

Review

Cultural Pluralism in Indian English Novel: A Critical Study

¹Dr. Sushil Kumar and ²Mr. Gopal Chandra Paul

¹Associate Professor, P.G Deptt. Of English and Research Centre Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya, India.

²Ph.D Research Scholar P G Dept. of English & Research Centre Magadh University, Bodh-Gaya, India.

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Man and culture are the two different sides of a same coin and they both embody each other. Man, may be native or modern, they have their own culture. Cultural differences between people may include their language, beliefs, traditions and arts. India is a land of cultural diversity. The cultural diversity, nourished since ancient time, helps to develop multi-cultural phenomenon in India. This multi-cultural phenomenon has enriched Indian English Novel. Like social, political, economic and gender issues, cultural pluralism is an important aspect in Indian English Novel. The conflict between traditional social system and modernity, and the conflict between The East and The West provide the Indian English Novelists huge clay to give the shape of world class novels. Moreover globalization has given birth of the hybrid culture here. Almost all the Indian English Novelists-R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Vikram Seth, Arun Joshi, Amitavo Ghosh, Khushwant Sing, Salman Russhadie and all other male have successfully dealt with various topics in their novels. Woman Novelists- Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Shashi Despande, Nyantara Sehgal, Attia Hossain, Kamala Markandaya have expressed not only feminine sensibility but also man, manner and culture. They are conscious about the cultural rich heritage of India. Whenever they highlight the life of Indian people in their novels, they either consciously or unconsciously mention Indian culture. Because they all are partakers of the powerful Indian Culture and ethics. The colour and beauty of Indian People help Indian English Novel to reach a new high in literature. The main purpose of the work is to examine that this is how cultural pluralism in Indian novels unveils the symbolism behind the simple legend and a symbol: a legend about something that has taken place in the history of men and women, and a symbol of what is going on and of what is going to be. I do not simply define the concept but also submerge in it and discuss how cultural pluralism in Indian novels has deeply rooted.

Keywords: Cultural diversity, Multi-cultural phenomenon, Hybrid culture, Culture and Ethics, Globalization

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INTRODUCTION

The story of the Indian English Novel is really a story of a changing India. There was a time when education was a rare opportunity, learning English was like daydream and speaking English was unnecessary. The stories were already there in myths, in the folklore and the umpteen languages and cultures that gossiped, conversed, laughed and cried all over the Indian subcontinent. India has always been a land of stories, the demarcation between ritual and reality being very narrow. From the ancient time a lot of literary elements are available here. These literary elements help the novelists to represent India in the world through their writings. They record all the aspect of life of the people in India.

The Indian English Novel erupted in the fiery talks of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, revolutionary writing of Raja Rammohon Roy, the spiritual prose of R.N. Tagore, the patriotic and philosophical writings of Sri Aurobindo and the pacifist dictums preached by M.K. Gandhi. With the coming of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan, the Indian English Novel had begun its journey. In "Coolie" & "Untouchable", by Mulk Raj Anand, casteism & the social disparity in India is laid bare. In R.K.Narayan's imagery village malgudi, the invisible men and women of our teeming population come to life and act our life with all its perversities and whimsicalities. In "Kanthapura" by Raja Rao, Gandhism awakes in a sleepy village down south India. India no longer needed to be depicted by outsiders. The perspectives from within ensured more clarity and served a social documentative purpose as well. India is a cultural pluralist society. The notion of cultural difference and cultural diversity become the important aspect of the Indian English Novel. The vastness of Indian culture leads the Indian English Novel to point out cultural pluralism. The impact of modernism and globalization arrest the need for a broad cultural consciousness. Every small section of a large society that maintains its own cultural identity, value and practice is accepted by the wider culture.

METHODOLOGY

This work is mainly based on secondary source of information, such as published documents, books, literary reviews, autobiography, journals, critiques etc. This study investigates the impact of cultural pluralism in Indian English Novel. Cultural Pluralism is a term applied when a small group within a large society maintains their unique cultural identities and their values and practices are accepted by the wider culture provided their

consistence with large and values of the wider society. These small groups within a large society practice their own cultural. The concept of cultural pluralism was first emerged in the 1910s in the United States and became widely popular in the 1940s. Cultural pluralism is deeply rooted in Indian society. As literature reflects the man and manner of the society, Indian English Novel is not out of it. Like all others issues, Indian English Novel highlights one of the important issue Cultural pluralism.

The early novels in India were not just patriotic depictions of Indianness. There were the cynics. Niradh C. Chaudhuri viewed India without the crown skeptically. He discarded the fiery patriotism and spiritualism that were 'Brand India' and mourned the absence of colonial rule. As India grew out of her obsession with freedom and viewed her own streak of imperialism during the Emergency, the Indian idiom began to change. Now with the Indian Diaspora begin a reckoning force in the publishing World. Indian English Speaks a global tongue, unconfined to any particular culture or heritage – the language of the displaced intellectual.

This brings us to a problem with contemporary Indian English writing. When you ponder on the subject very few Indian writers in India have made it with their English Writing. They inevitably have the odd degree from Oxford and Cambridge and their foundations are laid abroad. It seems to be a prerequisite to have a global perspective if one is to be successful in writing in English. The real need in India is more publishing houses that are willing to give aspiring writers in India a chance. Writers in India need more avenues to make themselves heard and as readers the Indian audience should not get too mesmerized by foreign publications.

The Indian Diaspora raised the curtain on the fantastic mythical realities that were part of domestic conversations in the villages. Salman Rushdie fascinates critics with his 'chutni9fication' of history and language as well. He opened the doors to a plethora of writers. Amitavo Ghosh dabbles in postcolonial realities and Vikramseth fuses poetry and prose with an air of Victorian grandeur. While Rohinton Mistry tries to decipher the Parsi World, Pico Iyer effortlessly walks the map in his writings.

The women writers explore old wives' tales, condemn exploitation and try to make sense of the fast changing pace of the new world. Kamala Das explores women's plight in India and the world and others like Shashi Deshpande paints characters who blame their own complacency for their sorry condition. Attia Hosain presents fighting against the backdrop of the feudalism

and the tempestuous partition of the Indian Sub-Continental. Arundhati Roy begins her story without a beginning and does not really end it while Jhumpa Lahiri's well-crafted tales move at a perfect pace.

Indian English began with the bang when R.N. Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and by the time V. S. Naipal bagged the same. The Indian English novel had a far flung reach. Now Indian English novels are sparking off debates about huge advances, plagiarism and film rights. 'Hinglish' masala and a dose of spiritualism realism are only the tip of the iceberg. The Indian audience and the rest of the world have a lot to look forward to when they get an Indian English novel in their hands.

The 'deep association' that Rabindranath Tagore welcomed between India and the west as far back as 1916 has by today gone far beyond anything the imperial encounter could have anticipated. What puts such a psychological distance between 'East is East, etc.' and East, West is of course, historical time. The presence of the British Raj in India as described in Rudyard Kipling's "Kim", plain tales from hills, Wee Willie Winkie etc. and even E.M. Foster's "A Passage to India" brought into being a literary terrain called Anglo-Indian. The point of view from that place was implicitly that of the colonial expatriate. In that world it was not pukka to mix overtly with the locals.

In the world routinely described in terms of the prefix 'post' (as in Post-modern, post-colonial etc.) cultures are seen in the images of pyramids and cities as melting pots full of sociological chop suey. Given those new circumstances the very title of Salman Rushdie's East, West (published last year) catches the mongrel spirit of our times definitively; with the matter-of-factness of the Rudyard Kipling's line, 'East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet.' Which, in another era, indicated the exact opposite.

Since India independence in 1947 and the migrations from the subcontinent into Britain which followed, new possibilities-socially, culturally, artistically-had to emerge. For reasons such as these English literatures was becoming a literature in English. When Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" won the Booker Prize in Britain in 1982 this seemed confirmed, at least in the eyes of a certain reading public. As a former advertising copywriter and even keen to (re-) coin a phrase, Rushdie heralded the discovery of a new fictional land: Indo-Anglia. In an influential article in The Times that year he continued to clearing the ground, escalating the tone with playful effrontery. English, no longer an English language, now grows from many roots; and those whom it once colonized are carving out large territories for themselves. The Empire is striking back.

The battle over English is not new, and neither is the struggle to belong within the canon of English studies. The growth of literary criticism this century can be seen

as a kind of postal sorting of great from good writing. F. R. Leavis' "The Great Tradition" which appeared in 1948, among other things helped to fasten Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James and Joseph Conrad onto an English readers' royal family tree. The first stirring of activity in Indo-Anglia began, curiously enough, at around this time.

V.S. Naipaul, of Indian extraction but from Trinidad, arrived in Britain in 1950. Eight years later he claimed despondently that the Americans didn't want him because he was too British, and that the British public didn't want him because he was too foreign. 'It is an odd situation,' he wrote, 'an Indian writer writing in English for an English audience about non-English characters who talk their own sort of English.'

What established Naipaul into what might be considered today a pantheon of world writers was the publication in 1961 of his novel, "A House for Mr. Biswas". The central tension of a man caught between his desire for independence and the irresistible pull of the Hindu family structure- all within a post-colonial Trinidad setting was unique in its local flavor; yet, like much great literature, universal in its portents.

Critics rushed to make hay out of Mr. Biswas and appointed him a plethora of literary forbears; comparisons with characters out of Dickens, Dostoyevsky and even Beckett abounded. The forgoing of possible links between texts is for readers and scholars alike always interesting. All the more if they are from culturally if not linguistically different sources.

And yet, the text that reverberates most influential at the heart of "A House for Mr. Biswas" is not from the western tradition. It is, instead, the Ramayana, one of the two sacred Hindu texts, the Mahabharat being the other. According to R.K. Narayan, all imaginative writings in India have its origins in these books.

What was remarkable about Naipaul's novel at the time was its portrayal of an aspect of Indian life enacted outside India. It is one of the first modern novels to observe the conundrums of the post-colonial condition in the novel form. Central to this is an underlying tension between inescapable past and unyielding present, with the individual caught inexorably in the middle.

Mr. Biswas is by turns heroic and pathetic in trying to resist his inlaws who live at the heavily symbolic Hanuman House. The Ramayana in which the the monkey Hanuman is a major character-rescues and ruins him. During a re-enactment of King Lear's heath scene Mr Biswas begins to chant with sudden piety, Rama-Rama, Sita- Rama, Rama and Sita being the hero and heroine of the Ramayana.

The ritual chanting of this mantra, as recommended by the ancient texts itself, serves him and damns him too. Such a state of contradiction is a quintessential Indo-Anglian limbo. One which was to inform Naipaul's work to such a point that by the 1970s the novelist and the travel

writer, Paul Theroux, was commenting that '[he] is the first in his line, without a tradition or home.'

The most fervent political mantra on Indian lips this century was without question Quit India. As the events of 1947 (when independence was gained) and 1948 (when the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, finally left) reflected, words themselves (not only chanted but also inscribed on every wall of every city, town and village) seemed to move the hand of fateful action. But in spite of India and Britain's 'unholy wedlock, deadlock and divorce', as Narayan has put it, the deep association has grown.

Even a somber and domestic drama such as Anita Desai's "Clear Light of Day," published in 1980, cannot shake off the anxiety of influence. Intertextuality, or the way outside works echo in the reading of another, is very active beneath the calm surface. From the works of Eliot, Tennyson, Lawrence and Swinburne to the Urdu poet, Md. Iqbal, there are epigraphs, allusions and quotations. And yet, Desai's story is but a quiet family reminiscence of the summer of 1947 in India. At fictions alter two histories and two literatures, Indian and English, become conjugated once more.

Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children", published in 1981, has become a central text in many genres, including magical realism and what is known as Commonwealth Literature. Like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Gunther Grass' *The Tin Drum*, it is a novel that seems to speak for an entire continent. As in *Clear Light of Day*, the subject of "Midnight's Children" is 1947. The style of observation, however, could not be more different. For a definitive account of the intertextual influences on the writing of that novel the clearest commentator is the writer himself. His collection of essays entitled "Imaginary Homelands", published in 1991, is a superb reader's companion not only this book but to the Indo-Anglian disposition in general.

Salman Rushdie's assertion that a book is 'a kind of passport' is a poignant one. He has sent most of this decade in hiding because of the late Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa issued against him for his novel "The Satanic Verses," published in 1988, which accused him of blasphemy against Islam. Artistically, at least, he remains a free spirit. He admits to roaming from Ted Hughes's *Crow* poems to Sergei Eisenstein's *The Film Sense* to Eugene Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, and perhaps more crucially to Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* for inspiration.

It is worth nothing that these names are drawn not only from various countries but also from various genres of art. With the actual diaspora of peoples has come a timeless and boundary-less meeting of minds and fusion of ideas. Indeed, at one point in "Midnight's Children" the narrator, Saleem, complains helplessly about the 'polyglot frenzy in my head.'

By 1991 the borders of Indo-Anglia had been extended

irrevocably into the cultural mainstream. So, much so that Time Magazine could run a major feature entitled 'Rushdie's Children.' Rushdie himself, having claimed ten years earlier, 'I think we are in a position to conquer English Literature,' was now being perceived as a patriarch of the house of fiction. By the time "Midnight's Children" was named 'Booker of Bookers' in 1993 Leavis's great English tradition had become, if popular prizes are any measure to go by, a multi-colored and multifarious spectrum. In the days of empire, when a sahib's tour of service on the sub-continent was complete, retirement back to England (read: civilization) was de rigueur. To stay on was a rare thing and strongly disapproved of. Going 'jungli' or native and adopting local custom was an unforgivable act in the imperial code of practice.

The irony, of course, is that one of the standards of English civilization, the English novel, has itself gone 'jungli'. It has become complicated with the new inflections of hitherto 'strange' voices. For Indo-Anglian writers since Rushdie's breakthrough, one of the prevalent concerns has been in locating a strong conception of selfhood in the post-modern pell-mell. Hybrid cultures can seem to fall between two schools. Thus, forgoing a genuine sense of identity at the twain of granite-like myth and knee-jerk stereotyping has been in no small way the Asian man's burden.

By the late 1970s Britain the most significant cultural encounter was between black and white, particularly in popular music. The idea of a 'two-tone' youth culture had a supposed universal appeal and yet the Asian element did not seem to play an active part in it. The British born, Hanif Kureishi, has observed this chasm well in his script for the 1986 film "My Beautiful Launderette", and his novel "The Buddha of Suburbia", published in 1990.

The central dilemma that effects his protagonists is whether to 'act coloured' and remain near to stereotype, or escape this by 'bleaching' one's roots. There is a constant play-off between the authentic and the phoney. Karim, the central character in "The Buddha of Suburbia" is admittedly, 'an Englishman born and bred, almost... having emerged from two old histories.' His identity crisis reaches tragic-comical heights when he agrees to play Mowgli in a stage production of Kipling's "The Jungle Book", or as he puts it, "The Jungle Bunny Book".

In response to the cheeky view that Britain's national dish is the chicken curry, comes from Farrukh Dhondy's novel "Bombay Duck", also published in 1990. It takes off on the ideas and idiosyncrasies of takes away culture. That Bombay Duck, a favorite side-dish on the curry house menu is nothing like poultry and is, in fact, an odorous dried fish is just one hint that Bombay Duck is about things not beings what they at first seem.

Stepping beyond the imaginary India of 1947, Dhondy skillfully takes swatches out of and swipes at modern day Britain, at the accents and attitudes, the races and

relations. His satirical touch is a deft one. The social foibles and hypocrisies of Anglified Indians and Indianized Britons are engagingly critiqued without being morally judged. It provides a timely antidote to the kind of political correctness that reaches for its gun whenever race or sex is alluded to in anything but a positive way.

Bomby Duck is an insightful sign of the times in Indo-Anglian. It does not seek to answer its own questions; one of which is posed when a British stage version of the Ramayana is put on in India and it receives a hostile, even murderous reception. When an authentically 'Indian' version of it arrives in Britain, however, it is forced to shut down due to widespread lack of interest.

Between the extremes of an emotionally charged tradition and the prospect of an apathetic, mixed up here and now; that is still the limbo, even into the 1990s, in which the fantasy world of Indo-Anglian must continue to discover itself. Foster's famous farewell at the end of "A Passage to India", when nature itself speaks to defer a real meeting between Indian and Englishman-'No, not yet', and the sky said, 'No, not there' here never sounded so distant.

CONCLUSION

Cultural pluralism supports to survive small group of cultures within a dominant culture. The cultural knowledge is an important resource in the Indian English Novel. Indian English novelists wisely nourish and harbor cultural values and practice them in their writings. They value and practice Indian culture, and compare it with the laws and values of the wider society. They use their knowledge and skills to interpret and reflect on literature. Their active interest in Indian culture and ethics lead them in the recognized field of literary study. They

practice them varying degrees by a group or an individual. They use global form of expression in order to represent Indian culture in the English speaking world. Indian English novels embody Indian culture and values, and tell us how cultural diversity leads cultural plurality. Indian English novelists voice this cultural pluralism like uncountable 'stars'.

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