
INTERMINGLING OF THE 'SOCIAL' AND THE 'SPIRITUAL': THE ROOTEDNESS OF THE INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL IN THE INDIAN TRADITION

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Abstract: Indian English novel has followed this path through its evolution from the early era of Humanism through to its varied dimensions of diasporic, post-colonial and post-modern Indian writings. In a world interspersed with loss of self-hood, ambiguous identities, multiple voiced discourses, unending anxieties, hybridised existences, 'glocalised' life-styles foreboding a sense of ever-expanding 'rootlessness', the Indian way of story-telling with an intermingling of the material(social) and the spiritual presents to the world a way of looking at reality wherein without diminishing the multiplicity of existence, the real could be assimilated for a meaningful and conflicting understanding of life. This paper deals with what the Indian tradition of storytelling stands for and how its varied aspects have been incorporated by Indian novelists as seen in the intermingling of the 'social' and the 'spiritual' with a special reference to the works of Mulk Raj Anand and Githa Hariharan.

Keywords: Rootedness, Social, Spiritual, Compassion.

Abstract: The Novel in the Indian tradition has been a social act. Every novel is influenced by its socio-cultural epoch and its bearings on the life and times of the author. The social and cultural environment of the author provides him/her with the kinetic energy to bring in creativity. The author's sensibilities and values are shaped to a great extent by the cultural ambience he/she has grown up with. The representation of life and society at its fullest has been the driving force in the evolution of Indian English novel from its earliest masters to its present generation of multi-faceted practitioners. Thus, The Indian English novel has always been influenced by the cultural rootedness of the Indian tradition.

Indian English novel has followed this path through its evolution from the early era of Humanism through to its varied dimensions of diasporic, post-colonial and post-modern Indian writings. In a world interspersed with loss of self-hood, ambiguous identities, multiple voiced discourses, unending anxieties, hybridised existences, 'glocalised' life-styles foreboding a sense of ever-expanding 'rootlessness', the Indian way of story-telling with an intermingling of the material(social) and the spiritual presents to the world a way of looking at reality wherein without diminishing the multiplicity of existence, the real could be assimilated for a meaningful and conflicting understanding of life. Rooted in the aesthetics of compassion, the Indian literary culture nurtures the reconciliation between the social and the spiritual "as one of the values in tune with the 'Ritha' principle- the cosmic law of balance of equipoise that ensures harmony and happiness in life" (Dasan 1). This paper deals with what the Indian tradition of storytelling stands for and how its varied aspects have been incorporated by Indian novelists as seen in the intermingling of the 'social' and the 'spiritual' with a special reference to the works of Mulk Raj Anand and Githa Hariharan.

In spite of being progressively refurbished due to intrusions and inclusions of various cultures and religions, Indian writings have always followed the tradition of being rooted to the Indian cultural milieu. The early Indian novelists who opted to write in English did not find the 'strangeness' of the language to a major barrier in their endeavour to imaginatively represent reality. They intermingled their writings with Indian idioms presenting their rootedness in the Indian culture. The coming of transnational globalisation, induced migrations, heterogenous diasporic identities since Independence, have portrayed alternative ways of looking at reality and have raised questions about 'anxiety of

Indianness' and the very meaning of 'Indian'. Even then, Indian writings in English carry a legacy of looking at life and reality from a point of view anchored in an Indian way of story-telling.

The novel has been a social act to communicate the human struggle through imaginative fiction. The issues have fascination and complexity of the human spirit impacted by various societal changes like Industrialisation, the quests for self-hood and identity arising out of societal and systemic exploitation have found a presence in the novel. The Indian English novel is no exception to this orientation. Even in the ancient literary works like the 'Panchatantra' or the 'Hitopadesha', the main objective was to educate human society in the right ideas. Indian literary culture, rooted in the aesthetics of compassion nurtures the reconciliation between the material and the spiritual. It evokes a compassionate understanding of life. The roots of our cultural values are related to our sense of self-identity. Rootedness in Indian aesthetics and creativity with a variety of quests were part of the foundation laid by Indian novelists like Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore and Indian English novelists like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. Mulk Raj Anand, one of the pioneers of the Indian English novel emphasized that a creative writer must go "straight to the heart of the problem of our time, the problem of human sensibility in the present complex- the tragedy of the common man" (Anand 21).

Being rooted in humanistic values, their works withstand the passage of time and contribute to the ennoblement of human dignity. They laid the foundations to the tradition of Indian writing which promulgated works with an affinity to life and compassionate humanism. Moreover, they also offered a spiritual way of looking at the complex issues and thus offering solutions. Multicultural diasporas, emotional identities of 'twice-born' consciousness usher in multiple-voiced questions with no easy answers. Yet, Indian novelists have effectively presented the Indian English novel as a social act "with its affinities with Indianness, the essence of which is a compassionate understanding of life" (Dasan 9).

Indian fictional narratives, in general, shape life experiences into stories. It is familiar with mimetic imitation and aesthetic evaluation of the impact and implications of what life consists of and what it teaches. From the times of the pioneers- the great trio, Bhabhani Battacharjee, Ahmed Ali, Ruskin Bond to the post-independence Woman writers like Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande to the Rushdie phenomenon and its bearers like Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh and to the bloom of Indian women writers like Arundathi Roy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, etc the Indian English novel has sought to represent 'the social' with underpinnings of the 'spiritual'.

Writings of the pioneers convincingly prove that rootedness in reality has varied versions and dimensions in Indian English novel. Anand and Raja Rao wrote on socio-historical conditions. Though Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* dwelt upon caste conflicts in the context of Gandhian nationalism, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* may be read as the first imaginative rendering of the Indian social manifesto for Dalit liberation and Identity. With Anand's novel, the Indian English novel took a new turn in the development of social consciousness and critical social realism. To Anand, an artist should express honest indignation against the existential angst and communicate the aesthetics of love and compassion as the supreme-mover of life. He boldly peopled his novels with characters from the lowest rungs of the Indian society- the untouchables, the illiterates and the innocent poor. He was committed to writing in favour of the poor. For Anand, as Dasan points out, "this transcendence was not an act of God-realisation or deification of one self or man becoming superman. Instead, it called for the realisation of one's social conscience – to see through the pettiness of exploitation, to have a heart of compunction and to embrace a life of compassion" (40).

The focus of the post-colonial Indian English novel is more on the existential angst with a quest for defining human identity in the light of changes harboured by education, improvements in the economic status of the people of India, impact of migrations and conflicts arising out of tradition versus modernity. Githa Hariharan, one of the finest of Indian women novelists presents the social aspects much in the same way assimilating Mulk Raj Anand's way of looking at reality. She incorporates the contemporaneous within the socio-historic consciousness facilitating her protagonists to identify and signify the articulation of the other as something precious, humanising and ennobling and informs the readers of the need to build human relationships without discrimination and alienation. Like Anand,

she is deeply sensitive about the dignity of the human person in the context of hegemony of different sorts particularly the male-centred forms of it.

In one of her novels titled, '*Fugitive Histories*', she addresses the issues of human worth and dignity using compelling multiple narratives of people enmeshed in a web of hatred, violence and distance. Set in the backdrop of the Gujarat Riots of 2002, she captures the plight of three women entangled in a web of undecidedness, loss of purpose and everything that one holds dear in life. Their lives oscillate between existence and denial. The author through different versions and different stories utilising memory, documentary and history takes the readers on a journey into their shattered world of ideals and hopes. Born to a Hindu-Muslim parents, Sara is confused of her 'hybrid' identity and frustrated by the politicising of her identity. Mala, having fought all her life because of her marriage to Asad – a muslim and having seen death in all its forms, now finds herself alone and lonely in the divided streets of identity. Yasmin, a teenager brutalised in the riots, is bewildered if the words 'freedom', 'hope', 'home' and 'future' anything at all. Hariharan, juxtaposing the conflicting worlds and their social predicaments still maintains that the only way to bridge the gap of this divided world is to live on and kindle the same spirit of multi-cultural ethos that has been able to nurture us all as Indians for so long. She reminds the readers of the innumerable geographical markers that stand mute witness to the indomitable spirit of the Indian diversity and co-existence and implores a falling nation to cling to the soul-force of the father of the nation and extols the victims of the hatred to embrace the will to live on. Thus, Hariharan clearly represents the utter brutality of the carnage and the devastation of the riots, but does not end on a pessimistic note and indicates that the road to restoration lies in the sense of acceptance and the spirit to overcome the harsh realities of the every day life. In other words, she invokes the aesthetics of compassion and co-existence in the minds of the readers by intermingling the 'social' with the 'spiritual'.

Thus, Indian English novel of the twentieth century, ranging from the earliest masters to the newest breed of the fiery writers has a unique essence. It is rooted in Indian aesthetics and novelistic tradition. It continues to be a social act engrossed in representing life and reality. It intermingles the social and the spiritual and in spite of conflicting tensions of 'Indianness' to a large extent maintained its face of being a human document.

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