

Changing Structure of Indian English Writing

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Abstract: Indian writing in English has come of age, from the first novel in English by Bankim Chandra in the late nineteenth century to the present twenty first century writings. The early writers made English their own weapon of expression by using Indianised version of idioms, describing Indian epics, society and landscapes, etc at great length. Their core characters were simple minded individuals in their ordinary lives fighting hard every day against inherent evils of society such as poverty, colonisation, patriarchy, caste and class differences. With time theories such as socialism, Marxism, radicalism, etc began to find their place in Indian English writing. Revolution, emancipation of masses, struggle to maintain the identity of India post colonisation became common themes. Female authors made the writings gynocentric. They focused on the expression of the internal fury of yet silent subaltern women. The spreading of Indian diasporas worldwide made our writings multicultural and multilingual. The characters and their expressions, situation, events, etc now became a complex amalgamation of different worlds. From a serialised chronicle of work focusing on lives of simple people to a symbol of multidimensional lives of modern Indian, Indian English writing has metamorphosis-ed into an intricate web of expression making an indelible mark among popular literature worldwide.

IndexTerms - Expression, Indian writing, language, modern, society, struggle

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English writing 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.

In 1773 Sake Mohamed probably wrote the first Indian travelogues in English known as Travels of Sake Mohamed. Most of the early days writing in English in India were nonfiction, accounts of events, narratives, biographies, etc.

The nineteenth century Calcutta was cosmopolitan, and was influenced by the happenings of not only from Britain and the Continent but also from as far away land such as Canada and the United States. Calcutta started benefiting from English education in 1817.

It was Raja Ram Mohan Roy who initially took keen interest in introduction of English as a medium of education in India. He believed that only by learning the language will Indians be able to understand the scientific advancement that makes the colonial masters superior to them in strength. Thus come one step closer to freedom. For this he worked hard in close contact with the British government in India and helped introduce English as a medium of education in Indian schools and colleges.

II. THE BEGEMNING

The revolution in Indian intellectual life was so complete by the 1830s that the first autobiography had already been published in English – Raja Ram Mohan Roy's.

With Macaulay's minutes in 1835, English became the medium of instruction in India. It was supposed to create an English speaking, reading, writing class of Indians who would help the colonial masters in the administration of the colony. Instead it helped Indians produce works focused on their fellow brethren. Though English was a foreign language, this evolving class of writers made it their own.

In the beginning, writers wrote of India's history, epics, landscape, wars, etc glorifying the past of our country that was deliberately degraded by the British to crumple the spirits of the Indians. Despite all sorts of bans and opposition from the ruling government, they freely advocated independence from the colonisers. Young and ambitious writers such as:

Henry Derozio (1809 – 1831) wrote poetries that reflected native Indian stories in Victorian style. He stood for the spirit of freedom and independence. Much of his work advocated liberty, independence and strong sense of patriotism.

Toru Dutt (1856 – 1877) wrote poems based on Indian myths and legends such as Legends of Hindustan. She used epics like those of Savitri, Lakshman, Eklavya, etc in her prose and poetries. She presented a simple interpretation of deep Indian philosophy.

The widest reaching effect of Indian writing in English can be seen in the novels. Simple yet effective novels began to surface in English from the late nineteenth century. The novels of the nineteenth century brought to limelight the social injustices, superstition and the abominable conditions of the peasants and workers that plagued the Indian society. Women's emancipation, education and widow remarriage also became common themes in the novels.

Formal recognition for Indian novels in English worldwide came in the beginning of the twentieth century. The early writers such as Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, and R K Narayan made a mark by their deep understanding of the complex Indian society under the colonial rule suffering acute poverty, social discrimination, unemployment and illiteracy and its simple yet enriching expression by means of a foreign language. These three novelists wrote and published their works that proved to bring revolutionary changes in the acceptance of Indian English Writing in popular literature across the globe.

They worked hard to expose the hypocrisy of the society they lived in. Bhakha of Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand was considered untouchable by the virtue of his birth. However, we see the superficiality of this polluting effect on the upper castes when a Brahmin priest tries to molest his sister. After this event, the brother sister duo is too afraid to complain against an upper caste Brahmin for they knew that no one will publicly acknowledge the truth even if within their hearts, the people knew that the charges were true to the core. Such a blunt expression was unknown in the past. The writers fought against the rigidity, superstition, colonialism, etc effectively by means of their pen.

They also produced their own version of Indian English wherein the idioms used were simply the translation of the Hindi versions. For example instead of 'nip it in the bud', Raja Rao used 'crush it in the seeds'. Also many Hindi words such as sindoor, verandas, puja-ghar, etc started finding place in English writings.

Raja Rao in his foreword to the novel *Kanthapura* wrote:

English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up - like Sanskrit or Persian was before - but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can only write as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as a part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will someday prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

III. INFLUENCES

The freedom movement led by Gandhi inspired a flurry of activity in the literary world. The desires for an autonomous, independent nation lead to creative ideas in the Indian writings in all languages including English. It sought to appeal to the masses to take up the cudgels and oust the British from the Indian soil. This increased the scope of the Indian English Fiction.

The growth of independence movement and nationalist consciousness gave much impetus and spur to the outflow of novels in which affection for motherland was the crux and this served to invoke the patriotic sentiments of the masses. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, K.S.Venkataramani's *Kandan*, The Patriot and Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, *The Sword and the Sickle*, revolved around the varying themes of the independence struggle.

Jawaharlal Nehru brought the idea of socialism to Indian English Writing through his autobiography, essays and letters mainly written during his time in jail. He brought a sort of revolution by equating all people irrespective of caste, creed, sex, religion or wealth. This was new to a country where bias was found at every footstep.

IV. CHANGING STRUCTURE

Slowly and steadily female authors like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai joined the ranks of English writers in the forefront. They brought women's struggle for survival outside homes and into the world of fiction. Their concern was a common Indian woman's quest for existence. How she has to face the opposition of family and blood before facing the world. She had to stand up before her own kin to fend for a life of her own choice. These writes gave a voice to the female psychology in Indian English novels. Their feminism was not influenced by the western concept but evolved within the ambit of Indian society with its own set of problems.

For example Rukmani of *Nectar In A Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya spent her entire life coping with her marriage to an illiterate poor farmer despite being a headman's daughter. She was not asked before marrying her off neither she had any actual power to protest against it. She was expected to accept her destiny without a word.

Novels of Anita Desai dealt with human emotions. The shift was from collective to individual perspective. Her heroines represented the 'creative release of feminine sensibility' which began to emerge after World War 2. The journey from dependence to selfhood and freedom was the main concern of her novels.

The poems of Kamala Das explored the sexuality of women, a topic that was taboo till date. She introduced an element of brutal frankness in her verses. She wrote about the frustrations, desires, of the suffocation of arranged loveless marriage, of numerous affairs, of shame and sorrow.

She brought a new subject matter into Indian English poetry, the same matter was the taken to novels by writes like ManjuKapur, Shobha De, etc. Their novels started exploring the idea of lovemaking, pregnancies, abortions, love child, etc without any inhibition.

Viramti of *Difficult Daughters* by ManjuKapur accepts her desire for the Professor. She admits to her affair with a married man. Being in a relationship with him, aborting his love child and expressing the agony related to it. These feelings of inner fury, lamentation, desires of women to be loved by someone now found place in Indian English writing.

Anees Jung in her book *Unveiling India* states her ideology in the following words:

In the complex pantheon of diversities, the Indian woman remains the point of unity unveiling through each single experience a collective unconscious prized by a society that is looked in mortal combat with the power and weakness of age and time. She remains the still centre, like the centre the potter's wheel, circling to create new forms, unfolding the continuity of a racial life, which in turn has encircled and helped her acquire a quality of concentration.

The institution of marriage stopped being sacrosanct. Lines between genders started blurring. Man and woman living together before or outside wedlock became a common norm. Even if unacceptable to the society, the progressive writers still incorporated the new dynamics into relationships. The idea was to allow a person to choose the partner or the form of relationship she wants to be into.

Novels like *The Guide* by R K Narayan showed Rosie and Raju living together in the village and later in the city bungalow without being in a legit relationship according to the social norms.

A major revolution came with the formal recognition of Dalit Literature when the first conference was convened in Maharashtra in 1958. Though much work was done by the likes of B R Ambedkar, JyotibaPhule, etc in the nineteenth century, it was accepted as separate cannon decades later.

The non Dalit authors sympathised with them but those who belonged to the caste expressed the agony in unparalleled words. The atrocities inflicted upon the marginalised section by the people of the society came to fore. This added a new dimension to the Indian writing. It began a quest for equality and recognition. It is mainly confrontational in nature, a revolt against the prejudiced hierarchy

The work *Sangati* by Bama makes us wonder about the path she had to tread to reach the position she now commands. This made Indian writing in English mature as well as universal. It became a vehicle of expression even for the marginalised of the marginalised. It is a unique Dalit feminist narration from subjugation to celebration

Oppression, ruled and still being ruled by patriarchy, government, caste and religion, Dalit women are forced to break all the strictures of the society in order to live(Preface, *Sangati*)

Apart from becoming sensitive to the hardships of people, writing also became bold and experimentative. Different genres evolved, horizons expanded and new literary work was produce. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* freely mixed a little supernatural with the realities of India. He mixes fairy tales with savage and harsh political indictment. Facts, fiction and a little element of magic are what make the work stand apart.

The same could be said for AmitavGhosh's *In An Antique Land*. It freely mixes past and present. On one hand the writer presents us with a fictional autobiography sort of travelogue, taking us through the streets of Egypt, its towns, villages and tradition while on the other hand we are presented with a voyage of a slave from Africa to India in the distant past. Though there was hardly any relation between the two stories they were presented in parallel to the readers.

With spreading of the Indian diasporas abroad, preservation of own culture in a foreign land became a popular theme. How despite emigrating, the older generation craves to preserve the values and pass them on to the future generations. A tug of war between the old and new came into play.

A House for MrBiswas by V S Naipaul shows MrsTulsi struggling to keep India alive in Trinidad. She wants her children to celebrate Diwali while they want to celebrate Christmas. There is also a rule of having a combined Puja in the house every morning though most of the family members wish to avoid it and often doze off during the prayers.

Namesake by JhumpaLahiri shows Bengali immigrant parent trying to raise their children in the best way possible, protecting them from American culture yet losing them to it.

The characters also began to change with time. They became modern, educated, more in line with the evolving western world. They were city dwellers or immigrants seeking a better life style. Now the struggle in Indian English writing was of saving our culture amidst modernisation and westernisation. It became a recurrent theme of novels as well as short stories.

The craze of settling abroad, getting high ended jobs, better life style at the cost of own culture and fragile parents left behind. Modern society is a progressive one but it is becoming devoid of love and affection. The literature now raised its concern against contemporary anarchy and obsessions with self aggrandisement.

It reveals the outlook of the new generation who strives to strike a balance between the inherited traditional values and imbibed foreign culture. Salman Rushdie, AmitavGhosh and UpamanyaChatterjee are the writers who can be called the pioneers of such writings. Their works delve into the hurdles faced by newly independent India. These writers have made bold attempts to recapture the altered perceptions of Post - colonial India and the use of revolutionary narrative techniques. These writers have transformed the meaning and dimension of Indian writing in English and have made it more dynamic, accommodating and expansive.

The short story *The Only American From Our Village* by Arun Joshi reveals the mental agony of a father, who manages to send his son abroad for higher studies and other brighter prospects, but in return, he receives a cold and heart-breaking response. He dies alone in his small house of the village whereas his son keeps busy in a conference at the same time.

V. CONCLUSION

Writing is a dynamic phenomenon, the topics, society which is written about, narrative techniques, etc all keep on changing with time. What remains intact is the desire of the artist to create, to convey their thoughts and beliefs in the best way possible to this ever changing world. With this the structure of Indian English writing keeps on evolving.

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