



## ENGLISH LITERATURE IN CURRENT TIMES: A CRITICAL APPROACH<sup>#</sup>

Dr. ALKA DUTT

Assistant Professor, Amity University Manesar, Haryana

Email ID: [alkaduttdutt@yahoo.co.in](mailto:alkaduttdutt@yahoo.co.in)

(<sup>#</sup>Paper Presented at 6<sup>th</sup> JGU International Conference on Theory-Literature Interface (Online) Date: 24-26 July, 2020)



Article Received:06/08/2020

Article Accepted: 25/09/2020

Published online:28/09/2020

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.8.3.345](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.8.3.345)

### Abstract

Proposed paper would like to talk about **contemporary literature** of **modern** day world. As writer writes from his own unique perception of all that he sees and feels; few texts would be under lens of discussion in order to understand mankind in relation to social, economic and political scene of his times. **Current trends** in writing offer deep insight into human **psychology** that is responsible for shaping societies around the world. Few of these trends would be put forward through presented paper. **Diversity** in writings would be explored through works of writers around the world.

Keywords: Contemporary literature, psychology, current trends, modern, diversity

**Contemporary literature** comes with different hues. Someone rightly remarked that at times certain books come up with matter that should not be brought amidst undergraduate or post graduate students due to objectionable themes and diction present in these writings. *Harry Potter* series have come under serious objections from many quarters. Though magic is not unknown to readers of literary texts, books by Rowling have been targeted for eulogizing magical practices when Bible warns believers to stay away from devils, and evil spirits etc. who seem to be related to black arts. Rowling's books come with a special school where such weird practices are part of curriculum. Americans certainly did not like these books that promoted witchcraft and took occult practices in a light manner. **Modern** trend that had started after Second World War has certainly come up a long way from fighter planes, bombs and land mines. Today more than ever before even more destructive elements can be seen in societies around the world. **Current trends** in writing have touched upon every imaginable theme that a writer can churn out

through his ever and over-active memory bank. Beauty of written words rests upon power of pen that makes even ugly things look noble and eloquent. Mundane events in day to day life outshine the grandest of thoughts that once glared back at reader from epics of yesteryears. Reason behind this is simple; reader is living the life that is in front of his eyes and his eyes are constantly in search of solutions to his personal problems rather than an escape into false imaginative world that makes unbearable life bearable.

### Rebellious Literature in current times

**Current trends** in literature break accepted boundaries. While writers of bygone era took care in crafting out stories in order to avoid hurting sensitive readers; contemporary writers do not carry any such qualms. They come out with truth and naked facts and readers do not baulk away on reading these. This is perhaps because nothing seems to shock human mind any more. **Diversity** in literary writings reflects numbness that has settled around hearts that should beat with joy at each new

morn. **Psychological** characters are strewn across literary pages as never before. Penned down words are more cynical and are ever questioning whatever comes in their way. Contemporary literature comes with rational and common- sense values. Today, texts have little to do with traditional and cultural values. If any such traces appear in writings, they are like thistles in vast bushy field of thoughts. It is the individual who is the main concern of its creator in the literary texts, be it novel, drama or poetry.

Political matters have always been part of literary writings. Shakespeare had talked about princes, kings, queens and nobility in his dramas. Greek tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* is again concerned with throne and matters of royal family. Spenser praised the Queen in his *Faerie Queene*. Today a writer does not talk about kings and noblemen who are thing of past; rather, literature is all about petty politics, dictators and totalitarian regimes that create hell on earth for normal masses. Romance writing of 17<sup>th</sup> century is totally different from contemporary romance. Dark passion of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is difficult to find in novels that fill modern book shelves. Secret and sacred love of Hawthorne's heroine, Hester Prynne, is difficult to find in contemporary love stories. Today love and sex are fused together to make writing into a popular fiction, Present writings are more natural and realistic. They are down to earth and this quality endears them to the readers.

#### **Current writings: a colourful kaleidoscope**

Current writings are more like a colourful kaleidoscope. John Dryden had said about Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as coming with "God's plenty." One can perhaps say the same about **current trends** in writing. Each genre reflects back social, economic and political scene in current times. Capitalist world is saturated in oil. Petroculture fiction talks about how oil and its products have seeped into our lives and changed it in unthinkable ways. Here one finds man vulnerable to oil imperialism that has gone on to degrade global environment. Upton Sinclair had taken up oil theme way back in 1927 in his novel by the same name that focuses on greed that exists in man. It is this greed that has destroyed humanity, justice, religion and all soft feelings in money

oriented set up of today's global world. Oil as western imperialistic force is also discussed by Amitav Ghosh in his "The Circle of Reason" (1986).

Drugs have always made their presence felt in literary field; be it in the life of a writer or his works. Research work by students is being enthusiastically taken up under the genre of Opium literature. Romantic criticism freely discusses effect of this drug on writing of Coleridge, George Crabbe and De Quincey. Opium that was supposed to be therapeutic in nature became means of recreation. Coleridge understood its power over imagination. Indian author, Amitav Ghosh, takes up Opium theme in his prize winning work, *Sea of Poppies*. Man Booker Prize winner novel talks about English Imperialism and Opium trade that flourished around Bay of Bengal. This novel can be analysed from different angles. Evil at home and society can be seen across pages of this novel. It reflects upon **current trends** of everyday life in **contemporary world**. Book takes up issue of rape, racism, casteism, escapism and accursed slavery system. Ghosh has carried Opium theme in another wonderful novel, *River of Smoke* (2011). Ghosh brings love and peripeteia in his stories. His spectacular narratives resound with contemporary resonance. Drug theme crops up in Jack Kerouac's roman a clef novel, *On the Road*. This piece of writing is also studied as a travel fiction. Here we have an autobiographical masterpiece of a lonely man, a melancholy person who is in search of something that would give meaning to his meaningless existence. About his writing, Kerouac remarked that it was impressionist in style. Once again like Ghosh's novel, Kerouac too takes up more than one theme in his novel, Here again a man is trying to escape American capitalism by hitting the road. Though not a religious novel, the story is about a person who is in search of "God". There is enough spiritualism in Kerouac's personal life and fiction; it is omnipresent in subtle manner and this reminds one about 'Epiphanies' of James Joyce. In Kerouac's life these are marked as hallucinations.

Celebrating the ordinary brings **contemporary** writing closer to one's heart. Chetan Bhagat has managed to do so through his masterpiece, *One Night at the Call Centre*. Multi-

Nationals have opened up doors to millions of aspiring job seekers around the world. His novel talks about dreary lives of these hard task bearers in a subtle manner. He not only touches upon poverty and need for work as driving force, but also takes up effect of new life style on social and cultural life of modern Indians. Here big battles are fought to maintain balance in life that has been disturbed by a lying boss, false security provided by cheating husband and peer pressure to make children do what parents want out of them. Novel comes with hope for mankind through self-realization. Novel rightly takes up **current trends** when it discusses merits of technology and what it can do for society that appreciates materialistic lifestyle. There is no accepted universal beauty or love in this book. Characters learn to deal with problems that have arisen in life, adapt to new life style and have jest to move forward. Book can be explored for its feminism nuances. There is pragmatic approach to life in the story that concentrates on lives of characters and their needs. Here ethics are rejected as they are considered to be social constructs; instead they are re-evaluated and accepted for their usefulness. Chetan Bhagat motivates readers to look at life in realistic manner. Here morals do not figure as a barrier to emotional fulfilment; albeit, characters come to an understanding that different circumstances demand different and appropriate actions.

Latest in **current trends** is readers' interest in Pandemic literature that has been fuelled by Chinese writer, Fang Fang. Her eyewitness account during isolation period in Wuhan had been brought out as *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from a Quarantined City*. Her diary calls for movement away from individual existence that has been popular with existentialists. For a long time now, as reflected in literary texts, man has been feeling "the existential angst". Novels of writer's like Sylvia Plath and Arun Joshi have been talking about people who feel disoriented and confused in a world that seems both absurd and meaningless to them. Wuhan tragedy and tragic scenes from all over the world have drawn people closer. Today each person is feeling the "despair". But this is a different kind of despair. It is not existentialist despair that exists without hope for a

better tomorrow. Present day despair is fighting against confining restraints as put up by Covid-19. Fang Fang's writing has given active voice to woes of humanity by openly talking about psychological turmoil as felt by isolated and traumatized masses. Past few years have seen a rise in psychological cases. Silent disease had been spreading slowly and steadily, even young generation was not spared. But what books hinted at and what psychologists tried to treat, that disease seems to have taken a back seat in present times. Corona seems to have shaken man out of lethargic/sleepy state of mind. Though physically locked in, man is desperately trying to search online libraries for something that would provide glimpses into a sunlit bright new future. More literary texts carrying horrific tales from earlier pandemics and epidemics are being downloaded and read to relieve oneself by immersing in make-believe fictional world where death and tears are a way of life in order to escape living death that is roaming around the world. More belief in God is doing away with nihilist attitude that has been stalking man for quite some time. Fang's diary has sounded the bugle for a moralistic approach towards present predicament. On reading Fang's diary, one recalls a call for all humanitarian approaches as mentioned in *La Peste* (1947), (*The Plague* by Albert Camus), a novel on plague that ravaged France.

### Conclusion

Contemporary writings can be approached for step away from all that draws man towards negativities that surround him. Man who feels pressed down by his own follies, finds thread of hope running through these current writings. Optimistic narratives goad man to break shackles created by his own self to seek fresh pastures for a new and healthy life. By identifying himself with the characters, reader can overcome his weaknesses and shortcomings as he is reminded time and again that to make mistakes is not a crime. Works discussed in the paper can be seen from an angle where there is celebration of life amidst chaos.

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