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Indian English Literature: An Analysis

V.W. Wahule

Twentieth century has witnessed significant developments in English literature in various parts of the world. It has developed not only in England and America, but more significantly it has developed in India, Canada, Africa, Australia, and the West Indies and so on. Due to historic reasons, English has taken deep roots in India and Indian writers in English have successfully introduced the Indian culture and society to the Western world with the result that the West has accepted India as a land of fascinating cultures, traditions and rituals.

Down the ages, the place of women in the tradition, “bound male dominated Indian society had been quite unenviable” (Rani 147) and the growth of English in India has seen the emergence of several women writers writing in English and it is of great importance and marks the dawn of a new age of brightness for Indian women. Modern literature plays a vital role in formatting the reader’s consciousness, by providing a glimpse into the female psyche and the female experience.

V.W. Wahule: Dept of English, Jawahar College, Anadur, Osmanabad (MS) India.
Jawahar Arts, Science & Commerce College
Anadur, Tal. Tuljapur, Dist. Osmanabad

Indian writing in English in postmodern age various novels are gaining ground and making a separate and independent entity of its own. Now the age of obscurity and oblivion has reached completely to an end and the withered and uprooted tree, once again, has taken its roots in the solid ground of Indian culture and tradition. In its early stages, the Indian writings in English were especially influenced by the Western art form of the novel. It was typical for the early Indian English language writers to use English unadulterated by Indian words to convey experiences that were primarily Indian. The core reason behind this step was the reality that most of the readers were either British or British educated Indians. In the twentieth century, the writings were largely confined to writing history chronicles and government gazettes.

In the early twentieth century, when the British conquest of India was achieved, a new class of writers started to emerge on the block. These writers were essentially British who were born or brought up or both in India. Their writing consisted of Indian themes and sentiments but the way of storytelling was primarily western. They had no reservation in using native words, though, to signify the context. This group consisted of Rudyard Kipling, Jim Corbett and George Orwell among others.

The period begins in the 1930s with the arrival of the three major Indo-Anglian novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. This coincides with the final phase of the nationalist movement which for the first time in Indian history awoke the masses of Indian people to their political rights and responsibilities. During this period, India’s conception of caste, which had strangled social behaviour for some thousands of years, was revolutionized, and Mahatma Gandhi’s christianised and individual version of *Karma* and *Bhakti* was gradually replaced by the philosophical and practical materialism and individualism typified by the modernizing and industrializing instincts of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India.

The trends in Indian English literature written by Indians have changes every year by year. Earlier it was more

influenced by colonial and Western philosophy. Also the genre of novel and short stories had become hugely popular and writers were exploring new themes within this genre. The advent of the printing press had ensured a vast readership and also encouraged writers to explore their writing talent. Indian English writing started with authors like Sarojini Naidu. This great poetess charmed the readers with her writings. Feminist themes have also been used by authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta. Regional fiction theme has been aptly used by Kamala Das, Anita Nair and Susan Viswanathan. Novelists like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai captured the spirit of Indian culture and its traditional values. During the 1990's India became a popular literary nation as a number of women authors made their debut in this era. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti Namjoshi and Anuradha Marwah Roy used realism as main theme of their novels.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century Indian women novelists tried to reveal the obstacles women faced and the disadvantages they had in a Hindu world. Fiction by the early women in various Indian languages was a brave effort to articulate the mute sufferings of their unfortunate sisters incarcerated and segregated in the dark corners of the household for ages. The twentieth century has seen a concerted effort on the part of women writers to understand and analyze the myriad forces that determine the position and image of women in society. While the liberal feminists focused on the denial of equality in political and liberal rights, the Western Marxist feminists as well as those in the Third World concentrated on class oppression and male control over the systems of production. The woman, known for her productive powers, her sexuality and morality, her mobility and her political legal, social, economic, rights, is controlled by the male. We have a number of noted women novelists who enriched Indian English fiction by the creative release of feminine sensibility since Independence.

The woman is the focus of writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De. They all have presented women in a

new light, women who are educated and want to assert their individuality and freedom from men. "The works of Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De can be compared to those of The Canadian writers like Margate Atwood, Margaret Lawrence and Aretha Van Hark who write of life as seen and experienced by women" (Ravindran 10). It is also notable here.

The Indian English novel evolved as a subaltern consciousness; as a reaction to break away from the colonial literature. Hence the post colonial literature in India witnessed a revolution against the idiom which the colonial writers followed. Gradually the Indian English authors began employing the techniques of hybrid language, magic realism mixed with native themes. Thus from a post colonial era, Indian literature ushered into the modern and then the post-modern era. The saga of the Indian English novel therefore stands as the tale of changing tradition, the story of a changing India.

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