Chapter-1

Indian Fiction in English
INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

Prof. M.K. Bhatnagar describes Indian English Literature in the first three decades of the century as a "hot house plant" which had no native geographical area. In spite of this situation, many Indian writers were the supporters and customers of this hot house plant. Some masters won praise and respect slowly both for their prolific creativity and command over the medium. Indian English literature developed a clear and unmistakable tradition that was its own.

FICTION IN INDIA:

English Novel is a product of the 19th century. But native Indian stories and tales were of an even earlier period. Miracle Tales, animal allegories and narratives of magical realism such as: Betal Pachisi, Simhasan Battisi, Tilism-i Hoshbruba, Daastan-e-Ameer Hamza and Kissa Tota Maina etc.

In Sanskrit poetics Itihas is considered as a genre of composition just like Kavya and Natya (Poetry and Drama). According to the genre description in English poetics we could say that Mahabharata and Ramayana both are epics. But a clear distinction is made in Sanskrit between Kavya and Ithias.

In Sanskrit the word ‘Itihas’ means the recordation of facts, which are true according to the events in the
order of their happenings. In fiction also this genre feature is available.

In English Literature novels are often titled as histories, for e.g., The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling (1749). In the 19th century William Carey published a collection of imaginary tales in Bengali and called it Ithias-mala -A Garland of History.

Another anthology published by the Fort William College, Rajaboli (1808) by Mrityunjoy Tarkalankor made no distinction between mythological stories and verifiable events. This is based on the lives of Muslim, Hindu and British heroes who fought in the battles of Kurukshetra to Plassey. When the stories of Arabian Nights were retold in Bengali they were called Arabi Ithias. In the same way other stories from Persia were published in Bengali in 1834 as history-Parasya Itihasa. The same book was reprinted in 1856 as fiction-Parasya Upanyasa.

This shift from Upanyasa to history can be seen easily. People would always be eager to know their past (history) and want to protect it from being ruined. Present is always real but past may seem Maya or Bhram because people find it impossible to believe verbal retellings. It is necessary to record the past. The future is also dependent on the present. This practice began in Bengali literature. Bijitkumar Dutt wrote Sahitya Aitihasik Upanyas in the first half of the nineteenth century. One half is about history of Bengal and the other half included India and the world. The post
Macaulay era had learnt the difference between fiction and chronicle.

Bankim translated into Hindi under the influence of Bhartendu Harishchandra and at the end of the century Kishorilal Goswami wrote his novel being influenced by Bengali. It is clear that *Sukha Sharbari* (1894) written by Goswami is inspired by Bankim’s *Kapalkundala* to some extent. Venkatachar was also influenced by Bankim’s novels. And in turn Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada all were influenced by Sir Walter Scott.

History often is affected by regional biases. The stories of the bravery of Tipu Sultan in Kannada, Shivaji in Marathi, Pratakaditya or Sirajuddoulah in Bengali held sway over regional masses. But Maratha and Rajput histories go beyond the range of regional boundaries and achieve popularity all over India. The most popular theme in the Indian histories written in English was about kings who apposed Mughal power especially the stories of Shivaji and the Rajput kings. These books came to be used as historical material by other writers.

The popularity of historical and pseudo-historical novels of 19th century can be seen through these four hypotheses.

1. Due to the contact with Europe educated Indian people felt a new world of imagination, humanism and triumph of Self over hierarchical society. In the 19th century the life of Indians was affected by
many social restrictions and they were politically servile. So the Indian creative writers turned towards the past, the memories of old fame and glory, valour and heroism.

2. The historical novel fitted the concept of story telling tradition in India easily. Daastan, Kissa, Katha, Tilism are the story telling genres in India prior to the advent of the British genre of Fiction into India. Such writings allowed freedom to the imagination. In the 19th century the historical novelists were more popular than realist novelists like George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell. Historical and romantic novelists were Scott and Wilkie Collins, Bulwer Lytton etc.

3. Past is better than present. The wonder evoking happenings of a bygone era were like an elixir. Because the present was more full of miseries than the past. So history provided the novelists a way to glorify the past through the tales of bravery and heroism. In this way the passion of nationalism could be evoked easily through the past than the present.

4. Novels such as Bankim’s Anandamath (1882) which were based on history were more influential as they tried to show the Bengalis how glorious their past was.
Through these points we can say that the historic novel was more welcome than the realistic novel.

Elements of fantasy and the intimations of history both are blended in these historic retellings of legends.

Novels like Devakinandan Khatri's *Chandrakanta* and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajsingh* (Bengali, 1882) lie between the poles of fiction and fantasy. The characters of Aurangezeb and Zebunnisa are drawn from history but human dimensions are also shown through the relationship of non-historical characters. Umesh Chandra Sarkar's *Padmavati* (Oriya; 1881) presents historical events but here history is overshadowed by the complicated love story. According to Mircea Eliade the mythic time of a première cultures is cyclic, because the events progress from the past to the present and future.

The Beginnings- Anglo Indian Fiction before 1900

In the beginning of Renaissance in India, literature in other languages as well as in English flourished. It was the time of 19th Century when the Principal of Fort William College found many grammar texts and workbooks with the help of Indian scholars and compiled them. By then the Indian mind was more influenced by the western thought, concepts and ideas through English literature.

The Anglo Indian writers achieved great popularity. Many English writers like William Jones, John Leyden, Sir Alfred Lyall and Sir Edwin Arnold expressed their
views about the Indian life but their picture was not so true, intimate and realistic. All these English writers felt that Indian writers may be able to reveal and explain the real picture of Indian religious and cultural life better than any other English writers who wrote about India and Indians. The writings of the British writers skimmed along the surface of Indian life as if they had touched only the outer surface of water of the Indian ocean.

Modern Indian Renaissance boasts of writers who write in English and also those who write in their mother tongues. The earliest question that troubled the critics and observers was the controversial one of whether writers merely imitated the great English models. Rammohan Ray was the pioneer who led the way in writing pamphlets, books and prose and journals in Bengali. After him came Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Michael started as an Indo-Anglian journalist and poet. Bankim also started in English but soon he returned to his mother tongue. He wrote Anandmath, which gave India his patriotic mantra Bande Mataram. When the Renaissance started in Bengal, it played the role of a forerunner. Bengal was a place of cultural rebirth and of the early struggle for independence. There are many writers who hailed from Bengal-Vidyasagar, Romesh Chunder Dutt, Duejindralal Roy, Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. After some time other Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Gujarati, Oriya and Sindhi writers also felt the returning
of life from the twin sources i.e. English and Bengali or English and their regional languages.

In the 19th century Ramakrishna Paramhansa and his great disciple Vivekananda used this massive intellect and the twin stronghold to arouse the nation as it moved towards the western culture. They tried their best to give a new life and a balanced Indian view through the practical medium of English. At the advent of literary Renaissance in India, the literary artists came into contact with two main streams which affected their themes. These streams or thrust areas of Indian intellectualism were: (i) Spirituality (ii) Mysticism. Tagore, Iqbal, Subramania Bharati, Jayashanker Prasad and Sri Aurobindo described “man’s kinship with the Divine in moving and memorable language. Puranic myth is rendered anew and reincarnated in modern thoughts.” The Hindi epic Kamayani, and Sri Aurobindo’s Savitri presented a rhythm-bound and optimistic view for future poetry. The optimistic view and a promise of fulfillment of the vision of a ‘New Man’ and ‘New World’ were arising from the hopeless present. These poetic works held out a hope against the onslaught of frustration.

In the 20th century Mahatma Gandhi, Tilak, and Sri Aurobindo inspired the poets and writers to create works of art and literature to suit the need of that time and to bring about a new revolution in the nation. Lok Manya Tilak was an astute freedom fighter and a kind of a
teacher of Gita's way. He was a political leader and a lyrical poet too. Sri Aurobindo was a chosen voice for Indian nationalism. Mahatma Gandhi was also a very sharp politician and a saint and an Idealist. So we see that the current of literary inspiration flows in India from Europe via Bengal. Bengal plays an important role in the shaping of Modern Indian Literature. The age of Bankim paved the way for the age of Rabindranath. Bankim tried the strategy of appealing to the national self-respect. In the 20th century the problem is one of search for identity and writers like Rabindranath tried to bridge East with the West.

In Indian Literature we see the movement from an era of self-discovery to an era of assimilation and nativisation of the forms, genres and the techniques of the west. This is a time when all the old forms were going into disuse; new words and new connotations were daily coming into use. So all were writing according to the rules or lack of rules in English syntax and English prosody. Thanks to the transport facilities people were travelling to the different cosmopolitan cities like Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore and Hyderabad. People became bilingual and the communication from one to another was difficult yet not impossible due to this bilingualism. But soon the position was changed. An uncertainty crept in as the writers lacked the confidence to break the debilitating boundaries. The second retarding feature was a loyalty to
mother tongue, which at its best made them illogically parochial and at its worst rendered them less than perfect in the new language of their learning experience i.e. English.

In cosmopolitan cities like Bombay, New Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Bangalore and Hyderabad people had to communicate with each other in different languages due to fluid population. So in such cities people became bilingual and multilingual. Languages were losing their importance and stability. This was a sign for future that all the languages seemed to sway between the fanatic purism and an acute hybridization. The result was often ridiculous. In spite of all this confusion and ambivalence regarding English there were some great masters of prose such as Mahatama Gandhi, Aurobindo, Rajaji, Radha Krishnan and Nehru. Each developed his style in a highly individual way. Bhartrihari, famous Hindi poet called India "a new heaven and a new earth"\(^3\)

Who are the conquerors, Not mere lords of land.

But kingly poets whose high victories

Are perfect works.\(^4\)

(Translated by Sri Aurobindo)

Today English literature has neither the need of introduction nor defence. It has established itself firmly all over the world. Indian English writers can be categorized as "Reigning Gods", "Popular Geniuses" and "Established Artists"\(^5\).
Henry Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt and others contributed much in the beginning. Swami Vivekananda, “the fiery monk”\textsuperscript{6}, with “the tongue of spiritual flame”\textsuperscript{7}, lectured in English. These writers tried their best to awaken the western mind to Indian culture and philosophy.

Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo were two such pioneers, who focused world attention on Indian culture. Sri Aurobindo highlighted Indian philosophy; and Rabindranath Tagore exposed all the nuances of bhakti. These and many others were the leading artists “whose brilliant literary light appears transpiring through the work of the later Indian English writers”\textsuperscript{8}.

Sarojini Naidu, the native nightingale used words artistically. She stresses more on words not ideas. Her words have great intense emotional feelings. Sarojini follows the style of the later romantics. She was gifted with Indian sensibility of revealing a spirit intoxicated with the romance of the past.

In A Persian Lute Song one of her famous poems enriched with romantic sentiments and imagery, the princess is waiting for the arrival of her lover. So she is eager to maintain the natural beauty to welcome him-

“Sweet stars in drift on shining drift,
weave not your dance too soon,
be not too sudden or too swift,
to rise, O glimmering moon”\textsuperscript{9}
Sarojini was a romantic poet with a gift for skilful versification. Old world romance of the Middle East was described beautifully by Sarojini Naidu. According to Sarojini love is a rare gift of nature and so it can be called an agent of ecstasy. Love is the origin of both agony and bliss.

“Fulfillment and Farewell
concentrated in a kiss?”

Poets and fictionists who started writing before or during fifties like Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Kamala Markandaya, Asif Currimbhoy and others, and prose artists like Nirad C. Chaudhari and K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar are the “Popular Geniuses”.

A.K. Ramanujan is a poet who writes on men and manners a prime sample among many writers who entered into the field of Indian English Literature with multidimensional sensibility.

Today when the Indian writers write in English they keep a base as ‘Indianness’ before them. At the same time they feel that to portray a farmer or a small town school teacher will not be a perfect example of presenting the Indian quality in a country of multitudes. Harish Trivedi says that this school of writers resemble R.K. Narayan's *The World of Nagaraj* whose students firstly “rub off their sandal paste and remove the marks on their forehead” before their entry into the school’s
portals. They find it necessary to shed the native strain and adopt a faceless creativity so as to find facile acceptability.

Shashi Tharoor says that he and other writers like him are using the eclectic approach. As Indian writers they write about India's truths that are multiple. They adopt and accept the Mahabharata, the Kerala folk dance, Bollywood films and Shakespeare, Wodehouse and Beatles too.

Indian Character - Typology:

English language is the common tongue of all those nations which were in the commonwealth. It can be called a meeting point of all these nations which have different races, culture and regions. English language is a gift of the British Empire and the flourishing freshness of this language and literature proves it true that the rulers' language never dies with them. Greek, Latin, Arabic and Persian in the ancient West and medieval East enjoyed the same status. Now English occupies the highest place among all other languages. It is the most important medium of communication internationally in all spheres.

English brings with itself the significant burden of multiple cultures. The literary works in English emerging from cultures which are already possessors of the multiple archetypes and canons become more enriched due to their interaction with the complex multi linguistic multi cultural make up of English itself. Certainly
conflict may rise out of such an unplanned mixing. The western model of Fiction, the narratology and the art of characterisation may be at variation with the native models, such as have been handed down from the ancient texts of scriptural, epic, folk (written as well as oral) forms of the native literature. So for these commonwealth literatures which took on the new language and the literary modes and models, the matters were not as simple as it may seem. English literature and language were not being inscribed onto an empty canvas. The rich tapestry of the native tradition had to be over written on. The question was if such an overwriting would mean that the earlier patterns would allow themselves to be removed. The big question would also be, if the writers themselves would throw out the cultures, traditions and language systems already internalised and adapt themselves totally to become faceless imitators of a learned system of thought and creativity. On the other hand, would the artist show that this addition of further cultural bases would mean yet another and yet another stream that could feed the artistic thrust for a better expression for creativity.

Indo English novel has a very long history. National awakening, political uprising and industrialization made great contributions to the Indian novel. In 1930s and 40s the Indo English Fiction grew in a healthy manner. Most of the important novelists of India - Mulk Raj Anand,
Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan have been translated into many Indian and foreign languages.

New themes were added to the repertoire of the novels. Some of the Indian novels deal with the theme of Indian immigrants in England. The theme of expatriation, exile, loss of identity, search for the Self, nationhood are all the results of the ‘felt’ experience of colonialism, red hot from the trauma of enslavement and the struggle for independence. Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man* are two of the many novels which reflect this agony and anguish of the individual.

Raja Rao deals with Indian metaphysics, Markandaya presents rural Indian life and Malgonkar recreates Indian history. Major Indian novelists have not been able to overcome the unique but paradoxical situation that they were fitted with. In the thirties Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* and the *Serpent and the Rope* describe the east ward position of nation present in all writers Mulk Raj Anand's choice of English was free from any depression or dilemma of choice. Artists should choose English or the mother tongue as their writing medium freely. Their main object should be to fulfill India's quest for national identity. Anand and writers like him were not merely social realists. They gave India its National Identity.

Almost all these writers were much aware of increasing readership of English in India. They used
English as the writing medium but emphasized the Indian situations of the thirties. These writings were insular tests for the case of ‘mix and match’ of different ingredients in the production of ‘art’.

After independence the Indian novel has developed with remarkable speed.

The last few decades can be said to be the golden period for Indo English novel. Many novels, which have been written after independence, reflect the confidence and quality of a settled nations’ psyche. Indian novel in English rests on a complex canon. Experiments are rife. The post-Rushdie era has put this pressured literary form on a ‘test’ position once again. Indian English novel is now facing the challenge of learning to prove itself over and over again. Writers are delving into the multicultural pot and inventing new recipes and new modes of telling. Compared to this racy, complex, restlessly rich and varied narrative, Narayan’s stories appear simple and innocent.
REFERENCES:


3. Ibid- p.45

4. Ibid- p.45


6. Ibid. p. 180

7. Ibid. p. 180

8. Ibid. p. 181


