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Major Trends in Post Independence Indian English Novel

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The entire history of Indian English Novel can broadly be divided into two periods—pre-independence and post independence. The pre-independence period witnessed a slow growth of Indian English novel since the publication of Bankimchand Chatterjee's *Ram Mohan's Wife* in 1864. The novelists of this period mainly wrote under the influence of Gandhism and nationalism. They devoted their novels, one the one hand, to the exposition of social evils, customs & traditions, rites & rituals, poverty & illiteracy, bonds & bondages and, on the other, made their works a powerful medium of highlighting the east-west encounter and of spreading the nationalistic ideas of the great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. While Mulk Raj Anand & R.K. Narayan throughout remained preoccupied with the treatment of social & national issues in their novels, Raja Rao made a departure from the dominant trend by assigning ample space to the richness of Indian philosophy in his *The Serpent & the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare*. The Partition left an indelible impact on the psyche of a few writers & led them to highlight its ill effects in their writings. Prominent among such writers are Manohar Malgaokar, Kushwant Singh & Chaman Nahal. The novels produced in the pre-independence period depicted the changing sociopolitical scene and thereby won the attention of the novel reading public. The novels of Mulk Raj Anand produced during this period extensively deal with several aspects of social reform such as exploitation of the untouchable, the landless peasants, tea garden workers and the problems of industrial labour. *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves & a Bud* and *Big Heart* are milestones in Anand's Journey of social reform. These novels concentrated on social reforms so much that one of the critics Aniah Gowda declares him as the most conspicuously committed writer and his writing as propaganda writing. The trend of depicting the social issues for the purpose of social reform got strengthened with the publication of G.V. Desai's *All About Hatter*, the recognised classic and Bhavani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*. While Desai's *All About Hatter* concentrates on the frontiers of social realism and stresses the need of social reform, Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* studies the socio-economic effects of Bengal famine of early forties.

R. K. Narayan, who began his series of Malgudi novels with *Swami & Friends* in (1933), added a new dimension to the novel of social reforms and revived Hardy's convention of regionalism. As M.K. Naik puts it, "A single minded practitioner of the novel of local colour, he, however, produced his best work after independence when the little small town ironies of his microcosm developed into an awareness of the layer of existential irony of human nature & life."¹ Like Anand, Narayan was preoccupied with Indian characters & settings. Although Anand presented both lower class & upper class people as major characters in his novels. Narayan always concentrated on the common place characters. That he has named his important novels such as *Mr. Sampath*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The English Teacher*, *The Financial Expert*, *The Vendor of Sweets* & *Painter of Signs* after the common place people shows that he is a novelist with deep concern for the average persons. Although both Anand & R.K. Narayan extensively travelled abroad, they preferred to choose the social realities of Indian life as focal points of discussion in their novels and never picked up any alien situations or persons to describe in their fictional world. The last of the Big Trio- Raja Rao made his mark by treating both Indian and non Indian characters with great skill in *The Serpent and the Rope* and heralded the onset of the trend of delineating the alien situations or persons in fiction. The theme of east-west encounter

depicted in this novel marks the beginning of the tradition of highlighting the interaction between the Oriental and Occidental people and cultures.

Thus, in the pre-independence period the Indian English fiction projected the themes of nationalism, social reform, east-west encounter, degeneration of values, rural-urban conflict, freedom struggle and plight of the untouchable and the landless poor. The Big Three—M.R. Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao dominated the entire literary scene and their contribution led to the growth of novel as a social portraiture. The theme of freedom struggle occupied an important place among the major concerns of pre-independence Indian English Novel. After independence this theme continued to captivate the attention of a few novelists. K.A. Abbas' *Inquilab* treats this theme in an objective manner. Kushwant Singh's second novel *I shall not Hear the Nightangle* portrayed the theme of freedom struggle with the fusion of satire and religion. In Chaman Nahal's *The Crown and the Loincloth*, the struggle for freedom during Gandhian age has been limited with the intermingling of the historical, the fictional, the tragic, the comic and the ironic. Kamala Markandaya's *Some inner fury* also portrays this theme although its main focus is on the romanticising of the historical events. R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatama* and Nayantara Sahagal's *Time to be Happy* are the best examples of the theme of freedom struggle.

The ill effects of Partition moved a few Indian English novelists to evocatively deal with this turbulent political phenomenon in their fictional world. Prominent among such novelists are Khushwant Singh, Attia Hosain, Manohar Malgaonker, Balchand V. Rajan, Chaman Nahal & Raj Gill. Khushwant is the first novelist to present this theme as a thought provoking saga of post-partition traumas experienced by both Muslims & Hindus. His first novel *Train to Pakistan*, the most forceful novel on Partition depicts this political calamity in a thought provoking manner. Like Khushwant Singh, Raj Gill Nahal has focused on the pre & post Partition conditions in his novel *The Rape*. Similarly Chaman Nahal is preoccupied with the presentation of an exhaustive account of this political trauma in his partition novel *Azadi*. The novel also exposes the degeneration of values & collapse of system as horrible side effects of Partition. Balchandran Rajan's first novel *The Dark Dancer* attempts to combine the theme of Partition with the theme of East-West encounter. But, due to the main focus being on the East-West encounter, Rajan failed to treat this theme as efficiently & successfully as Khushwant Singh & Chaman Nahal. A *Bend in the Ganges*, a famous Partition novel by Manohar Malgaonkar deserves appreciation for an impressive presentation of the trauma of Partition. H.S. Gill in his novel *Ashes & Petals* presents the most thought provoking aspect of Partition-Killing of young girls by their fathers on being attacked by the extremists. Attia Hosain enjoys the distinction of being the only woman novelist to nostalgically depict Partition in her only novel, *Sun Light on a Broken Column*.

Politics and history inspired a couple of post Independence Indian English novelists to produce the novels that contained the political events & historical facts as major issues. Nayantara Sahagal appeared on the literary scene as a greatest political novelist in the history of Indian English novel. Of all her contemporaries she is most preoccupied with the political theme. She skillfully treated the leading political personalities & significant political issues in her novels viz. *This Time of the Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *A Situation in New Delhi* (1977). Thus, the political novel attained maturity and the major part of credit for this maturity went to Nayantara Sahagal in Post Independence Period. As compared to the political novel the historical novel could flourish due to certain factors. The most important examples of historical novel are Malgaonkar's *The Devil's Wind* and *The Sea Hawk*, Bhagwan S. Gidwani's *The Sword of Tipu Sultan*, Ahmed Ma Akhtar's *The Monument*, Raina's *Ambapali*, Modak's *Single in the Wheel*, Jafa's *Nurjahan* and Kamala Markandaya's *The Golden Honeycomb*.

The east-west encounter captivated the attention of post independence Indian English novelists more vigorously than any other theme. This theme was extensively treated in Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* G.V. Desai's *All About the Hatter*, Kamala Markandaya's *The Nowhere Man*, *Some Inner Fury*, *Possession* and *The Coffin Dams*, Rama Rao's *Remember the House*, Manohar Malgaonkar's *Combat of Shadows*, Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Esmond and India* and *Heat and Dust*, B. Rajan's *The Dark Dancer and Too Long in the West*. The presentation of reactions of an Indian on returning home from abroad is focus of the most of these novels. Some other novels explore another facet of East West encounter—the problems & challenges faced by the Indians in making adjustments with the alien culture. Prominent among such novels are Victor Anant's *The Revolving Man*, Timeri Murari's *The Marriage Raginald* and Jamila Massey's *The Immigrants*, Shashi Brata's *She & He*, Saros Cowasjee's *Goodbye to Elsa*, M.V. Rama Surme's *The Stream & Look Homeward*, Romen Basu's *A Gift of Love*, *Candles and Rose and Portrait on the Roof*, Anita Desai's *Bye Bye the Black Bird*, Dilip Hiru's *A Triangular View*, K.D. Khosla's *Never the Twain*, Chaman Nahal's *Into Another Dawn* and S.S Dhami's *Maluka*, Jatindra, Mohan Ganguli's *When East and West Meet* and Bhaskar Rao's *The Secret*.

Another most significant feature of the Post Independence novels produced during the period between 1950s and 1980s was a shift of emphasis from the external to the internal, the socio-political issues to the individual problems. Although the Big Three throughout also highlighted the individual problems in their novels, they cannot be called novelists with a commitment to existential issues. Anita Desai & Arun Joshi carved out a niche for themselves in the history of Indian English novel by extensively & intensively dealing with the individual problems. Arun Joshi is preoccupied with existential issues such as quest for identity, alienation, rootlessness, meaninglessness & human predicament in the novels viz. *The Foreigner*, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, *The Last Labyrinth*, and *Apprentice* which were published during his life time. But in his last novel *The City & the River* which was posthumously published he drifted from harping on the existential issues and focused on the contemporary political scenario represented by the Period of Emergency during the rule of Indira Gandhi. But Anita Desai never treated the political issue as Arun Joshi did in his last fictional work. She skillfully explored the inner recesses of human psyche tormented by the existential problems & predicaments. The themes such as quest for identity, alienation and rootlessness have been touched upon by Anita Desai in her prominent novels viz *Journey to Ithaca* and *Fire on the Mountain*. Shastri Brata's *Confessions of an Indian Woman*, *Easter* and *She and He*, like Joshi's & Anita Desai's novels present the themes of alienation, rootlessness & futile search for meaning. Saros Cowsjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* and Shiv K. Kumar's *The Bone's Prayer & Nude before God* also highlight the existential issues. Y.P. Dhawan's *Beyond the Guru* and *Journey through Hell* effectively deal with the existentialist themes of alienation and question for meaning in life & evoke the feeling of disillusionment. Nayantara Sahgal's political novels also contain an undercurrent of existentialism.

Feminine sensibility has emerged as one of the most significant themes being treated by the post-Independence Indian English novelists. Although the trend of depicting this theme was set by the Big Three, it did not occupy as much important place in the pre independence novels as it did in the novels produced after 1950s. While Raja Rao's novels specially *The Serpent & the Rope* & *The Cat & Shakespeare* depicts the ideal womanhood as enshrined in our scriptures, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan have dealt with the predicament of women. Anand's *The Old Woman* and *The Cow* presents the central figure Gauri as submissive and meek like cow. Despite her submissiveness she is treated inhumanly by her husband who mercilessly draws her out of his house and sells her to Seth. R.K. Narayna has treated feminine sensibility in *Guide*, *The Dark Room*, and *The Painter of Signs*. The post Independence shift in the attitude to women has led to

the uplift of their status in society. Now they are not generally treated as inferior to men. This subject has now become the prime concern of a majority of post independence Indian English woman novelists. Prominent among such novelists are Anita Desai, Kamala Das, R. P. Jhabvala, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya and Manju Kapoor. The theme of Women's subjugation and their consequent predicament has also been treated by a few novelists such as Bhawani Bhattacharya, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai.

The trend of Magic Realism which was conspicuous by its absence in the novels produced before independence became the dominant genre in the post independence period. Emergence of Magic Realism led to the weakening of the tradition of social realism. As M.K. Naik says, Magic Realism is a jealous mistress, once you set up house with her, social realism becomes an unwelcome guest."³. G.V. Desai's *All About Hatterr* is the most sterling example of Magic Realism. Most of the post Independence novelists followed the tradition of Magic Realism set by G.V. Desai got strengthen in the hands of Salman Rushdie after G.V. Desai. Salman Rushdie's first novel *The Midnight's Children* which won the Booker of Bookers Prize is an outstanding example of the trend of Magic Realism. Although he employed this technique in his subsequent novels such as *Satanic Verses*, *The Moor's Last Sigh* and *the Ground Beneath Her Feet*, he was not as successful as when he wrote *The Midnight's Children* in this genre. Shashi Tharoor's first novel *The Great Indian Novel*, Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants*, Ranjit Lal's *The Crow Chronicles*, Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*, G.J.V. Prasad's *A Clean Breast*, Kiran Nigerkar's *Ravan and Eldie*, Tabish Kher's *An Angel in Pyjamas*, Rukun Advani's *Beethoven among the Cows*, Mukul Kesavan's *Looking Through Glass*, Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth* and *Pouring Rain*, and Makarand Paranjape's *The Narrator* are the typical examples of Magic Realism. The woman novelist did not lag behind in resorting to the technique of Magic Realism. Prominent among the novels produced by the woman novelists who wrote under the influence of Magic Realism were Suniti Namjoshi's first novel *The Mothers of Maya*, Dilip Nina Sibal's *Yatra*, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Species*, Rani Dharkar's *The Virgin Syndrome*, Radhika Jha's *Smell*, Sunny Singh's *Nani's Book of Suicide* and Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*.

Industrialization, urbanization, globalization & modernization constitute the minor themes recurrently & consistently treated in the Post Independence Indian English novel. Shashi Deshpande, the novelist of urban and western backgrounds highlighted these contemporary issues as an evidence of the impact of the contemporary realities on them. Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*, *A Silence of Desire* and *Pleasure City* presents the havoc played by the affluent people who are hell bent on the execution of their developmental plans at any cost in the rural areas, rich in natural resources. The jobless villagers for employment & rich villagers for availing the educational health & recreational facilities migrated to the cities after independence with the result that "the size of the cities started swelling to an enormous and unanticipated point causing new and more complicated problems for the urbanites. The big cities became horrible orchestras producing strange strains of hustle and bustle, noise and uproar, tension and worries."³

The scenario of urban life represented by pictures of the chaos, raised voices and raging tempers, squalors, honkers, horn blowers, the breaking streets caught the attention of the distinguished novelists like V.S. Naipaul, R.P. Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya and Aravind Adiga. Ruth Pravar Jhabvala's *To Whom She Will*, *The Nature of Passion* and *Get Ready for Better* extensively deal with urban life & its problems. The busy, noisy, mechanized and inhumanized existence of man in the metropolises such as Delhi & Calcutta constitutes the focal issues in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City* and *Cry the Peacock*. Impressed with Anita Desai's efficient handling of urban issues, H.M. Williams observes, "Anita

Desai is a poet of urban horror skillfully evoking a picture of streets and lanes scarred by abysmal poverty, the haunt of stinking syphilitic beggars, lepers and rickshaw men. The trains and overload buses stinking and cracking at the rush hours, blaring taxi hours, start vividly from the filth, refuse, blood and squalid littres of the sidewalks and verminous alleys. The characters move in the various circles and suburbs of the doomed metropolis. Smoke becomes a symbol of darkness and despair for Monisha Amla Nirode, the smoke that hangs thickly over the city, the smoke of the funeral ghats, and the smoke of Monisha's incinerated corpse "4

Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice* and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* depict the harsh realities of contemporary life in the cities of Madras & Delhi respectively Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* presents the challenge confronting the modern man in the cities of Dhanbad & Delhi, Bangalore and his second novel *Between the Assassinations* is about the city of Kittur. Kiran Desai in her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* has consistently presented the theme of globalization highlighting the gains & losses emanating from the emergence of global culture & economy.

Another most important feature of the post independence novel that distinguishes it from the pre-Independence novel is the recurrent use of situations and characters that are global. Although M.R. Anand & R.K. Narayan visited the western countries many times & even lived there for certain durations, their main concern remained confined mostly to the Indian characters & situations. But the contemporary novelists brought themselves out of the Indian boundaries & made their writing a window to the whole world. Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* is set in the U.S.A., with all the characters having western background. Likewise, the situations described and characters presented in his *An Equal Music* are British & European. Another novel that is devoted to the treatment of non Indian characters & situations is Joydeep Roy Bhattacharya's *The Gabriel Club*. Other novelists to depict the foreign characters & situations are Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh.

Though the trend of Magic Realism has dominated the post independent fiction scenario, the tradition of social realism has flourished and will continue to flourish because the novel being an index of cultural and social reality finds in it an inexhaustible source of material. Established by Mulk Raj Anand in the pre-independence period, the tradition of social realism has been furthered by Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Khushwant Singh, R.P. Jhabvalla, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Nayan Tara Sahagal, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and Aravind Adiga. The burning social issues such as class conflict, gender discrimination, the rich poor divide, caste system, suppressive measures adopted by the upper class while dealing with the lower class have been highlighted by novels after novels. The novelists like Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai, Ruth Prawar Jhabvalla and Arundhati Roy have lent voice to the voiceless women. Kamala Markandaya has highlighted the disastrous impact of industrialization on the rural people. The social realities characterizing the life in metropolises Delhi, Calcutta and Madras have been artistically presented by Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Ruth Prawar Jhabvalla, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De in their novels. Khushwant Singh's novels extensively deal with the thrilling life of the people of Punjab.

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