

TRACING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN ENGLISH WRITING: AN INSIGHT INTO ORIGIN, PROGRESS AND REPRESENTATION OF INDIANNESS

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Abstract

The Indian English Literature is a contest over the nature, identity and ultimately the destiny of modern India. It needs to be mentioned that there has been a movement to take Indian Writing across the globe. This natural phenomenon has caught the attention of foreign listeners and writers also. Fictional writings even representations of nature and characters in its best form by Indian writers like Toru Dutta, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, Kamala Das, DilipChitre, Amitabh Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, JhumpaLahiri, Anita Desai have taken Indian writing and writers to great heights. The Indian writings in English have finally been accepted as an important literary endeavour. The readership and production of numerous writings both in quality and quantity in vernacular languages in India is by far larger than the English counterpart. One has to assess the readership of Indian English writing which is at best nominal in India, the target thus, seem to be the widely English speaking western world. The paper traces this study, providing the outline research in origin, traveling through the development and representation of Indianness in language, now known as Indian English literature.

Key words: Indian Elements, Characteristics of Indian literature, Indianans in Indian writing, Presentation of Indianness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature that was written before 1947 is considered as Indian literature. Literature in Sanskrit which includes the sacred books -the Vedas, Upanishads and great epics are Indian literature. This is because of the importance assigned to the language 'Sanskrit' in ancient India. It was the lingua franca and high culture language as it was taught to the upper-class Brahmins (good and virtuous) who were said to be born out of the mouth of deity (Purusha) according to Rigveda. After 1947, Indian constitution was written according to which 22 languages are officially recognized. So Indian Literature was limited to pre-republic India.

Based on the ancient history of India dominated by Brahmins, the upper educated ruling priestly class, Religion (Spirituality) was the primary concern. Attaining heaven (Mukti) and Reincarnation are the two main focus of Hinduism. Charity (Dana) is the concept that is emphasized in Vedas to attain heaven according to the doctrine of Karma. 'Deeds of the past determine the state of the present' is the concept of reincarnation. If noble deeds are done in the past, noble birth in the present is assured. Ramayana is the story of Ram, the reincarnation of Lord Vishnu. The 1950s and 1960s saw poets like Dom Moraes, P Lal, P Nandy, A K Ramanujan, K.N.Daruwalla, Kamala Das to name a few, each having a style and craftsmanship of his or her own. English has become a global means of communication. With the advent of Post-Colonial situation in literature, the Indian English has got its own status as a distinct speech form. Some Indian English writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, DilipChitre, ArunKulatkar, Amrita Pritam, Taru Dutta, Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Das, JayantaMahapatra, Arundhoti Roy, JhumpaLahiri etc. have introduced Indian English to the West. Such writers have contributed much to the making of Indian English by using words of Indian Regional languages. Thus they have given a new dimension to the making of the Indian English. Indian elements in Indian English literature have drawn the attention of serious readers as well as critics. Some of the oldest human languages like Tamil, Pali, Prakrit, and Sanskrit are rooted in the present day Indian languages. It is natural that words from these ancient terms have contributed to English, we speak today. Many Indian origin words have contributed in the making of the Indian English Literature and they are greeted and accepted with a great enthusiasm by us.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To show the Indianness in the making of Indian creative writing in English.
2. To emphasise the points that Indian English literature is substantially Indian.

3. METHODOLOGY

The method of this paper is analytical and descriptive.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 The Origin of writing in India

There are three observable characteristics of Indian Literature of the origin:

1. Indian literature is based on piety, a deeply religious spirit.
 - The oldest know literature in India is the Vedas. According to Hindu tradition, the Vedas are apauruṣeya “not of human agency”, are supposed to have been directly revealed, and thus are called śruti (“what is heard”). This contains hymns and prayers for gods.
 - Indians believe that a knowledge of gods and a strong belief in Hinduism is necessary to save mankind.
2. Indian literary masterpieces are written in epic form, corresponds to the great epochs in the history of India.
 - The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the most important epics of India; the latter is the longest epic in the world.
3. Medieval Indian literature the earliest works in many of the languages were sectarian, designed to advance or to celebrate some unorthodox regional belief. Examples are the Caryapadas in Bengali, Tantric verses of the 12th century, and the Lilacaritra (circa 1280), in Marathi.

4.2 An Insight into Origin and Progress

Indian writing in English is primarily a result of the English colonial rule in India spanning almost two centuries. There is an undeniable relation between the literary work and the historical background out of which it arises. In spite of the western imperialism and colonialism the Indian culture has grown incredibly over the past two hundred years. It is a well-known fact that the Englishmen came to India on the pretext of trade and immediately realized that a stable political control would substantially increase their profits. The Industrial Revolution in England could only sustain itself through the capital made in the Indian territories in the form of revenue collection. They then commenced to annex different territories in and around India and set up a colonial empire. The British rule completely ruined the agricultural self-sufficiency of the farmers and the trade of silk cloth saw a downslide due to the English factory produced cloth more easily and cheaply available. The weavers and artisans lost their job and had to sustain themselves by working in cotton plantations. The old existing order underwent a complete and systematic destruction and overhaul bringing misery, poverty and death to millions of Indians.

After a few years of colonial rule and consolidation, the English empire got embroiled in a hotly debated and discussed issue of introduction of the English language in educational institutes. In a watershed decision English was introduced in the Indian education system, and was understood to be a different epistemological template in which not only the language but lifestyle and culture was imposed. As it is apparent with scorn and despise towards Indian languages, the sole purpose regarding English was to strengthen their rule and brainwash the colonized; and not to empower or produce scholars. Moreover, the colonizers only had contempt and disdain for the established languages, knowledge, beliefs, religion and educational institutes, labelling them as being irrational, pagan, barbaric, unscientific and immoral. With the introduction of the English language the missionaries got a better hold on the country and political the empire established the notions that it is a benevolent authority and has now taken the responsibility of bringing light in the form of knowledge to the ignorant population. As a result of English education a few writers and poets converted to Christianity and imitated a style of writing prose and poetry like the English Romantics and classics.

The colonizers were initially largely successful in creating 'a class' of interpreters between them and the masses. Education as a tool in the hands of the English proved to a great ideological weapon to legitimize their authority in the colonies. Evidently a hierarchy is created in which the western education model encompasses wisdom and knowledge as against the colonized people who are imbeciles. The education introduced was naturally lopsided and it not only valorised English traditions and way of life, it also provided the newly urban English educated a very limited and constricted space for liberal thought. The Indians began to believe that the colonizers had a moral responsibility to fulfil as the country was depicted to be infected by depravity, bestiality and religious bigotry. The evangelists propagated Christianity in schools indirectly by teaching biblical scriptures rather than English grammar. These pioneering works of poetry, fiction, drama, travel, and belles-lettres are little read today except by specialists, but when they were published they were, by the mere fact of being in English, audacious acts of mimicry and self-assertion. More than this, the themes they touched on and

the kinds of social issues they engaged with would only be explored by other Indian literatures several decades later.

4.3 Phases and effects: Transformation of language

The first phase of Indian English literature roughly comprises the half century before the Great Revolt of 1857. This was a period when English education and Western ideas had begun to act as a great liberating force in a country which had been suffering from political instability for about a century.

The entry of Indian English writing in the English canon is often debated as some of the critics are of the opinion that this genre got an acceptance only in the late 1950's when the Indian writers decided to establish it as a discipline, while others regard the works initially written by Indians in the English language as the real formation of this literary genre. The first novel by an Indian in English Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Rajmohan's Wife appeared quite late in 1864 and is his only novel in English, the rest fourteen successful novels he wrote in Bengali. KylasChunderDutt's A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945 (1835) preceding Bankim's novel is about an imaginary armed uprising against the British but cannot be classified as the first novel as it came out in a journal.

Thus, 'the 'language of command' is stood on its head and turned into the language of subversion, suggests itself as the imaginative beginnings of a nation.' The revolt of 1857 was a turning point and India became an empire under the British rule, represented by the viceroy. The revolt saw a unification of the warring Indian states against a common enemy. The heroism, valour and courage demonstrated by Indians inspired a lot of folk songs, poems and literature detailing the battle and brutality with which it was suppressed. The possibility of toppling the British rule looked viable but it took a century for Indians to attain independence. The British formulated numerous rules and regulations to stipulate the authority of Indian princely states and other autonomous bodies and gained complete control over India. Censorship of literature increased many folds as the colonizers strictly monitored any writing that was seditious to the British policies, government or laws. Political themes were now discussed through literature in the guise of historical novels or romances which glorified the past rulers.

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 and this phase is dubbed as the 'renaissance' of Indian writing in English. The tradition of novel writing in India is an imitation of a western phenomenon and thus different from most of the earlier writings that engaged in a quest of metaphysical and transcendental knowledge, where the present world is depicted and painted to be a mere appearance. Another luminary figure is that of Tagore who wrote an expansive body of prose fiction, poetry, and songs. His creative ingenuity is unparalleled in either Bengali or English. Besides, the danger of considering English Indian writing as national literature especially in western universities is manifold, primarily because it is written by a minority that is upwardly mobile. Text written in English language should not be the only source of highlighting Indian culture and way of life; this would marginalize the importance of the texts produced in regional languages that have their own values and narratives.

The accommodation of Indian writing in English in the English canon is a momentous achievement because it provides autonomy to this genre as it is not merged with Commonwealth writing or is merely labelled as an imitation. The polemics of criticism in earlier days refused to accept it as an area of academic scrutiny as it did not proliferate to the degree it has now. Indian writing in English belongs to a particular class of people who are of Indian origin and have learnt the language well to be writers of that language, and those who are able to read the English language and are to an extent more proficient and comfortable in English than in their mother tongues. These conditioning does not makes them less of a writer rather they are experts in explicating the thoughts and lives of Indian characters living in India but not speaking, thinking or living an English life. It requires great talent, insight and exceptional grasp of bilingualism to express in English the lives of people who do not speak that language.

Patriotism, freedom struggles, exploitation of the factory workers and the relationship between the colonizer and the condition of the colonized formed the corpus of Indian writing in English. Gandhiji inspired and influenced the writers and poets immensely and this fact is clear in the way activism and courage was liberated from aggressiveness and violence. The tumultuous political situation of the nineteen thirties due to the civil disobedience movement under the leadership of freedom fighters created a readership that wished to explore and get information about their country's rapacious plunder and the miserable, starving plight of its citizens. The prevailing nationalistic fervour and political situation witnessed a portrayal in the literature produced at that time. Some writers advocated the Gandhian method of non-violence to attain freedom while the others wanted independence through any means whether it involved violence or not remained immaterial to them. The partition of the subcontinent had a prolonged disturbing and traumatic effect on the psyche of millions of Indians and became one of the most discussed, debated and analysed theme in numerous novels. After independence, the era of hope and certitude got side-lined by an age of self-scrutiny, scepticism and an attempt to deal with the one's sense of identity exposed to divergent cultures, Indian and Western. Post-independence

fiction reflected an anxious reality "On one hand freedom had been won; ostensibly the exploiter had been expelled and the forces of evil were no longer in the land. But on the other hand, writers and intellectuals generally felt that the only change effected by independence was the change in the colour of the exploiters' skin." Political satire and a growing disillusionment with the current state of affairs were highlighted in numerous novels by writers of different vernacular. Moreover, the theme of partition and the consecutive wars with China and Pakistan created a sense of despair in the literary arena and greatly affected the works of writers.

Caste and communalism have become major issues in Indian English writing. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* is read as a remarkable and revolutionary novel by both critics and readers, and in this novel he illustrates the pitfalls of a parasitic casteist Hindu society. The concept of 'marginalization' is a common leitmotif in the novels depicting lower caste people and women. Meenakshi Mukherjee says that "A huge social divide exists between those who have proficiency in English and those who do not. Along with 'marginality' a sense of alienation is an underlining concern in numerous novels. Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) focuses on the female sensibility at odds with the male dominated society. Her later novels like *Fire on the Mountain* (1977) describe the isolation and alienation of man from family and society. Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August* dissects and beautifully expresses the estrangement felt by the characters in the novels.

Highlighting the transformation in the Indian writing in English, Desai exults the unconventional use of English language and the playfulness with which Desai wrote *All About H. Hatter* (1948) explicating a hilarious encounter of west with the east. His novel is difficult to grasp and fit into a simple interpretation, it only mystifies as it grapples with half- comic and half- tragic autobiography of the hero's search for a viable philosophy of life. The most defining moment, however, was the publication of Rushdie's masterpiece which gave the Indian English writing a new lease of life and a revival that can be assessed by the remarkable rise in the number of novelists. Desai says:

The picture changed abruptly, dramatically, in 1981, when a book called *Midnight's Children* appeared on the scene like a thunderbolt and the author was sent to India on that until then unknown exercise, a book - tour. It was the combination of a book that proved that Indian English was a language in itself, capable of presenting serious important ideas with.

Indian writers writing in English sometimes get undue publicity as media glorifies even their weakest attempts while a lot of good regional literature finds no takers. All these factors along with the global and economic power of the English language has made the survival and flourishing of regional language literature a bit difficult.

One can argue that the earlier writers of English did write to a Christian western world, explaining almost apologetically India's pluralism and trying to fit in the constraints demanded by English literature and are accused of "exoticising" India to the foreign readers. The readership issue of Indian English literature has assumed dimensions more varied than just simple publishing politics. Even now the debate continues and those who choose to write in English argue that English is also an Indian language and they know this language the best. They are accused by those writing in vernacular of not being in touch with the masses and aiming only for self-aggrandizement. Interestingly, a new generation of writers has slowly emerged that does not feel the need to provide a glossary for Indian vernacular terms or the Indian way of life. Desai reiterates the fact that "a new generation of Indian writes, addressing Indian subjects and items in a language taken from Indian streets newspapers, journals, and films, and a class of enterprising business who decided they were worth publishing - marked the '80s and '90s."

5..CONCLUSION

Thus we have Raja Rao in his foreword to the novel *Kanthapura* debating:

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. The readership and production of numerous writings both in quality and quantity in vernacular languages in India is by far larger than the English counterpart. One has to assess the readership of Indian English writing which is at best nominal in India, the target thus, seem to be the widely English speaking western world.

Given the fact that English today is the language not only of upward social mobility and outward geographical mobility, but also a major tool for accessing knowledge at the higher level." One cannot remain blind to the major characteristic feature of Indian English literature, both linguistic and cultural, that its influence extends beyond the limits of any elitist paradigm. Thus we have seen that the shaping factors of Indian English literature are Indian Folk literature, myths, legends etc. The handling of these elements has given a new dimension to Indianness. Indian words, names, articles are vitally present in Indian creative writings in English. The above discussion leads us to the conclusion that Indian elements have shaped English distinctly.

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