheed brings out a heart throbbing comparison where she peels the fictive chasm of the society by showing how the women are introverted in the shadow of light when men are set free to think, to breeze their monarchy over their counterparts. But the poet knows that light cannot be hidden in darkness and so is truth which cannot be shaded behind the mirage of customs and traditions. As a mother, as a wife, as a citizen, women had to suffer all along the spectrum of roles she had been fulfilling with utmost commitment but is devoid of even the rights that recognise the reciprocity of the society. The poet gives a rhetoric refrain against the claimed nationalism and independence wherein she pities the captive minds of such nations which proclaim to be free.

The poet yearns for change that can lift the women to the status of humanity, where she can think free, and let her free pen puddle the perplexities of the people's society.

A Change of Skies by Yasmine Gooneratne:

The novel, "A Change of Skies" coagulates over its title, wherein it landscapes the immigrant experience and humorously explains the clustering and clashing of cultures over the latitude of Cultural Revolution. In the alienated land of overseas, the novel connects the countries of common clamouring cultures bordered by the waters of nationalism. Enchanting over the story of a Sri-Lankan family moving to Australia, the novel describes the cultural war of continents. And by portraying such a huge inter-continental culture, the novel secretly culminates the upheaval of Asian cultural heritage as a single string of rhythmic vibration. The novel also brings in the image of literary communication of cultures as is brushed with the following polishing words of the Yasmine:

Long before I saw Britain for the second time (as a post graduate student), I knew London [...] I knew, long before I ever are one, what muffins tasted like. Where Wordsworth's inward eye has been polished by memory, imagination had burnished mine: it flashed like images in a video on a fast forward, not just the skittish daffodils of his description but all the meadow flowers of Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Keats. For generations my relatives had been either going to, or returning from England. And so firmly had their gaze been focussed on the metropolitan centre of pale pink imperia that they had never so much as glanced in any other direction. To do so would seemed the grossest lapse of taste (Yasmine Gooneratna 12)

Pondering over generations that take to sustain cultural chaos, the novel deals with four main characters, Edward, who migrates to Australia in 1882 but eventually, returns in 1887, his grandson Bharat and Bharat's wife, again drift to Australia in 1964 and rooted their identity in the foreign culture and finally their Daughter Edwina born and brought up in Australia. The novel renders the idea of formation of cultures and thereby erases the differences of cultures which are the substitutes of an adhering collision of contradicting traditions.

V. Conclusion:

English is a global language that has structured histories to be historicized. It is true that the regional languages that the SAARC countries share can be the unfathomable flame for propagating the message of cooperation and coordination. But English can be used as the voice of all other languages as it has the power to take on the flavor of literary works written in exotic but extraordinary languages. Translations can be the express medium for



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vibrating the cultural heritage of SAARC to the far away continents. By developing such regional literature, countries can communicate and connect beyond their national regime. Incorporation of SAARC English literature in the literary syllabus of the institutions stipulated in the member counties can be proved can an effective medium for developing the pen beyond patriotism.

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