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## INDIAN ENGLISH NOVEL: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

“It is only novels in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties the liveliest effusions of wit and humor are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.” This definition of novel has been given by Jane Austen who has beautifully described the meaning and importance of novel in one’s life. As we know that literature is the mirror of society and a form of art. Study of it allows everyone to gain access to deeply imagined lives other than our own. It helps an individual to present himself or herself as an educated member of the society, it entails the contemplation of the essence of the society and how people work within the confines of the structure of the society. This paper attempts to present the saga of the Indian English Novel stands as the lovely tale of transforming tradition and customs, the tale of a transforming India.

**Keywords:** Fictional piece, women novelists, female education, political domain and society

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### Introduction

Indian novels have been untrodden enough to exhaustively reflect the history, society, economic and political domain and the tradition of Indian subcontinent navigating since the ages. The novel is a one of the genres of literature that everyone recognizes at sight. In spite of uncountable varieties of method and manner, the differences in the appeal it makes to its readers stand clearly apart from any other literary shape. Its medium is prose, not verse; as to content, it is a portrayal of life, in the shape of a story, wholly or in the main as to its way of fictitious; as to its way of portraying life, though the pretence of exact

reporting of indiscriminate detail is generally regarded as a mistaken kind of realism, and much latitude is allowed to plot and surprise, everything recounted is required to be credible, or at least to have a definite and unchanging relation to the facts of existence.

The Novel is concerned with the real world; its aim is to present a world as like as possible to the actual world, not to fashion a new one to the heart’s desire. Some would have it that a novel is not a novel unless it has certain habitual features, such as a plot and love interest. But since there are novels without them which have been universally acclaimed as among the best, there seems little

reason for insisting on these alleged essentials. Most novels have them, some have done brilliantly without; but no work of fiction would be accorded the name of novel unless it were a prose story, picturing real life, or something corresponding thereto, and having the unity and consistency due to a plot or scheme of some kind or to a definite intention and attitude of mind on the part of author.

As far as novel is concerned, it originated in Europe. It stepped into the non-European countries stealthily with the establishment of European colonies

The story of the Indian English is really the story of a changing India. There was a time when education was rare opportunity and speaking English was unnecessary. The stories were already there in myths, in the folklores and the umpteen languages and cultures that gossiped, conversed, laughed and cried all over the sub-continent. India has always been a land of stories, the demarcation between ritual and reality being very narrow. The novel is considered to be an exotic plant on the Indian English literary ground. Thus, the Indian English novel is an example of literary hybridization of Indian content and Western form.

The Indian English novel flourishes when a wave of imaginative creativeness patriotism has spent its force. The Indian English novel erupted in the fiery talks of Henry Derezi, the spiritual prose of Tagore and the pacifist dictums preached by Gandhi. The earliest fictional pieces were attempted by Kylash Chunder Dull and Shoshee Chunder Dull, but they were not in the form of novels. It was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1834-94) who introduced novel in its right form in India with the publication of his novel in English, Rajmohan's Wife (1864).

Up to the end of the nineteenth century, most of the novels were on social and a few on historical issues, and for their models they owe, in fact, to the eighteenth and the nineteenth century British fiction, especially Defoe, Fielding and Scoff. During 1864 to 1900 there came novels like Ram Krishna Punt's The Bay of Bengal (1866), Tarachand Mookerjee's The Scorpions or Eastern Thoughts

(1868) Lal Behari Day, s Govind Samanta, or The History of Bengal Raiyat (1874), Ananda Prasad Dutt's The Indolence (1878), Shoshee Chunder Dutt's 'The Young Zamidar (1883), Trailokya Nath Das' Hirimba's Wedding (1884), Mirza Moorad Alee Beg's Lalun, The Beragun, or The Battle of Panipat (1884), Sanjihi Mull's The Interesting Story of Prince Pooran (1886), Michel Madhusudan Dutt's Bfloy Chand: An Indian Tale (1888) and Lt. Suresh Biswas: His Life and Adventures (1900), Yogendranath Chattopadhyaya's The Girl and Her Tutor (1891) B.R. Rajam Iyer's Fragment of a Religious Novel etc.

One astonishing thing regarding the development of Indian English Fiction is the emergence of women novelists; female education was not being flourished and it took a little bit of time to spread. Before the turn of the nineteenth century three female fiction writers were chiefly dominated. These were Toru Dutt (1856-77), Krupabai Sathianadhan and Shevantibal M. Nikambe.

The twentieth century began with novelists of more solid work. Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) translated his own Bengali novels into English. These were The Lake of Palms: A Story of Indian Domestic life (1902), and The Slave Girl of Agra, an Indian Historical Romance (1909). Another novels produced by Sarath Kumar Ghosh were one of the best fictional examples of East-West relationship. Besides, a Punjabi novelist Sirdar Jogendra Singh's works Nur Jahan, The Romance of Indian Queen (1909), a historical novel; Nasrin, An Indian Medley (1919) Kamla (1925) and Kammi (1931) were prominent.

Stray novels mostly by the writers belonging to the Bengal and Madras presidencies, appeared on the scene. These include ST. Ram's Cosmopolitan Hindustani (1902), M. Venkatsiya Naidu's The Princess Kamla or The Model Wife (1904), LB. Pal's A Glimpse of Zanana Life in Bengal (1904), SM.Mitra's Hindupore, A Peep behind the Indian Unrest - An Anglo Indian Romance (1909), SB. Banerjea's The Adventures of Mrs. Russell (1909), Balkrishna's The Love of Kusuma An Eastern Love Story (1910), BK.Sarkar's Man of Letters (1911), M. M. Munshis Beauty and Joy

(1914), Svarna Kumari Ghosal's The Fatal Garland (1915), T.R. Krishnaswamy's Salma: A Tale of the Times of Old (1916), T.K. Gopal Pannikar's Storm and Sunshine (1916), Srinivasa Rau's Varanasi: The Portugese Ambassador (1917) and C. Parthasarthy's Sangili Karuppan, or The Wheel of Destiny (1920).

During the period of 1920-1947, under the dynamic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi all established political notions started disappearing from the scene. According to Nehru, "Gandhi was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths".<sup>1</sup> Soon after, the novelists changed their direction from the past concentrating on contemporary issues. The Indian English Fiction writing of Gandhian era justifies EM. Forester's remark about the modern novel as playing vital role of portraying "life by time".

The Nationwide movement of Gandhi ji brought many social or political changes. It can be perceived in K.S. Venkatramani's Murugan, The Tiller (1927) and Kandan, The Patriot: A Novel of New India in Making (1932). Then came A.S.P. Ayyer, a Tamilian novelist Krishna Swamy Nagarajan and others depicted the combined effect of realism and irony.

Indian English novel owes much to the efforts of the great trio Mulk Raj Anand (b. 1905), R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) and Raja Rao (b. 1908), for providing a solid base and achieving an identity of its own.

It was these three who defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established the supposing, the manner, the idiom, the concept of character and the nature of the themes which were to give the Indian novel its particular distinctiveness.<sup>2</sup>

With the coming of the trio, the Indian English novel had begun its journey. Mulk Raj Anand's fictional writing bears, what he himself calls, the double burden of "the Alps of the European tradition and the Himalayas of my Indian past".<sup>3</sup> With the advent of his first novel, Untouchable (1935) up to the latest novel, Nine Moods of Bharata: Novel of a Pilgrimage (1998), his

works have been obsessed with autobiographic experiences. In Coolie (1936) by Mulk Raj Anand, the social disparity in India was laid bare. His Two Leaves and A Bud [1937] presents the contrast between rural and urban India and race relations. Among his other novels like The Village (1939) Across the Black Waters (1941), The Sword and The Sickle (1942), The Big Heart (1945), Seven Summers (1951) The Old Woman and The Cow (1960) The Road (1963), The Death of a Hero (1964), Morning Face (1970), Confession of a lover (1976), The Bubble (1984), Little Plays of Mahatma Gandhi (1991) and Nine Moods of Bharata: Novel of a Pilgrimage (1998). Captured by the works of Sarat Chandra in Bengali, Prem Chand in Hindi, Tolstoy and Ruskin and Gandhis reform movement, Anand dealt with the problems of the downtrodden and delineated their struggle, dejection and courage in reality.

So far as R. K. Narayan is concerned, he kept himself aloof from the prevailing socio political issues of the contemporary period. He created an imaginary village. In his imaginary village Malgudi, the invisible men and women of our teeming population came to life and act out life with all its perversities and whimsicalities. Before independence Narayan produced Swami and Friends (1935), The Bachelor of Arts (1937), The Dark Room (1938), and The English Teacher (1946). Later his work reached to maturity and appeared after independence; The Financial Expert (1952), The Guide (1958), The Man Eater of Malgudi (1962), Waiting for Mahatma (1955), The Vender of Sweets (1967), The Painter of Signs (1976), A Tiger for Malgudi (1983), Talkative Man (1983), The World of Nagaraj (1990) and Grandmother's Tale (1992). In contrast to Anand's militant humanism or realism, Narayan explores "the staying power of the society.... whose hundred ills have not destroyed the moral and spiritual base of the individual."<sup>4</sup>

The youngest of the trio, Raja Rao's place in the realm of Indian English fiction is safe as the most Indian of Indian Novelists in English, as stylist, symbolist, mythmaker, the finest painter of East-West encounter and as a philosophical novelist. Till recently he has published just five novels, the first being Kanthapura (1938), The Serpent and the

Rope,(1960) The Cat and Shakespeare (1965), Comrade Kirilov (1976) and the latest being The Chess Master and His Moves (1988).

After the advent of independence, several complications took place in social, political, economic and cultural spheres but India handled them. thoughtfully and kept on progressing step by step. The fact of being independent spurred the Indian English writing. The more serious novelist has shown how the joy of freedom has been more than neutralized by the tragedy of the 'partition'. It broadened their vision and introspecting faculty. "As a total result of these developments, important gains were registered especially in fiction, poetry and criticism. Fiction, already well- established, grew in both variety and stature."<sup>5</sup>

Next came Bhabani Bhattacharai (1906-89) who was deeply influenced by Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi. He realized that "a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before reader something from the society's points of view."<sup>6</sup> Bhabani believed that Art must teach, but unobtrusively, but its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach, but only by virtue of its being a vehicle of truth. Undoubtedly, Bhabani's fiction carried social purpose but occasionally he succeeded in achieving vivid interpretation of life. In his first novel, So Many Hungers (1947), he dealt with the theme of exploitation on all levels. Then appeared Music for Mohini (1952), He Who Rides a Tiger (1952), A Goddess Named Gold (1960) Shadow from Laddakh (1996) and finally A Dream in Hawaii (1978).

An interesting thing was the growth of an entire school of women novelist; the prominent figures being Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamla Markandya, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai. Some fresh faces appeared on the Indian English fictional screen like Chaman Nahal and Awn Joshi by the end of nineteen sixties. Though a realist, unlike Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar with the publication of Distant Drum (1960) declares, "I do strive deliberately and hard to tell a story well . I feel special allegiance to ... the entertainers, the teller of stories."<sup>7</sup>His Combat of Shadows (1962) derives its title and epigraph from the Bhagavad Gita.

Malgonkar's best novel The Princess (1963) happens to be the best political novel.

With the publication of his famous novel Train to Pakistan (1956), Khushwant Singh, a shining star in the galaxy of Indian English novelists, came into limelight as a crude realist. His second novel, I shall not hear The Nightingale (1959), presents an ironic scene of a Sikh joint family symbolizing different Indian reactions to the freedom movement. His crude realism takes place in his each novel. This includes Delhi (1992) and The Company of women (1999) also. He himself says that his "roots are in the dung hill of a tiny village."

J. Menon Marath (b. 1906) presents realism in his novels- Wound of Spring (1960), The sale of an Island (1960) and Janu (1968). Another novelist Ball Chandra Rajan presents a blend of realism and fantasy in his novel The Dark Dancer (1959), Too Long in the West (1961) and many others. G.V. Desani's All About H. Hatter (1948) was a daring steps on the ground of Indian English experimental novel. Keeping the major novelists aside, one shall find few novelists, during the post-Independence period. Anand Lal, M.V. Rama, Jatindra Mohan Ganguli, Roman Basu and so on. Ruskin Bond produced The Room on The Roof (1966) followed by An Axe for The Rani (1972) and Love is a Sad Story (1975), and A Flight of Pigeons.

After the advent of independence, women novelists, too, have started enriching Indian English fiction. They create a significant school including Kamla Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal and Anita Desai, being the most outstanding of them. As far as the novels of Kamla Markandaya (b.1924) are concerned, they show much wider range or a rich variety of selling, character and effect. Her first novel, Nectar in a Sieve (1964), is a woeful tale of the trials and tribulations of an innocent couple, Nathan and Rukmani, of a South Indian village. Her next novel, Some Inner Fury (1957) deals with the straining of human relationship in the wake of the Quit India Movement. A Silence of Desire (1961) represents the conflict being the spiritualism and modernism. Possession (1963) Kamla's fourth novel is in a sense, a continuation of A Silence of Desire. In A

Hand full of Rice (1966) she avoids the disturbing extravagance of obsession extravagance in scene and situation. Two Virgins (1973) depicts the influence of western culture and revolt by the protagonists for shaping their careers. In The Coffey Dams(1969) she deals with the theme of East-West encounter from a different angle by showing the conflict between technological power and the forces of nature symbolized by turbulent south Indian river. After this published The Golden Honey Comb (1977), and Pleasure City (1982). Mostly in all her novels Kamla Markandaya “has treated the theme of, the East West confrontation more comprehensive than any other Indian English novelist.”<sup>8</sup>

In the course of a little over a decade, Mrs. Ruth Praver Jhabvala (b. 1927) has published six novels To Whom She Will(1955), The Nature of Passion (1956), Esmond in India (1958), The House Holder (1960), Get Ready for Battle (1952) and A backward Place (1965). The most remarking feature of Jhabvala’s novels is the use of subtlety and skillfulness to disentangle the “gossamer Threads of intricate human relationship”.(AHIEL,235)After 1980, she has produced In Search of Love and Beauty (1983), The Continents (1987), Poet and Dancer (1993) and Shards of Memory (1995). Though she left India in 1975, but her preoccupation with India continues. As she herself claims, “I cannot claim that India has disappeared out of synonymously, myself and my work: even when not overtly figuring there its influence is always present.”<sup>9</sup>

Nayantara Sahgal (b.1927) another star in the galaxy of Indian English fiction depicts the political turmoil of the outside world and the private torment of individuals in her novels. Her novels include Time to be Happy (1958), This Time of Morning (1968), Storm in Chandigarh (1969), The Day in Shadow.(1971), A Situation in New Delhi (1977), Rich Like us (1985), Plans Four Departure (1985), and Mistaken Identity (1988). In all her novels, Mrs. Sahgal’s feelings for politics and her command over English are rather more impressive than her art as a novelist. Anita Desai (b.1937) is the most prominent among the English novelists who has tried to portray the dilemma of human

souls trapped in the adverse situation of life. In almost all of her novels Desai deals with the issues of the private torments of broken marriages, emotional fiasco and the failure of communication between individuals. Anita Desai has contributed a series of novels like Clear light of day (1980), The Village by the Sea: An Indian Family Story (1982), In Custody (1984), Baumgartner’s Bombay (1988), Journey to Ithaca (1995), and then Fasting, Feasting (1999). In her two novels Cry of The Peacock (1963), and Voices in the City (1965). Anita Desai has added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian Women writers in English fiction. Nevertheless, Anita Desai is an original talent that has the courage to go its own way.

Being a psychological novelist, Anita Desai plunges deep into the dark realms of the minds of her characters. For this purpose, she employs the language of thoughts and interior selves of her character. She employs images, symbols and myths.

During the contemporary period spanning 1980 to 2000, some of the women novelists made their debut in the nineteen seventies. Among these included Raji Narasimhan’s The Heart of Standing is You Cannot Fly (1973), Forever Free (1979), Drifting to a Dawn (1983), The Sky Change (1992), and Atonement (2000) Bharti Mukhejee with her novels Tiger’s Daughter (1972), Wife (1975), Jasmine (1989), The Holder of the World (1993), and Leave it to Me (1997) got extreme success. Veena Nagpal with her Karmayogi (1974), and Compulsion (1975); Kamala Das with Alphabet of Lust (1976); Rama Mehta, who produced, The Sahitva Akaderny Award winners, (1979) Inside the Haveli (1977); Shouri Daniel with The Salt Doll (1977); and Uma Vasudeva, who made her debut with the publication of The Song of Anusuya (1978), followed by Shreva of Sangarsh (1993).

Some of the remarkable women novelists, who started their literary career in the nineteen eighties and have been making contribution to the stream of Indian English novels, are: Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Mrinal Pande, Arundhati Roy and Shobha De.

Shashi Deshpande (b.1938) one of the outstanding novelist her writing is influenced by her

deep rootedness in middle class Indian society. She refrains from speaking frankly, "Understatement is the hallmark of her work."<sup>(Naik & Narayan)</sup> Her novels include The Dark Holds No Terrors (1980), If I Die Today (1982), Come Up and Be Dead (1983), Roots and Shadows (1983), A Matter of Time (1996), and Small Remedies (2000). Her work is woman-oriented and she paints characters who blame their own compliances for their sorry condition.

Githa Hariharan (b.1954) is another well-known writer who made her public appearance in the nineteen-nineties with The Thousand Faces of Night (1992) followed by The Ghosts of Vasu Master (1994), and When Dreams Travel (1999), a type of feminist retelling of The Arabian Nights. Then came Mrinal Pande (b.1946) with her Daughter's Daughter (1993), and My Own Witness (2000). Another star in the galaxy of Indian English fiction is Arundhati Roy who made her debut with the Booker Prize winning The God of Small Things (1997). She begins her story without a beginning and does not really end it while Jhumpa Lahiri's well-crafted tales move at a perfect place.

Shobha De, is an eminent Indian novelist, who is often known as India's Jackie Collins. She is the founder - editor of Stardust film magazine, is famous to Indian magazine readers as the queen of gossip. Her first novel, Socialite Evenings (1989) deals with the attraction of a young middle-class girl to the work of films and modeling. The Narratives of Shobha De like Starry Nights, 1991; Sisters, (1992; Strange Obsession, 1992; Sultry Days, 1994; Snapshots, 1995; Second Thoughts, 1996; and Spouse, 2009 would seem to belong less to serious fiction than to pulp writing. They are "entertainments"<sup>(Nail & Narayan,114-115)</sup> rather than novels proper.

By the end of the sixties and in the early seventies of the last century newer voices were heard on the pulpit of Indian English fiction, the most striking of them being Arun Joshi (1939-93), and Chaman Nahal (b.1927). In all Joshi wrote five novels. Before 1980 he published The Foreigner (1968), The Strange Case of Billy Biswas (1971), and The Apprentice (1979). Then appeared The Last Labyrinth (1961) The winner of Sahitya Academy

Award in 1982, and The City and The River (1990). In all his novels he deals with the themes of alienation and involvement, East-West encounter and compromise, love and hate and existentialism and materialism. Chaman Nahal most outstanding work before the eighties was Azadi(1975), based on the theme of partition. After 1980 Nahal produced The Crown and the Loincloth (1981), The Salt of Life (1990), The Triumph of The Tricolour (1993), Sunrise in Fiji(1988) and The Boy and the Mountain (1997).

After 1980, the Indian Diaspora raised the curtain on the fantastic mythical relative that was part of domestic conversation in the villages. Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) fascinates critics with his 'chutnification' of history and language as well. He opened the doors to a plethora of writers. Along with Salman Rushdie there have been some other remarkable figures, namely Amitav Ghosh (b. 1956), Shashi Tharoor (b. 1956), Vikram Seth (b. 1952), and Amit Chaudhary (b. 1962). Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981) brought a new era in the history of Indian English fiction. His other achievements include Grimus (1975), Shame (1983), The Satanic Verses (1988), Haroun and the Sea of Stories (1990), The Moor's Last Sigh (1995), and The Ground Beneath her Feet (1999). Amitav Ghosh initiated with The Circle of Reason (1986) followed by In an Antique Land (1992), The Calcutta Chromosome (1986) and The Glass Palace (2000). Shashi Tharoor's first novel The Great Indian Novel (1989) is one of the finest examples of post modern fiction. Vikram Seth published The Golden Gate (1986) in verse. In 1993 and 1999 appeared A Suitable Boy and An Equal Music respectively. Amit Chaudhary has produced four novels so far namely A Strange and Sublime Address (1991) actually a novelle; Afternoon Raag (1993), Freedom Song (1998) and A New World (2000).

The India English novel has passed through a tough time but today the case is different, It began with a bang when Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and by the time V.S. Naipaul bagged the same; the Indian English novel had a far flung reach. New Indian English literature is readily accepted abroad also. And not only this, the Indian English novelists have proved them by overtaking the novelists, whose native language is English, in

the race of begging major literary awards. Still the Indian audience and the rest of the world have a lot to look forward to.

Undoubtedly Indian novelists are the creative masterminds behind such ravishing story, plots and nonstop mashes in language. Today Indian Novels have reached to the height of success and secured a notable status not only in Indian market, but also globally. The much has been done in this field yet more is about to.

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