



ANGLO INDIAN NOVEL: A SEED, A SAPLING, AND A PLANT

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ABSTRACT

“Literature”, quotes Iyengar the French literary historian, M. Taine, “is the creation of three factors: the race, the milieu, the moment.” (Iyengar, Indian Writing in English. 22) As regards Indo-Anglian literature, the ‘race’ is the mixed India race, a resultant of invasions, conquests, and occupations extending over a period of four or five thousand years; the ‘milieu’, the variegated Indian subcontinent comprising extremes of every kind, heir to a geography and cultural heritage all its own; and the ‘moment’, the meeting of the West and India. In order to probe into the etiology of this literature, a fair survey of historical facts is essential, for the beginnings of the old literatures are generally shrouded in the mists of antiquity. The present article is a humble effort to conduct a fair and judicious probe into the upcoming of this rejuvenating and audacious plant- ‘the Anglo Indian Novel’.

INTRODUCTION

The East India Company, a British based trading Corporation, formed as early as 1599 “was directly interested neither in Empire nor in the Kingdom of Christ” remarks Iyengar, “and certainly not in the suppression or advancement of the indigenous culture.” (24) When the West turned to India- a monstrosity self-divided state from within- with unimaginable decay and misery at home; and by the beginning of the 19th century, the East India Company was more or less the master of the situation in India. Missionaries were permitted to enter the country freely in order to promote the Oriental learning, and “dictionaries, grammars, and translations”, observes Iyengar, “were among the first fruits of such missionary enterprise” and as result “the formal prose in the vernaculars was attempted.” (26) By early 19th century, however, the far-sighted men like Ram Mohan Roy advocated strongly for English instead of Oriental education.

During the period of 20 years between 1835 to 1855 – the period of the Macaulay and the Wood’s dispensation – a rapid increase in educated Englishmen, and hence the English books was witnessed. The detail, which is curious, was that this demand for English books came

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more from the Indian than from the Englishmen in India. It is said that even in 1834 approximately 5,32,000 English books were sold in India as against 13,000 in Hindi, Hindustani and Bengali, and 1,500 in Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. It was therefore logical that the long dormant intellectual and critical impulse quickened into sudden life, paving way to an extra ordinary story of endurance, assimilation and transformation - from the most utilitarian prose to the most ambitious verse, and out of this fruitful union - as it happened in Elizabethan England - a new literature was born. The growing language was, of course, as vital as, what Mulk Raj Anand observes, "Urdu from the mixture of Persian and Brij Bhasha in Mughal India hundreds of years ago." (Anand 25) The original literary creation in the English language by Indians has "now developed into" what Dr Raghukul Tilak observes "a substantial body of literature in its own right which is now referred to as Indian English Literature" (Tilak 1); and well does Rajagopalchari describe it as 'the gift of goddess Saraswati'; its uncompromised and practical essence being reflected into JL Nehru's words: "we shall only give up English at our peril."

Besides Ram Mohan Roy - one of the first of the Indian masters of English prose, the Cavally Brothers, Derozio, Kashiprosad Ghosh, Hasan Ali, P. Rajagopaul, and Mohan Lal - all belonged to the pre-Macaulay period. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, of course, came immediately afterwards. Henry Derozio (1809-1831), compared often with Keats, is known, apart from his shorter lyrics and sonnets, for his most ambitious work *The Fakir of Jungheera*; later, however, the poetry of the great English Romantics fired his imagination. Kashiprosad Ghose (1809-1873) is one of the first Indians to publish a regular volume of English verse; and his *The Shair and Other Poems* (1830) carry significance in Indian English literature for much the same reason as *Gorboduc* enjoys in the history of English drama. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-1873) is known popularly for his great Bengali epic *Meghnad Badha* centering round the heroic figure of Indrajeet - the son of Ravana.

The 'novel', a beautiful plant - however, grew in Indian soil not before 1858 when *Aleler Gharer Dulal* - a sort of *Jack Wilton* in the history of the novel in India, came out in Bengali. The real beginnings of this literary genre is, however, known to be commenced with the works of great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) - a master of romantic and historical novel- who reigned as the literary dictator of nascent Bengal, and successfully preached unerring vision of the moral strength - the self-sacrifice, self-devotion, self-discipline - and the infusion of religious feeling into patriotic works especially in his masterpiece - *Anandmath* (1882).

Rabindranath Tagore, a prophet of the Religion of Man stood as a manifestation of abridgement between East and West; and "it was for the first time in Indian literature", comments Iyengar about his novel *Choker Bali* (1902) that "the actions and reactions arising out of the impact of minds of individuals propelled the plot, and not so much the external happenings." (Iyengar 317) Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) portrayed the tears and sweat of the lower middle and have-not classes, and outgrew his predecessors in his best

works in *Srikanta*, *Grihadaha*, *Pather Dabi*, *Bipradas* and *Ses Prasna*. He was perhaps the first complete novelist who used his art simultaneously as a camera, and also as a surgeon's knife.

With the advent of Independence, however, came the wild thought to do away with a language that had 'enslaved' us. Some were apologetic about it, yet a few others fought for its retention, and "a scattered few", points out C.D. Narasinhaiah, "went on writing in English as if they didn't care what the politicians were wrangling about" (Narasinhaiah 173) conveying a clear-cut message that there is no necessary or binding relationship between Indianness and the use of English for creative expression – stamping that a writer "is not (at all) the product of an ethnic stud." (Singh 3) The Indian English novel, today, is a living and evolving literary genre attempting well in the hands of its practitioners - a fusion of form, substance and expression that is recognizably Indian, and yet not without universal appeal. It was, however, natural for some novelists to show how the joy of freedom had been more than neutralized by the tragedy of the 'Partition' with such important works as Khushwant Singh's *Train to the Pakistan* (1956), Balachandra Rajan's *The Dark Dancer* (1959), and Manohar Malgaonkar's *Distant Drum* and *A Bend in the Ganges*.

Besides the triad – MR Anand, RK Narayan and Raja Rao who have succeeded in imparting to the contemporary literary scene both the stir of variegated activity and the aura of significant achievement earning national and international repute, the other prominent writers like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Kamla Markandya, Ruth Praver Jhabwala, and Nayantara Sehgal, have, by their writing contributed to the development of Indian fiction in English; and today it has, undoubtedly, been developed in its varied aspects: social, political, historical and psychological.

Anand, giving a deft stroke to his pen, explored the by-lanes of the outcastes, the peasants, the sepoys and the working people writing naturally and unselfconsciously about what he had seen at first hand. Narayan, on the other hand, is considered as one of the few writers in India who took their craft seriously, constantly striving to improve the instrument, pursuing with a sense of dedication striving for technical perfection. "There is a norm of excellence", remarks Iyengar, "below which (he) cannot possibly lower himself." (359) He has added a good quality and quantity to Indian English fiction; and has won a good number of audiences in Britain and USA: his 'soul' fiction is, undoubtedly, the miracle of transcendence and the renewal of life, love, beauty, and peace. There is no surprise then that he has been ranked with William Faulkner, Hemingway and Graham Greene.

A novelist and a short story writer, Raja Rao reveled in his work his sensitive awareness of the past tradition. Transmuting the natural speech of Indian rural-folk into English, a language not learnt at mother's knees, is not as easy task; and "one has to convey", quotes Iyengar saying Raja Rao, "in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own." (386) The works like *Kanthapura* and *The Serpent and the Rope* are dashing attempts by Rao with epic qualities. To him "literature is 'sadhana' – not a profession but a vocation."

(408) Manohar Malgaonkar's fiction foregrounds historical aspects, the sense of history being as strong as his flair for story-telling.

Torulata, the first woman practitioner of Indian English Fiction perhaps, wrote both a French and an English novel before she died in 1877 at the age of 21. Both of her novels, *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* were published posthumously, and have autobiographical projection. Swarna Kumari Debi was probably the first woman novelist who wrote in Bengali, and two of her novels were translated into English as *An Unfinished Song* (1913) and *The Fatal Garland* (1915). Santa and Sita Chatterjee also wrote novels in Bengali and subsequently had them translated into English as *Tales of Bengal* (1922), *The Cage of Gold* (1923) and *The Garden Creeper* (1931). It was, however, not before the latter half of twentieth century that the woman novelists of quality started enriching Indian fiction in English - Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala being the most outstanding ones. In her first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), Markandaya takes us to the heart of South Indian village exploring the life of a peasant whose constant companions are the fear, hunger and despair; while her *Some Inner Fury* (1957) is a tragedy engineered by the politics. Her next novel, *Possession* (1963) celebrates the sovereignty of the spirit: it is giving, not taking, it is losing not possessing - that paves the way to fulfillment. While her *A Handful of Rice* (1966) has urban economics as its theme realistically linked to the present Indian economic situation, her *The Cofferd Dams* (1969) is deeply disturbing protest against the onslaught of modern technological ruthlessness. What is more interesting is that she "neither repeats herself, nor turns her fiction into a formula." (Iyengar 427) Having published six novels in the course of the little over a decade, Mrs. Ruth Praver Jhabvala has executed her exquisite comedies of urban middle class life in the nineteen fifties and sixties. She is often compared with Jane Austen, but in contrast to Jane Austen's world - where husband hunting occupies an important place in the action; her novels lay a stress on wife-hunting; and are full of relish of eating, and of cocktail parties.

In her two novels - *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) and *Voices in the City* (1965) - Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian women novelists in English. The social background, in Jhabvala's works is rather more important than the characters; in Kamala Markandaya the emphasis is as much on the principal characters as on the diverse backgrounds; but in Anita Desai it is "the inner climate, the climate of sensibility", remarks Iyengar, "that rumbles like thunder or suddenly blazes forth like lightning (that is) more compelling than the outer weather, the physical geography or the visible action." (464) She has successfully attempted to forge a style conveying the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters, and has had the courage to go her own way. Influenced by Virginia Wolf's ideal of fiction and even by her prose style, she, at times, finds it necessary to explore the inner as well as the outer climate through her controlled art. The corridors of power, the drawing rooms of politically very important people or the lobbies of Parliament - are some of the important stuff constituting Nayantara Sahgal's fiction; her *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) reflects the political background of Haryana and Punjab as well

as that of centre highlighting Chandigarh, the common capital of two states that had been an invitation to trouble from very beginning. The fiction of Manohar Malgaonkar portrays themes as varied as the military life, life of princes, the communal frenzy and the mutiny of 1857.

The late 20th and early 21st century Indian English Fiction witnessed writers of international repute: Chaman Nahal, Arun Joshi, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Chetan Bhagat, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai - to name only few - many of them have fetched national and International awards. Nahal has been hailed as one of the gifted craftsmen; Joshi's fiction is imbued with existential flavor – influenced with Camus, Sartre and Kierkegaard – and is more emphatically concerned with essence of human living. Rushdie, one of the most controversial novelists of contemporary literature is a writer of global fame, and possess the unique knack of creating historical fantasy, combining both realism and romance. Vikram Seth is known to have adopted the poetic form of novel, Amitav Ghosh has minutely examined the changing political and social front in India while Chetan Bhagat, one of the best sellers, do stand amongst one of the most influential people in the world due to his varied range of style and theme. Besides, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai have scored Booker with their pioneering works, and have been internationally acclaimed. The Novelists like Namita Gokhle and Shobha De are known to be outspoken for their approach; and many of the contemporary female novelists are today authentically and genuinely known for their bold views and frank expression.

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PUNE RESEARCH DISCOVERY

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED STUDIES

ISSN 2455-9202

VOL 2, ISSUE 2

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VOL 2, ISSUE 2

www.puneresearch.com/discovery

MAY to JULY 2017

(IMPACT FACTOR 2.01) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL