

A NOVEL PHENOMENON IN THE LITERARY HISTORY OF INDIA

Nitin Murlidhar Survase

Asst. Professor, Department of English,
Dr. Babsabheb Ambedkar Arts, Science and Commerce Senior College,
Mahad, Maharashtra (India).

Abstract: The novel phenomenon in Indian English Writing is new but became popular very soon. In Indian literature, other forms of literature were quite old as their foundations were laid down centuries back but the 'novel' as literary genre was new to India. Poetry, epics, drama, short stories and fables have their old literary history. 'Novel' was actually the last to arrive on the Indian English literary scene. It was only during a period of little more than a century that the novel-the long sustain piece of prose fiction-has crop up and taken root in India. At initial level, the Indian English novel has been reflected upon explored and analyzed from the perspective of history and historiography, genre and language, 'Indianness' and Indian sensibility with the majority of critics date its beginning back to the mid nineteenth century when the Bengali writer Bankimchandra Chatterjee published his Raj Mohan's Wife (1864). In India, the beginning of the modern novel as a realistic portrayal of Indian men and women in society and relating back to the European genre as it had evolved from the 18th century onward has been dated back to the late second decades of the 20th century. Indian novels are governed by their writer's more general and social interest while a younger generation is more politically and socially aware of contemporary issues. In the second half of the 19th century, stray novels continued to appear mostly by writers from the Bengal, Madras and Bombay. A majority of these novels are social and historical, and their models are obviously the eighteenth and nineteenth century British fiction, particularly Defoe, Fielding and Scott. An interesting development is the surprisingly early appearance of women novelists. In this paper the researcher is going to take the survey of Indian English literature. This study focuses only Novel phenomenon and will not deal with the study of Drama and poetry.

INTRODUCTION:

Fiction, is the most powerful form of literary expression today, it has acquired a prestigious position in Indian English literature. It is generally agreed that the novel is the most suitable literary form for the exploration of experiences and ideas in the context of our time, and Indian English

fiction occupies its proper place in the field of literature. In this regard Prof. M. K. Naik remarks:

...One of the most notable gifts of English

education to India is prose fiction for though India was

probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel

as we know today was an importation from the West. (Iyenger, 1962)

A novel phenomenon in the literary history of India has made the most significant position in the contemporary world of writing. The real emergence of Indian English Novel started with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajamohan's Wife* published in 1864. Indian English novel had begun almost with the introduction of English in Indian Education system, though earlier efforts by Indian writers were overshadowed by those in regional languages. Novels have kept on appearing at a steadily increasing pace and undoubtedly the future of Indian English novel is full of hope and promise. There has been an ample indication of vivacity, variety, humanity and artistic integrity that have ornamented the Indian English novel throughout and assures to do so forever.

I) Indian English Novels (1800-1900):

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajamohan's Wife*, like most of his Bengali novels, deals with social issues of the time. The main theme of the novel is about the consequences of a bad marriage and the sufferings of the woman protagonist. It was the time of social reform and so it is not surprising that the first Indian English novel is a social novel

instead of a historical romance. The second noteworthy Indian English novel, *Govinda Samanta* or *The History of a Bengali Raivat*, is also by a Bengali, Lal Behari Dey, and was published in 1874.

Though Toru Dutt is better known as a poet, she may very well considered to be the first woman novelist in Indian English, and perhaps the first Indian novelist in French, published in Calcutta in 1878, her influenced novel *Bianca* or the *Young Spanish Maiden* is a romantic love story set in England. Krupabai Satyanadan was another earliest women writer who has contributed two novels i.e. *Kamala: A Story of Hindu life (1894)* and *Saguna: A Story of Native Christian Life (1895)*. Among the other early novels by women writers may be mentioned Raj Lakashmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife or The Enchanted Fruit (1876)*. Romesh Chunder Dutt translated his own Bengali novels into English *The Lake of Palms: A Story of Indian Domestic Life (1902)* is a novel of social reform and widow remarriage.

II) Indian English Novels (1900-1950):

When the Gandhian tornado struck India, a change was visualized in mostly all directions, including the novel. There was intensification in the sense of nationalism as well as endeavors to construct of the idea of a modern India.

The trinity of R.K.Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao has not only shown stamina and stern consistency of purpose but has revealed the fortitude of talent and potentiality in their writings. R.K.Narayan is one of the few writers in India who take their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication what may often seem to be the mirage of technical perfection. His first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) created the famous Malgudi- the town that seeped into the heart of every Indian.

About the novel *Swami and Friends* Prof. M.K Naik Remarks,

R. K. Narayan is responsible for many of the outstanding literary works India has ever produced. And this book in particular captures the essence of India under British ruling and the mind and life of a typical teenage kid. (Naik, 1982)

Many more novels followed like *Bachelor of Arts* (1936), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1945) and many more. Behind all their unpretentious simplicity and triviality, Narayan's novels conveyed a sublime philosophy of life. Narayan's greatest achievement was making India reachable to the outside

world through his literature. Regarded as one of the leading Indian English fiction writers, he was capable of bringing small town India to his audience in a manner that was both authentic as well as experimental.

Mulk Raj Anand is another prolific writer whose first literary efforts were a chronicle to the lives of the under privileged. *Untouchable* (1935) is about a sweeper, *Coolie* (1936) illustrates the lives of displaced labourers who are, exploited by all kinds of economic forces including colonialism and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) exposes the state of Plantation life in British India. Thus, when Anand started writing fiction, he decided that he would have a preference for the common to the imaginary, that he would keep away from the thoroughfares of romance and sophistication but discover that tapered lanes of the outcastes and the peasants, the down trodden and the working class. His contribution to Indian English fiction of social realism is incontrovertibly great.

His *Untouchable* (1935) depicts the story of the low caste boy, Bakha. It is basically a tragic drama of the individual caught in the net of the age-old caste system. In *Coolie* (1936) he presents a poverty-stricken protagonist, Munoo.

K.R.S. Iyengar remarks:

Both novels are A plea for downtrodden, the poor and the outcast, who face economic hardship and emotional humiliation in a rigid social structure. (Naik, 1990)

Raja Rao, who makes a remarkable triad with the other two writers, is affiliated with them in time and at times in the choice of themes but not in his art as a novelist or in his enchanting prose style. *Kanthapura* (1938) the only novel written by him before independence, clearly reveals a writer pondering over and depicting the transformations that were taking place in the making of the modern nation.

There were some other writers and novels that have marked their contribution to the spirit of the time and one of them is the *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) by Ahmed Ali. Another such novel is *Iqbalunnisa Hussain's Purdah the Polygamy: Life man Indian Muslim Household* (1944) which conveys what it promises through the title an intimate depiction of a mode of life. Another writer who deserves mention at this juncture is K.A. Abbas whose novel *Tomorrow is Ours: A novel of the India of Today* (1943) tries to accumulate an India with a responsibility to participate in worldly interactions.

III) Indian English Novels (1950-2008):-

The trinity of R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao continued their long and illustrious career even in the post independence era and many of their novels have contributed to the enrichment of Indian writing in English. R.K.Narayan in his last group of novels, *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting for mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The sweet Vendor* (1967). Naryan makes his readers enter into an exotic world of half-headed and half –hearted dreamers, artists, financiers, adventures, eccentrics, cinema stars, Sannyasis and many others, several of them not from Malgudi but imported from outside.

For R.K.Narayan, Iyengar express that;

Narayan's is the art of resolved limitation and conscientious exploration: he is content, like Jane Austen, with his little bit of ivory, just so many inches wide: he would like to be a detached observer, to concentrate on a

narrow scene, to sense the atmosphere of the place, to snap a small group of characters in the atmosphere of the place, to snap a small group of characters in their oddities and angularities: he would, if he could, explore the inner countries of the mind, heart and soul, catch the uniqueness in the ordinary, the tragic in the prosaic. 'Malgudi' is Narayan's 'Casterbridge' but the inhabitants of Malgudi—although they may have their recognizable local trappings—are essentially human, and hence, have their kinship with all humanity. In this sense, 'Malgudi' is everywhere. (Kirpal, 1979).

In 1951, Mulk Raj Anand published *Seven Summers*, the first of a series of seven novels which Anand planned to write as a kind of autobiography in seven parts,

corresponding to the seven stages of a man's life. Anand's *Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) had a certain topical appeal, whereas his later novels, *The old woman and the cow* (1960) and *The Road* (1961), Anand reveals more of his humanity and empathy and less of his aversion and antagonism with the existing reality. But it was actually his earlier works, the novels before independence that had made a mark in the history of fiction writing;

Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) materialized after independence. The former novel is an ambitious and commendable attempt at accomplishing an entire projection of India in stunning fictional requisites and perhaps it is one of the most impressive novels by an Indian in English. Bhabani Bhattacharya's five novels – *So many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960) and *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) – form an impressive achievement. Manohar Malgaonkar has published four novels in quick succession and there is a certain maturity in plot as well as theme of the novels. *The first Distant Drum* (1960) presents the aspects of army life. His second novel *Combat of shadows* (1964), *The Princes* (1963), *Bend in the Ganges* (1964).

If Anand's art is committed to expose social injustice, economic exploitation and the plight of suppressed castes and classes in India while Raja Rao's interest lies in exploring the spiritual essence of India, an ideological movement of Narayan's work is much less discernible.

William Walsh admires:

If Anand is the novelist as reformer,
Raja Rao the novelist as Metaphysical
poet, Narayan is simply the novelist
as novelist. (Kirpal, 1996)

G. V. Desani's *All about H. Hatter* (1948) is a book that exhibits great comic skill and is anticipated by many as a post modernist novel in form and style. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), his most famous novel, is the story of the impact of partition on a village in the western border and how the peaceful life of two communities is rent as under by forces that they cannot understand. In *I shall not Hear the Nightingale* (1959), Singh portrays a Sikh family and all that it goes through the freedom movement during the 1940's.

It was Salman Rushdie who altered the perception of Indian writing in English and made unbelievable imprints on the world literary sphere with his *Midnight's Children* (1981) and later *Shame* (1983) by illustrating the Indian reality with a

fantastical touch and transfusing history, myth and autobiography elegantly. And then it was the *Satanic Verses* (1988) that set the world on fire and was branded a blasphemous book'

Amitav Ghosh's *Circle of Reason* (1986), an imaginative fiction elongating from rural Bengal to the modern Mediterranean port, and his mastery of narration was reaffirmed in *Shadow Lines* (1988). From *Heaven Lake*, Vikram Seth finally turned into fiction writing to re-assert the Indian writer's claim on the English language. His *The Golden Gate* (1986), a novel written in smooth sonnets, is an unparalleled accomplishment which facilitated Indian novel in English traverse another edge.

Arun Joshi's *Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) is a wonderful introduction to the post-independence Indian English novel. *The Foreigner* (1968) was on the same theme of alienation. He has also achieved recognition for his novels. *The Apprentice* (1974) in which the life of an idealistic youth is delineated and *The last Labyrinths* (1981), which has won him the Sahitya Academy Award. His novel *The City and the River* (1990), is a political allegory that shows the cynical nature of human greed and deceit.

Anita Desai has added novel aspect to the accomplishment of Indian woman

writers in English novel. Desai deals mainly with the exploration of sensibility which is in fact, very Indian in attitude. In her first novel *Cry, the Peacock* (1963), it is the story of a lady who own world of passion and obsession. The voices of the middle class intellectuals in the backdrop of contemporary Calcutta weave the story of *Voices in the city* (1965). In her later novels Desai has dealt with such themes as German and anti Semitism the downfall of traditions, and the western orthodox views of India. Prof. M.k. Naik in his book *A History of Indian English Literature* writes,

“It is with the novels of Arun Joshi and Anita Desai

that a new era in the Indo-English fiction began and

also witnessed a change in the treatment of themes” (Bharucha & Sarang)

Shashi Tharoor joined the band of novelists with his sprawling work *The Great Indian Novel* (1990) in which he retells the political history of 20th century India. *Trying to Grow* (1990) by Firdaus kanga presents the middle class parsis with all their interesting eccentricities. The parsi genius struck again with Rohinton Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey* (1991), Where the novelist has shown his skill of

characterization with his various characters vibrant with life.

It is, however, after the Second World War that women novelists of quality started enriching Indian novel in English. Kamla Markandaya, and Ruth Prawar Jhabvala started the trend and their novels are unquestionably outstanding. Most of Kamala Markandaya’s novels persistently present the picture of India struggling against odds and trying to surmount them. Her first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) takes the readers to the heart of a South Indian village where life has apparently not changed for a thousand years. *In Some Inner Fury* (1957) Markandaya’s thematic concern is the encounter between the tradition – loving East and the fast changing world of the west. In a *Silence of Desire* (1961), she leaves politics and economics at the rear and invades into the imponderable dominion of spiritual realism. Ruth Prawar Jhabvala has communicated here experiences during and after the years of independence in India. Jhabvala’s first novel, *To Whom She Will*, is filled with relish of eating and in the later novels it is the cocktail parties that exchange the traditional eating parties.

Apart from these two distinctive novelists, there were many others with their unique talent and individual style and among them Attia Hosain, Anita Desai,

and Nayantara sahal had made their remarkable prominence felt with their effective and influential writing. Attia Hosanis's Novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), and her collection of short stories, *Phoenix Fled* (1953), provided a clear evidence of her talent and sensitive observation. Nayantara Sahgal has written novel like, *A Time to be Happy*, *This Time of Morning* and *Storm in Chandigarh*. *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969). Sets the scene in the exotic city of Chandigarh, the capital of part of Indian partitioned Punjab. Bharati Mukherjee, another women voice in post independence. Mukherjee's most successful and popular work of Fiction, *Jasmine* (1989), is a story in which a young Indian woman becomes an illegal immigrant to the United States. Mukherjee's works focus on the phenomenon of migration. *The Tiger's Daughter* is a story about a young girl named Tara who ventures back to India after many years of being away only to return to poverty and turmoil. Even in her later works like. *The Holder of the world* (1993) and *Leave It to Me* (1997) her focus continues to be on the immigrant woman and their freedom from relationships to become separate individuals.

Among the other women writers of the time mention should be made of Jumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Chitra Deshmukh, Kiran Desai, and Mnju Kapoor as these

writers have contributed not only in the world of woman writing but also aroused the sense of responsibility and affection towards woman. Arundhati Roy's *The God of small Things* (1996) is semi – autobiographical and major part of the book captures the author's childhood experiences. A feministic tradition is strongly apparent in Manju Kapoor's novels and the search of control over ones destiny is the key theme.

Shashi Deshpande also belongs to this genre of woman writers and her novels like, *The Dark Holds no Terrors*, *That long Silence*, *The Binding Vine* and *A Matter of Time* have created ripples in the mind of the readers and her writing has the power and the passion to ensure the changes that are required for the benefit of the society.

Conclusion:

A novel phenomenon in the literary history of India began from 1864 and it continues till today 2013. There are many novelists arisen and now arising. Although in comparison to epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories, fables and novels, is comparatively a novel phenomenon in literary history of India. In the early decades of 20th century writers like R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj anand and Raja Rao produced remarkable novels while post independence novelists like Khushwant

Singh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar etc. wrote novels of remarkable literary merit. Contemporary Indian English novel has assumed global significance at the hands of such writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and others. It forms an important feature of a global literary movement called New Novel Literature in English.

Indisputably, the Indian English novel has gained a unique viability, vibrancy and vitality, attracting a remarkably wide readership and universal acclaim, to which the new novelists have made a positive contribution. The Indian-English fiction has so many novelists but very few sympathetic critics.

Meenakshi Mukharji expresses her sympathy to conclude her *Twice Born Fiction* with a comment:

Indian English fiction, which has served for so long as a file or document of sociology of anthropology or educational theory must now be regarded as literature and evaluated as such. That is the service it requires from critics, and this study is modest essay in this direction.

References:

Bharucha Nilufer E. and Sarang Vilas (eds.) *Indian English fiction (1980-90 An Assessment B.R.)*.

Iyenger , K. R. S.(1962). *Indians writing in English*. Bombay.

Kirpal, Viney. (1979). *The New India Novel in English*. Delhi : Allied Publisher.

Kirpal, Viney. (1996). *The postmodern Indian English Novel*. Delhi : Allied Publisher.

Naik, M. K. (1982) *A History of Indian English Literature*. Delhi: Sahitya Academy.

Naik, M. K. (1990). *Aspects of Indian writing in English*. Delhi : Allied Publisher