

About her (India) there is the elusive quality of a legend of long ago; some enchantment seems to have held her mind. She is a myth and an idea, a dream and a vision, and yet very real and present and pervasive.

(Jawahar Lal Nehru)

So quotes Shashi Tharoor (2007, 7) contradicting what Winston Churchill had summed up as ‘merely a geographical expression’. Despite the fact that India embraces an extraordinary mixture of ethnic groups, a profusion of mutually incomprehensible languages, varieties of topography and climates, a diversity of religions and cultural practices and a range of levels of economic development, India is uniquely singular. The likes of Churchill might have had the difficulty of assimilating this diversity. The truth is that it is India’s plurality which is singular and it is because of this truth that we have attained *Satyamev Jayate* (Truth Always Triumph). This is also what has made liberalization and globalization possible and more easily acceptable to her people and she has assimilated all the convergent influences of the world into the fabric of her society.

India has survived innumerable onslaughts and has in some way or the other made room for the various legacies left behind by its invaders and just like its multifaceted geography it has accepted its equally multifaceted history and still reaffirmed its identity. The various immigrants, invaders and visitors, with intentions war like or peaceful, integrated themselves within the fold of its diversity and have to make here. They could not curb its essentiality although the overlap of many peoples did leave some lasting scars that have been indelible. This is our tryst with destiny and thence after we have redeemed the pledge and worked towards the large cause of humanity.

Again, despite the fact that Nandan Nilekani (2008) still feels that “India is a country caught in a mix of feudalism and a promising market economy”, but, he continues, it

has “the advantage of the flattening, transformational power” (Nilekani, 2008, 381). It was this that made it go in for wide scale liberalization and globalization ventures that have paid rich dividends and have put the country on the path of unprecedented progress. Yet, if we look into the rear view mirror the Phantoms of the past lurk close behind, often, shackling our footsteps into the future. Globalization in itself is not the Midas touch; the consonant awareness is not its complementary companion. Despite our longing to leave the past behind we are still dangling between the old and the new. Yet, there is hope, for, whereas the West is struggling with the fallout of sky-rocketing capitalism, we as slow achievers are trodding on and can still see the goal post, though the distance is large and the path beset with quagmires and the atmosphere laden with mist.

Stepping into any five star hotels now or a corporate office one is struck by the technological and human efficiency and this could well be America or Europe by the looks and sounds of it. It is a part of what contemporary India has grown into both as regards its society and culture. And this is what Tharoor has to say about both the terms. He paints a very impressionistic picture of the variety that co-exists today.

In the Indian context, even so narrow a usage embraces something rather vast and varied, from the five-star hotels with which I began this chapter to the homeless sleeping huddled on railway platforms, from the classical schools of Indian dance to the village equivalents of the whirling dervishes, from the ancient Sanskrit epics to the B-movies of Bollywood, from stories retold around rural fires to those recycled on the television screen, from the patterns daubed on the walls of mud huts to the postmodern canvases now sold regularly at high-priced auctions by Sotheby’s... (Tharoor, 2007, 278-79)

This is the broad and indefinable India that we are living in. As he says that in 1996, when he came to India he found America! That was the last millennium and now we are further into the future; and in the new millennium globalization, good or bad, is here to stay with us along with its consort cosmopolitan. The nation that was born on 15 August 1947 awakened into independence matured into liberalization and now has gradually edged into globalization.

Pluralistic democracy which is our greatest strength has allowed us to flow freely into a new world where ironically big is becoming beautiful, and paradoxically to be the 'other' we are becoming modern Indians.

Change has come to India, change in both the positive and the negative way. On the one hand political corruption is on the rise and on the other hand sociological transformations are. What one loses on the downward swing one gains on the upward push? Our future however is being reshaped through the increased ability to educate our children, develop the potential of our women, provide opportunities to the historically underprivileged, diminish unproductive conflict between communities and prevent the abuse of the human rights of our fellow citizen. All this is happening and happening from within as we shade off the weight of two hundred years colonial baggage. The pessimists might say that there are grounds for hope but not for certitude, and the optimists argue that since the spring has fulfilled promises, the maturing sun will load and bless.

Tzvetan Todorov (1976) has observed that: 'it is because genres exist as an institution that they function as horizons of expectation for readers and as models of writing for authors' (Tharoor, 2007, 163). This is to say that since its inception Indian Writing in English travelled through a kaleidoscopic fictional scene. India's first generation novelists hardly had any access to Tolstoy, Melville, or Flaubert. They servilely imitated mediocre English novels often devaluing their own talents in the process. It was only much later that with the rise of the novel of purpose, the polemical novel that Indian writers started defining their native identity. From experimenting to create a narrative form previously not part of the Indian literary heritage and writing in a medium hitherto largely untested as a mode of literary expression, Indian writers gradually graduated into a form and style of their own. The difficulties were immense because with hand sight it seems clear that the British model was the least suitable for the Indian mind because of the brooding inwardness and the philosophical quality with which they had been endowed. Out of this was born our own

writers Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao (see chapter- I). However, the sudden spurt of narrative creativity can be delineated in three dominant strands- the novels of purpose for social reform and missionary enterprise; historical and supernatural fiction for the creation of an ethos remote in time; and the rendering of contemporary society realistically. It was the last that came to form the mainstream of Indian writing in the twentieth century. Today's fiction of the new millennium is a continuum of that endeavor though post-modernly diversified into heteroglossic carnivalesques of the rising city scapes.

It is in this environmental change that the writers of the new millennium have emerged, imbibing the legacies of the old and the challenges of the new. They are in their own way writing the sociology of the times which ironically dwells on the hamartiae that withholds and the poetic justice that will deliver the right and the wrong equitably. There are indeed the legislators of the world, judging and reckoning as they go along. And, so we find in their fiction an interface between April as the cruelest month with the promise of a blossoming spring. These writers, largely young, write for the new generation. They have themselves experienced what it is to grow up in India and their writing is a sharing with like minded co-existentialists. Indeed, they are privileged since they come from more affluent backgrounds and have not borne the brunt of those disadvantages that a good other half of their compatriots have. But, with a discerning edge gained from education and recourse to that 'world at one's doorstep' called the computer and the internet, they are way ahead in their awareness capacities. With these decided advantages they seem to have taken upon themselves, the responsibility of projecting 'India Shining' or 'India Rising'. Needless to say that most of these writers have had a 'past' before they chose of their present occupation and this has made them view the world and write about it from that point of view, Advaita Kala comes from the hotel management industry and has worked as a Guest Relations officer, so her novel *Almost Single* looks at India and Indians through those lenses, Ravi Subramanian and Amitabha Bagchi have a corporate/ IIT background and their writing revolves around that experience; Suketu Mehta, Altaf Tyrewala

and Aravind Adiga have been journalists, therefore they write in an investigative reportage and carry the journalist's microscope and telescope as they look at and feel into things.

Besides, the professions that these writers have prophesied, there are other forces at work for an Indian writing in and about India. The first is the cultural diversity of this homeland. Not only many generations rub shoulders together but also many castes, creeds and ethnicities walk along the common path. Though they are all Indian, living in the first quarter of the new millennium, they carry with them the burden of their pasts and their heritage as well; though of the same nation and contemporaries they are divided by where they come from what religious sect they belong to, what class and what caste- and all these together make them different from each other. If we try to deconstruct the average Indian it is the Derridian difference that one must understand in order to arrive at an explanation of being Indian. So, it is but natural to see Altaf Tyrewala explore the underside of Mumbai with its rich mosaic of the Muslim culture for Mumbai is both *Siddhi Vinayak* and *Haji Ali*; the two inseparably linked yet obviously apart. When Tyrewala focuses on how the Mumbai Muslims feel about being discriminated, Suketu Mehta brings in other Minority groups that make religion a dividing juncture. And perhaps all the writers look at 'class' as an imperative in the unjust distribution of choices. Mehta dwells a long while on the Dharavi slums, Adiga narrates a 'wanting' past and Subramanian, Bagchi and Kala seem to be so obsessed with their own urban, upper middle class lifestyle that they seem to have close their eyes to the living reality of the other world. Tyrewala seems to believe that the Muslim minority has also been deprived of an upward economic mobility, for reasons of their own making and the making of other institutions.

What emerges as a sub text in the new fiction of the millennium is a conglomeration of unity, diversity and contradictions. The unity is in the way we celebrate festivals and other occasions, the diversity is of caste, class, regions and dialects and the contradictions are in the way the past walks hand in hand with the present and raising one head one sees the sky scrapers of the future. It is only when on being asked, "what caste are you?" one can reply, "I

am an Indian!” can the inherent paradoxes of our country be resolved and the ethos restored. What these fictions of today are trying to ironically analyze is that an India that denies itself to us could end up being denied to all of us. Let us not hurry on a second partition, for this time there will be no Noah’s Arc and in the words of Tharoor, “The partition(s) in the Indian soul would be as bad as a partition in the Indian soil” (79). So, let us beware the ideo of the present times and work towards recreating the old in new forms. The new millennium fiction presents these shocks so that we gear and oil our shock absorbers to smoothly transit out of the blue (s).

Arise, Awake and Stop not until the goal is reached.

–Swami Vivekananda.

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