

**Bilingual journal
of Humanities &
Social Sciences**

Half Yearly

**Vol. 2, Issue 1 & 2,
(Joint Issue)
15 Jan-15 July, 2011**

**A
Chronological
Study of
Indian English
Fiction with
Social
Perspective**

**Abnish Singh
Department of
English, COE,
Teerthanker
Mahaveer University,
Moradabad**

www.shodh.net

A Chronological Study of Indian English Fiction with Social Perspective

Abnish Singh

Indian fiction written in English has been impressive and has attracted attention widely. With the passage of time, it has witnessed a rapid change, from being deeply affected by the Raj to being Vernacular. It is, therefore, very important to know and realize such changes taken place in every field of Indian life and society and for that a brief history of Indian English Fiction might be one of the best media of its expression. These changes from socialism to individualism, from sharing to winning and from spiritualism to materialism reveal, a various, reflections of change from tradition to modernity in Indian society. Though this is a natural process as history changes with the passage of time and it is noticed that people are continuously losing their inner happiness and self-control inspite of having material comforts. And, therefore, it reveals an amazing range of subject matter with social perspective.

Fiction, which is an expression of the most intimate consciousness of life and society, form an impressive aspect of literature. Since as a creative process, fiction is an expression of the most powerful and intimate consciousness of life and society- the society in which it grows and develops, It has some purposes to fulfill them, some thoughts to be contemplated and some plans to be acted upon for the welfare of humanity. When it broods upon such different things, it witnesses changes taking place in life and society, and, therefore, these changes are reflected in the fictional world. Indian English fiction, is also doing the same thing and expressing thoughts, feelings and emotions in a rationale and interesting manner, and directly or indirectly throws light upon different changes in its own way. Hence, the reflection of change in different fields of Indian society manifests the significance and utility of the Indian creative writing in English. P.P.Mehta and P.N. Bhatt, both are of same opinion that, "A work of art changes in course of time. Its structure is dynamic. This process has never been interrupted and the task of the historian is to describe this process."¹

The Indian English fiction from its very beginning has witnessed socio-cultural, economic and political changes in the destiny of our nation. It was the time when the destiny of India was under the eclipse of the British rule and many Indians were trying to come out from that dark shadow. In lieu of this the writers made their first great protest known as Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, but were bodily crushed down by the British Government to barricade the Indians from the future revolts. After that, the British Queen made the Proclamation (1858) to strengthen her policy and the Indians were divided once again on the ground of religion, caste, color, race and society, and were denied even fundamental rights and liberties.

But, this was not the end of the British oppression. These were the initial steps to the journey of troubles. The Indians were tortured with shocks of the partition of Bengal, the Hindu-Muslim divide and the ruthless suppression of patriotic feelings by the colonial rule. So to condemn the cruel and discriminatory attitude of the British Government and in order to actively register their protest and discontent voicing for political reforms, many Indians formed various political organizations like the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League, the Forward Block, the Home Rule Leagues, etc. and, in this way, played pivotal role in the struggle for the attainment of Independence. The Colonial Government sensed the trouble and promised a responsible government after the tensions of the First World War subsided. Being in pressure and facing many problems, this promise could be fulfilled only after the second world war.

During the freedom struggle, many results came in. Amongst the most important outcomes were the emergence of socio-cultural consciousness and the growth of the spirit of nationalism in India, so strong that it led inevitably to the freedom of the country. Moreover, from that time onwards the English educated Indians drank deeply at the wellsprings of the British liberal thoughts flourishing in England, and they were encouraged by the growth of an active and independent press both in English and vernacular.

In the meantime, a number of European and Indian scholars began to study the ancient India's philosophy, science, religion, culture and literature. This growing knowledge of India's past gave the Indian people a sense of pride in their culture and

Bilingual journal of Humanities & Social Sciences

Half Yearly

Vol. 2, Issue 1 & 2,
(Joint Issue)
15 Jan-15 July, 2011

A Chronological Study of Indian English Fiction with Social Perspective

Abnish Singh
Department of
English, COE,
Teerthanker
Mahaveer University,
Moradabad

www.shodh.net

civilization. It also helped the reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharishi Devendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Dr Atmaran Pandurang, R.G. Bhandarkar, Mahadeva Govinda Ranade, Henry Vivian Derozio, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna Paramhans, Swami Vivekananda, Mrs Annie Besant, Shiv Dayal Khatri, Guru Shaligram Sahib, Satyananda Agnihotri, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghose, Maulvi Chirag Ali, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Rajnarain Bose, Naba Gopal Chatterjee, etc. in their works of religious and social reforms. For their struggle against social evils, economic backwardness of millions of Indians, feudalism, social disparities, the exploitation of women, loss of faith and values, illiteracy, sufferings, slavery, superstitions and inhuman practices and customs, the reformers used the authority of the ancient Indian texts. In doing so, most of them based themselves on reason rather than mere belief and faith. They made use of their knowledge of Western ideas as well as of the ancient learning. Such movements of reforms were part and parcel of the socio-cultural consciousness of the Indians that led them to win their freedom. Moreover, the socio-cultural consciousness and the growth of the feelings of nationalism and achievement of national Independence gave a great impetus to the growth and development of Indian English fiction.

"In truth, the story of the novel has no end and no beginning."² The generally accepted view is that the beginning of Indian English fiction is marked by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohun's Wife* (1864). The novel was serialized in *The Indian Field* in 1864. It reveals the long-sufferings of a typical Hindu wife, Mantangni and the degradation of moral and social values of Mathur Ghose, Rajmohun and Bikha. His other novels, which were translated from Bengali into English, are - *Kapalkundla* (1885) and *Durgesh Nandni* (1890). In these two novels, he imbibes patriotic feelings of Bengal and exposes the shams and hypocrisies of contemporary life and society, teaching the lessons of social and cultural values. The Bengali writers mainly dominated the period from 1864 to 1900. Widely known novelists of this period are - Raj Lakshmi Debi, Toru Dutt, Lal Behari Dey, K. Charkavarti, Kamala Saththianandhan, Behramji Malabari, N.V. Pai, R.K. Pant, T.C. Mookerjee, A.P. Dutta and others. Raj Lakshmi Debi's *The Hindu Wife* (1876), a novel important from the cultural viewpoint, sets examples of cultural change. While Toru Dutta's maiden romance *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden*, published posthumously in 1879, is an autobiographical novel that presents hedonic and artistic values. Lal Behari Dey's *Bengal Peasant Life or History of a Bengal Raiyat* (1880), the best Indian English novel written in latter half of the nineteenth century, is a realistic novel which exposes various manifestations of exploitation by and tyranny of landlord, sahuakar, priest, corrupt officials and foreign planters. Another novelist B. Malabari's *Gujrat and the Gujratis* (1882) contains local colour and vivid realistic picture of Gujrati life and society. While Nagesh Vishwanath Pai's *Stray Sketches in Chakmakpore from the Note-Book of an Idle Citizen* (1894) is remarkable for its thirty sketches of Bombay life. Kamala Saththianandhan is known for her renowned autobiographical novel, *Saguna : A Story of Native Christian Life* (1895), the first autobiographical novel in Indian English fiction. Depicting her own life till marriage and presenting social, moral and religious values. *Sarla and Hingana* (1898) by K Chakravarti, is a realistic story of Bengal village life. There are also some other novels like by R.K. Pant's *The Boy of Bengal* (1866), *The Scorpions or Eastern Thoughts* (1868) by Tara Chand Mookerjee, *The Indolence* (1878) by Anand Prasad Dutta, Bijoy Chand: *An Indian Tale* (1888) by M. Dutta, etc. which deserve mention. In this experimental stage, fiction-writing was newly developed industry in India. Therefore, the Western influence on it was visible clearly. Though most of the novelists of this period were influenced by their foreign masters and though their works are immature, they tried their best to treat contemporary issues, to present alternative patterns of values and to improve the condition of man and manners. Harish Raizada is also of the same view: As the appeal for improving the condition of Indian people and the relationship between India and England was to be made to the English rulers, many of the Indian writers chose to write in English, and as novel was a literary genre most suited to the proper representation of life and its problems, they took to fiction for expressing their views.³

While the first two decades of the twentieth century are noteworthy as they made their contribution to the growth and development of Indian English fiction in its seminal stage. It was an era of socio-cultural and national consciousness in which Indian English novelists also gave their limited contribution through their writings.

**Bilingual journal
of Humanities &
Social Sciences**

Half Yearly

**Vol. 2, Issue 1 & 2,
(Joint Issue)
15 Jan-15 July, 2011**

**A
Chronological
Study of
Indian English
Fiction with
Social
Perspective**

Abnish Singh
Department of
English, COE,
Teerthanker
Mahaveer University,
Moradabad

www.shodh.net

Ramesh Chandra Dutta, a renowned Bengali novelist, translated two of his six novels- Sansar and Madhvi Kankan into English under the titles- The Lake of Palms (1902) and The Slave Girl of Agra (1909) respectively. These novels aimed at the elimination of social evils and superstitions, desiring social reforms. Another novelist, Sir Joginder Singh's two historical novels- Nur Jahan (1909) and Nasrin (1915) and two romances- Kamla (1925) and Kamini (1931) expose wretched conditions of women and moral and spiritual degradation of Sultans, Nawabs, Zamindars, Rajahs, Taluquaders, priests, etc. Besides, other novels such as Love of Kusuma (1910) by Bal Krishna, 1001 Indian Nights (1905) and The Prince of Destiny (1909) by S.K. Ghose, Hindupore or A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest (1909) by S.M. Mitra, Padmini (1903) and The Dive for Death (1912) by T. Ramakrishna Pillai, Clarinda (1915) by A Madhaviah, Love and Life Behind the Purdah (1901) and Between the Twilights (1908) by Cornilia Sorabji, Bengal Decoits and Tigers (1916) by Maharani Sunity Devee, The Home and the World (1919) by Rabindra Nath Tagore the Wheel of Destiny (1920) by C. Parthsarthy, show an awareness of the local colour, regional life and some true values through their thoughts and actions. Socio-cultural and political changes, social evils like casteism, purdah system, Child marriage, poverty, exploitation, disparity, cultural-conflict, historical happenings, realism and romantic tales are common place in the novels of this period for national awakening. K. Venkata Reddy rightly says: Parallel to this struggle for political freedom was a social struggle-a fight against superstition, casteism, poverty, illiteracy and many other social evils that were eating into the vitals of Indians society. The socio-political movement that had caught the imagination of the entire nation also inspired the Indian novelists in English who rightly realized that novel too had a vital role to play in it.⁴

It is manderful to see that, the Indian English novelists, right from the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, started focusing their attention largely on contemporary problems. Motivated by socio-cultural and political awareness and changed historical situation, they began to conceive the values all around the state and presenting that life and society realistically in their fictional world. Naturally in the Pre-Independence era, novels like The Wreck (1921) and Gora (1923), Rabindra Nath Tagore's M.M. Banarji's Nanda, The Pariah Who Overcome Caste (1923), D.G. Mukharjee's Hari, The Jungle Lad (1924) and My Brother's Face (1925), K.S. Venktramani's Murugan, The Tiller (1927) and Kandan: The Patriot (1932), Mulkraj Anand's Untouchable (1935) and Coolie (1936), R.K. Narayan's Swami and Friends (1935), The Bechelor of Arts (1937), Krishnaswami Nagrajan's Athawar House (1937), Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938), Ahmad Ali's Twilight in Delhi (1940), Humanyun Kabir's Men and Rivers (1945), Khawaja Ahmad Abbas's Tomorrow Is Ours (1943) and Defeat For Death (1944), D.F. Karaka's Just Flesh (1940) and There Lay The City (1942) and other works gave firm footing to the Indian fiction in English and still have sparkles of alternative patterns of values, focusing on social concerns, stark realism, humanism, regional color, orthodox, liberal, progressive and Gandhian thoughts and rapidly changing historical and political situations. In this regard, Satish Kumar in his work A Survey of Indian English Novel says: During this era the toddling Indian English Novel, Inspite of many hindrances and handicaps, has learnt to stand firmly on its legs. A conscious and artistic pattern has evolved itself. The novel has become a great literary force, a powerful medium for creating social and national awareness and for suggesting ways of changing society.⁵

The Indian fiction in English attains maturity, full flowering and wide acclaim in the Post-Independence era. With the attainment of Independent, the novels experience a change in their themes and therfor it "at once gains a new capacity to absorb many of the critical issues that have plagued it so far."⁶ So, in the novels the focus is shifted from the public to the private sphere. The inner dilemma- anxiety, alienation, frustration, detachment, involvement, self-condemnation, self approval, restlessness, sense of guilt, loneliness and nausea, became the major issues for the themes of the novels of this age. Along with these issues, the novels comprised of some other themes related to current happenings at that time likes, cross-cultural conflict, realism and fantasy, rural events, the traumatic experiences in the form of partition of India and Pakistan, Indo-China, and Indo-Pak wars, communal carnages, loss of faith and values, curse of industrialization and materialism, growing hostility among men, the growth of Indian ethos and sensibility, etc. are seen in the novels of the Post-Independent fictionists like G.V. Desani, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan,

**Bilingual journal
of Humanities &
Social Sciences**

Half Yearly

**Vol. 2, Issue 1 & 2,
(Joint Issue)
15 Jan-15 July, 2011**

**A
Chronological
Study of
Indian English
Fiction with
Social
Perspective**

**Abnish Singh
Department of
English, COE,
Teerthanker
Mahaveer University,
Moradabad**

www.shodh.net

Nirad C. Chaudhari, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar, S.N. Ghose, B. Rajan, Kamala Markandeya and others. By the end of the Sixties and in the early Seventies the similar themes were seen in the novels of Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal, Jatin Mohan Ganguli, P.M. Nityananda, B.K. Karanjia, Timeri Murari, R.P. Jhabvala, Attia Hussain, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Nargis Dalal, Vimala Raina, Veena Paintal, Bharti Mukherjee and Anita Kumar. Thinking about the responsibility, function and contribution of the novelists of the Post-Independence era, Satish Kumar writes:

The novelist minutely analyses the significant and far-reaching changes in individual passing through period of over all transition. His observant and penetrating eye watches the evolution of new values and new morality.... The creative artist alone is interested in these basic changes. Hence in these novels the basic changes in the individuality of man and the evolution of new values and new morality is integral to the theme, action and characterization. All the novelists...have sincerely and realistically recorded the revolutionary changes in human outlook and, thus, they have envisioned a new social order.⁷

During the Eighties, yet another class of Indian fictionin writers. English emerged. like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Upmanyu Chatterjee, Allan Seally, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Ghokhle, Shashi Tharoor, Farukh Dhondi, Amitav Ghosh, Bapsi Sidhwa, Brinda Mukherjee, Ipsita Roy Chakraverti, Sudhir Kakkar, Dina Mehta, Dolly Ramanujan, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shauna Singh. and many more Apart from these famous writers some lesser known writers have also emerged on the contemporary scene such as Shiv K. Kumar, Saros Cowasjee, Vasant A. Shahane, K.V. Subbaram, Ranga Roa, Raj Gill, Balaraj Khanna. It is observed that the most significant and praiseworthy outcome of this emergence is that the Indian English novelists are now writing with new visions, new themes, new technical and linguistic devices, new ease and absolutely new confidence, making experiment in their works and winning international recognition and acclaim, which ensures a bright future for the Indian fiction in English. In this regard the following statement of Satish Kumar is remarkable: Indeed, the veteran masters of Indian English novel have the Indian novel in English seated fairly and firmly on a high pedestal in the literature of the world....Indian English novel no doubt will grow from strength to strength and 'help to make us a new nation and a new people wedded to the tasks of national reconstruction and international harmony'. It's future is immense.⁸

Today, when the Indian English fiction has finally created its own standing at the international level, it would be indeed interesting and significant to know about the changes taken place in Indian society. Moreover, the most significant outcome of these changes is that Indian English writers are now writing with a new zeal and confidence and blending social aspects and phenomenal situation in their fictional world.

Reference:-

1. Mehta P.P. and P.N.Bhatt. Theory of Literature. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1995. 170.
2. Neill, Diana. A Short History of the English Novel. New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 1979. 09.
3. Raizada, Harish. The Lotus and the Rose: Indian Fiction in English. Aligarh: A.M.U., 1978. 22.
4. Reddy, K. Venkata and P. Bayappa Reddy, ed. The Indian Novel with a Social Purpose. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1999. 1-2.
5. Kumar, Satish. A Survey of Indian English Novel. Bareilly: Prakash Book Depot, 1996. 53.
6. Naik, M.K., ed. Aspects of Indian Writing in English. New Delhi: Macmillan, 1999. 06.
7. Kumar, Satish. A Survey of Indian English Novel. Op. cit. 62.
8. Kumar, Satish. A Survey of Indian English Novel. Op. cit. 305.