Chapter 5. A Comparative Study of the Socio-Cultural and Psychological Issues in the Selected Novels.


After the advent of independence, the more serious novelist has shown how the joy of freedom has been more than neutralized by tragedy of partition how in spite of the freedom there is continuing corruption inefficiency, poverty, and cumulative misery; how, after all the mere replacement of white Sahib can not effect a radical cure for the besetting sins of India. When Independence came, the serious novelist in a sense found his occupation gone, for the traditional villain of the white-foreign rule-was no more in picture. Making a new start as it were the novelist shifted his lantern this side and that, made his probe, and found little to satisfy him. The old narrow loyalties were seen to wax as eloquent as ever. Communal, linguistics, casteiest passions were seen to come into the open with talk of ‘emotional integration filled the air, the terra firma only witnessed the agonizing spectacle of a divided house with a deceptive floor and pre-carious roof. (319-20)

Form the very beginning Indian English Novels have reflected reality of socio-cultural milieu. In the novels of 80,s East-West encounter, domestic exploitation of
women, existential element, conflict between traditional and modern values remained basic issues to be dealt by the authors. But after 90’s Psychological trauma, corruption, rootlessness arising from migration, and issues of diaspora became major themes of the novel. The change in the theme and content of the novel also modified narrative device, style and tone of the novelist. K.R.S Iyenger remarks; “Before 1947, the English models were the major outside influence on the Indian novel. After independence, however, novelist in India have shown themselves susceptible to the influence of American and European countries.” (322)

The socio-cultural, political situation became a major subject for the writers. Following are the difference that can be observed among the portrayed issues in the novels of two different decades.

1. Women’s Issues.

Indian English Novelist has given voice to the plight of women in patriarchal society. From the very beginning Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan have portrayed condition of women in Indian society. But their female characters are not impressive as they are victims, docile, and subjugated. Even women novelists too have followed the same manner of portrayal of female characters. Nanda Kaul, Tara (Fire on the Mountain), Geeta and other minor characters (Inside the Haveli) are the example of such portrayal. These female submits to the notion of patriarchy. Geeta in Inside the Haveli is educated girl, having emancipated ideologies and is brought up in metropolitan city of Bombay. In the novel it is easily observed that Geeta is unable to assert her individual identity and loses her confidence among highly patriarchal family members. Due to peer pressure she succumbs to the demands of her mother-in-law. She tries to remould her mannerism as per the patriarchal standards. Nanda Kaul in Fire on the Mountain is another illustration that supports the argument. Nanda, for whole life, suffers infidelity of her vice-chancellor husband. She lacks courage to defend her matrimonial right and remains a silent sufferer. She does not have sufficient courage to leave her husband. In total contradiction to the character of Nanda Kaul, character of Moni in Memories of Rain takes bold judgment. Moni in Memories of Rain marries an
English man and flies for England leaving her native and relative behind. She is left in trauma when she comes to know about her husband’s infidelity. For many years she suffers the pain silently but at last decides to leave Anthony. Even though her future has no security or certainty she returns to India. Jaya in That Long Silence also represents a modern, educated woman who is caught into flux between tradition and modernity. She is playing a role of a housewife which she largely regrets. She desires to be an emancipated writer but Mohan denies all her aspirations. Even though while she got pregnant for the third time without informing Mohan she gets the child abort. From the perspective of Indian woman who is caught in the shackles of patriarchy for many years, this is a radical step. Jaya being an educated woman understands her right over her body and maternity.

Raja Rao, Chaman Nahal have treated their female characters with notion of patriarchy. Characters of little mother, Saroja (The Serpent and the Rope) and Sundari, Chandani, Nur (Azadi) are represented as docile, depended and playing the role of domestic sphere only. While Indian English writers of 90’s like Upmanyu Chatterjee, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhary have portrayed their female characters who are free from social injustice and tyranny of tradition. Daya (Mammaries of a Welfare State), Liz Dorothy and Janet Hayakwa (The Golden Gate) Ila and Thamma(The Shadow line) are the female who are emancipated and society is not hurdle some to their individuality. Metropolitan lifestyle has cultivated space for individuality and joint family system do not prevail to subjugate the status of woman. Madeline in Serpent and Rope makes connection between cooking and biology of women. She says:

Cooking is a biological function of woman: it gives respite to her already small brain. If all the phosphorus in our brains were used up in discussion, woman would easily be fooled by man. So she must retire cook Macroni or washmen’s clothes-and thus she recaptures her strength. If you want to rule women just let them talk: they will fall into a coma. (SR, 305)

Here Madeline, in reality is a mouth piece of Raja Rao. It is evident that Rao finds that female should fulfill their domestic duties, no matter what ever is their profession or country. On the other hand Arun Joshi has portrayed female characters that represent
modern woman. Leela Sahbnis and Anuradha are the two characters that indicates upgradation of Indian woman’s socio-cultural status. Leela Sahbnis is an academician and has divorced her husband with an intention to study. While Anuradha, has not got married as she does not believe in the institution of marriage. Thus, in a time span of a decade, vast changes are visible; from the portrayal of women characters to their issues in a contemporary milieu.

2. Issues of Marital Bonds.

Morning Face, Azadi and Inside the Haveli are the three novels only that do not portray issues of fragmentation in matrimonial alliance while other selected novels The Guide, The Serpent and the Rope, The Fire on the Mountain, The Last Labyrinth, The Golden Gate, The New World, That Long Silence, Cuckold and Rich Like Us, portray the issue of marital bonds.

Morning Face, Azadi and Inside the Haveli portray traditional couple where husband and wife are true embodiment of each other. Sundari (Morning Face), Prabharani (Azadi) Geeta and her mother-in-law (Inside the Haveli) represent image of Indian women who provide all kinds of comfort to their husband and that is the soul motif of their life. While husbands too on the other hand play a responsible role of a life partners and is sensitive towards their spouses. Marital relationship is carried away like a sacred thread that should not be broken from any of the side.

While the novels, The Serpent and the Rope and Memories of Rain portray theme of conflicts due to cultural difference between East and West. Moni (MOR) has married to Anthony-an English man and Ram (SR) has married to the French woman. Both the couple lacks a common, mutual understanding due to their cultural polarization. In the relationship of Rama and Madeline both tries to compromise yet they differ in their outlook at meta-physical level also which was resultant of cultural difference Raja Rao writes:

Rama’s denial of the world and his contempt for the Christian and Buddhist compassion, because it implies for him an acceptance of the
world as real, poses a serious threat to Madeleine’s 
new found identity as a Buddhist. She realized that 
she can neither be an Ananda or a beatrice to Rama 
and her relationship with him comes to a logical end. 
(Rao, Rajeshwar 96)

Rama’s excessive obsession with ‘Indianness’ also becomes a reason to failure of 
his marriage. He could not accept Baudhism as he believed that it is born out of India. 
His high seriousness in disposition sometimes leaves Madeline exasperated:

Sometimes, Rama, I want to run away from you, run far away from you, 
just to listen to stupid innocent laughter or go to a circus and see the clown make 
everyone laugh….this seriousness reminds me of poor weather. Yet, grumble through we 
may, we do not actually run away from the book; we feel we must go on and on, marking 
the writings and rhythmic moments of the serpents….. (Iyenger 405)

On the other hand relationship of Moni and Anthony fails due to two reasons: first 
is Anthony’s dishonest and second is their cultural difference. Anthony still holds the 
mentality of colonial and colonized and feels him to be superior than Moni. He has notion 
that without his rescue, Moni could not have survived in India. On the other hand Moni is 
unable to accept Anthony’s infidelity and leaves him.

Matrimonial discords are portrayed in all novels. Only the reasons behind 
it are varied

3. Cosmopolitan and Its Influence:

Indian English Novelist have also portrayed changing scenario of modern Indian. 
Migration from village to urban cities started with a reason of employment and better 
living. Such migration affected psyche of common Indian in two ways: he started feeling 
alienation and other is negative effects on relationships. Mammaries of a Welfare State 
portrays life of an Indian beaurocrate who fails to receive family life even though he is 
educated. Aflatoon walfare state resembles with Indian cosmopolitans like Delhi. It is 
overpopulated city with nature and other humans and feels alienated. Same is the 
condition of John living at California. Inspite of every luxury the city offers him, he is
unhappy and lonely. In contradiction to this other novels depict the life at small towns or traditional Indian way of life. Azadi, Fire on the Mountain, The Guide reflects the life style at Sialkot, Kasauli and Malagudi where no bitter question of existence prevailed. After 80’s Indian English Novelists have selected metropolitan city to voice issues regarding urbanization and its effect on mind. In small town, one is abided and suppressed both by caste, society and religion. But these elements also provide man, a sense of belonging. While no such thing exists in metropolitan city. Excessive individuality and freedom gave birth to isolation. In luxuries, man feels his existence to be futile. He has no relatives to visit among all professional get to gathering and cut-throat competition. Due to liberal ideology and emancipated education, women in urban city crossed the threshold of four walls of the house. They also get involved in professional duties and her traditional female role was left aside. This resulted in the loosening of familial ties. Daya (MOWS) is the best example in this allusion. In the novel she get involved with Agastya but she is not emotional at all. Instead she is highly practical and does not long for anyone’s company. In The Shadow Lines Ila is another example of excessive freedom provided in cosmopolitan city. She lives at London and enjoys all freedom. Janet and Liz in The Golden Gate are other examples of female characters that are not ready to sacrifice their professional career for a relationship. While no such attitude existed in the novel’s of 1980’s.


Two novels under the study deals with partition and its consequences Azadi deals with immediate effect of partition that is mainly on physical level with description of massacre, riots, arson, mass migration. While The Shadow Lines by Amitav Ghosh portrays psychological shock that is portrayed by Thamma. Thamma, in the novel, is unable to accept partition and that her native country is now not her nation.

Chaman Nahal has begun his novel with announcement of partition. He has provided realistic description of increasing riots. Lala Kanshi Ram become the mouthpiece of thousands of people who suffered the trauma. Living a settled life for years, these people had to leave their homes and had to migrate to other place. Stabbing
in both parts of the nation became a daily routine. Nahal has portrayed increasing communalism between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Helpless women are abducted and raped mercilessly. Picturesque description of migrating people has been provided. As soon as Lalaji’s family moved to Delhi, their fight of existence begins. Among all corrupted officers, these refugees could not gain any support. Heart rendering sight of homeless refugees is depicted. Nahal has also tried to portray traumas of the victims but that cannot be observed with intensity.

On the other hand, character of Thamma, portrayed by Amitav Ghosh provides insight to the trauma of partition. Thamma, as a part of some integral defense mechanism, is unable to see any difference between India and East Pakistan which was her native. After getting retirement form the job as a headmistress. She once happened to visit Dhaka. In January, 1964, Thamma prepares to leave for Dhaka on the invitation of Maya Debi. On their way she wonders about the motif of drawing borders between the two nations. She searches for border at geographical form but she could not find any visible border. After reaching Dhaka she tries to identify the current scenario of locality that does not matches with the scenario of her previous psychological images. She is unable to recognize her own native that has changed drastically. Changed socio-cultural scenario pushes towards a psychological conflict. Thamma is described in following words:

.....my grandmother, looking perhaps for sweet shops
and lanes, could not help exclaiming when she saw the
saheb’s house in Dhanmundi: But this is for foreigners;
where’s Dhaka? And Tridib could not resist the malicious
pleasure of pointing out: But you are a foreigner now,
you are as foreigner as May—much more than May, for
look at her, she does not even need a visa to come here. (S.L, 195)

Thamma could not accept her status as a “foreigner”. Here Amitav Ghosh has raised an important question that only with changing national boundaries how person’s familial lineage, roots can be changed? Thamma loses her social; identity as it is largely connected with her native and social; geographical memories.
5. Attitude towards Alienation

Alienation has remained a core concern to deal with in the novels of Indian English Novelists. Raja Rao, Anita Desai, Arun Joshi, Vikram Seth and Upmanyu Chatterjee have dealt with the theme of alienation, in their novels, arousing out of various socio-psychological factors. But there is a difference in protagonist’s attitude towards alienation.

Ramaswamy in *The Serpent and Rope* is described as alienated from beginning. “I was born an orphan and remained so….” (SR, 05) He has lost his mother at young age after that his father marries twice. He has a step mother almost of his age. He does not share a good rapport with his father. Rama has married a French woman called Madeline. Rama is very sensitive towards Indian culture and tradition. Madeline belongs to French culture could not share Rama’s sensitivity towards Indian culture. Hence, Rama throughout the novel suffers with alienation. But his faith in religion and Indian metaphysics proves to be anchor to his identity. Thus, this study give insights to the difference of issues with changing times.
Works Cited


