

Summary

If we trace the broad spectrum of Indian writing in English right from the first novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, 1864, we can see how India figured as a subject in this novel. Whether it was Toru Dutt's *Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) or Sarojini Naidu's lyrics based on Radha and Govinda or Sri Aurobindo's *Kali, Laxmi, Durga, or Mother*, these novels explored India through the myriad forms of Indianness. Despite being written in English the writing variously explored notions of Indianness through its people, its geography, its culture and its traditions. This is true even today and not only for Indians living in India but for those across the seas too, the homeland and its politics is the recurrent theme in imagining one's nation creatively. This perhaps is the way that Indian writers choose to self-position and self-validate themselves viz-a-vis their counterparts abroad. The sociology and the economy of their vast country inspired their imagination and continue to do so despite the fast changing literary scene.

The canon of writing that emerged in the thirties and the forties including Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, later to be followed by Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Arun Joshi, and Ruskin Bond, all involved themselves with the historical legacy, the chronological changes and the culture's transition into a modern nation state. As sub text everyone used the impact of the western economies over which was positioned the Indian cultural dialectics. The resistance to one and the power of the other became an ongoing dialectics that persists even today.

Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912) was the first modern Indian text to be acknowledged in the West. It brought Indian writing to the eyes of the other world and since then the attention it has

drawn has never abated, so much so that today we are storming across the barricades into a realm hitherto considered 'English.'

M.R. Anand through his first novel, *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and A Bud* (1937) opened up questions of caste and class and he continued to work through the endeavor to reconcile the village with progressive, urbanizing India. He grounded his work in social realism and infused Gandhism with explorations of tradition and modernity. Raja Rao began with focusing on the Gandhian philosophy and non-violent resistance to the British occupation of India and later, also dwelt on the relationship between Indian and Western cultures. *Kanthapura* (1932) and *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) typify the two ends. *The Chess Master and his Moves* (1988) was his final way of projecting the ways of handling different identities. R.K. Narayan's fictional territory Malgudi was the then location where Indianness thrived and which could later on in more advanced times be taken as a Mumbai, a Kolkata or a Delhi and his bachelor of arts or painter of signs could well be the present day corporate and professional. In these three stalwarts of early Indian writing in English one can easily get a glimpse of the polemics that was going to shape future writing in English. The genes of new millennium Indian writing in English were as evident as writing on the wall.

Moving on to Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, we are well into the seventies' and eighties' India, Indianness and its associated problematic. The scene largely shifts from the village (Malgudi, Kanthapura) to the urban cities, from the villagers to the modern middle class, from the traditional to the modern. These writers of the seventies and eighties explored the changing social consciousness which was the outcome of labor intensive industries, the manufacture of low priced goods, and its accompanied psychological changes. The religious piety and the domestic virtues were receding, left behind in the earlier defining contexts. The

sacred was losing its battle with the mundane. Though the White Sahebs had left, the *Kale Angrez* had taken over.

Come the nineties and the literary scene underwent a sea-change. As India opened markets to foreign trade, it embarked on a path that has led it to where it is now. It provided the necessary impetus to the commercial acumen of Indians. Added to this was a 'sense of vision, a belief in themselves' and they became "exceptionally nimble in seizing the right business opportunities" (Varma, 2007, xxii). Arundhati Roy's novel, *The God of Small Things* (1997) embodies this shift and itself inaugurates an era of Bookers, Commonwealth, Grammy and Oscars. We can now put our 'Thumps Up', be the 'Gold Spots' ('India Shining') and 'Coca-Cola' the world with our 'Pepsi'. Alongside the 'India Shining' with its globalized capitalism, its upwardly mobile professional classes, its new leisure sites and practices it is also 'India Rising' and shedding its old persona, a more heterogeneous new middle class that has surfed the waves of economic liberalization and has done well for itself. So well that it can now flaunt its well-being in the face of millions of poor friends and neighbors.

This briefly sums up the chronology of major changes in the history of India well into the new millennium. Literature has always been alluded to as the mirror of the society which reflects the diversity of life. The larger events in which individual players enact their single lives are fashioned with passion into a consistent narrative. The passions of the author/narrator and the actions of the protagonist/societal being are nuanced together and organized into a significant discourse that projects the whole through the parts. Like fiction being written through the ages, the Indian novel, in different regional languages and in English, is no exception. A large canon of Indian writing in English today epitomizes New India, it demonstrates marked departures in writing in English often in genre, form and voices *Q&A* (Swarup, 2005), *Five Point Someone*

(Bhagat, 2004), *Two States* (Bhagat, 2009) caused a great commotion as their 'young India' narrative took its audience in new and challenging directions. Now, the plots are set in metropolitan cities with their spate of advertising media and journalism and the protagonists are professionals with a new life style and craving for new opportunities. These confirm to an India that is changing both socially and culturally.

In the earlier Nehruvian model of Indian nation building, the "old" middle class was made up of government workers who served the nation by working for it. In a globalized model of the Indian nation, the middle class engages in a global economy of work and consumption, serving the nation by, ironically enough, directing itself away from it. (Radhakrishnan, 2011, 42)

Just one look at the new fiction will point towards new India.

Looking through the rear view mirror one can see that the Indian novelist never approved of the 'Art for Art's Sake' hypothesis, his inspiration stemmed from what was and this he made his 'is' for his creative work. Man becoming the measure of all things. It was more the Victorian concerns that took the upper hand in his novels - the Dickensian realism, the Hardyian regionalism, and the morality of Jane Austen superseded the more abstract concerns. And perhaps, it is this that has stayed as the essential Indianness in novelists even in the new millennium. A combination of regional realism with a backdrop of how morality is being flayed by the new insurgent global practices is what we read in the fiction of today. The commitment to a cause or a catharsis through narration is now not the thrust which has shifted to presenting slices of the country with slivers of activities that has been generated by the circumstances of the times. These slices often are macrocosmic and the slivers the worms eye view of what is festering under the becoming garb of 'India Shining'. The social protest of Mulk Raj Anand, the distress that R.K. Narayan felt when the world of evil overtook the good or the inhumanity that Bhabhani Bhattacharya tried to expose through the depiction of merciless hoarders, profiteers

and black marketers does not ring through the writing of today. Yes, corruption, evil and inhumanity are writ large across every page, but the concern is not with the 'why' it has come to be or the 'how' it can be resolved. It is there, has come to stay, for better or for good and it is the 'what' that makes modern India. It is in the description of the 'what' that the writer's narrative moves.

This is not to say that literature has taken over the concerns of historical or sociological writing, it is still literature because it psychologically penetrates into the minds of its protagonists and lays bare their souls in crisis. The novel is not dead but has changed its mode into a more journalistic endeavor taking off from the dozens of 24x7 news channels summing up what India is. The snippets are brief and their impact transitory. It is the expansion of this pan-Indic experience that the writers of today bringing to the readers. If the national news can thrive on rape, murders, scams and terror why can the novels not become a part of this nationalistic endeavor of laying bare the seething, teeming panorama of the India that has come to be? One look at the newspapers and TV news of a couple of decades ago is enough to say where we have moved into and similarly a few pages from the novels of the past and the present is sufficient proof of the miles traveled ahead.