



TRENDS IN INDIAN CONTEMPORARY WRITING

DR. POOJA KUMARI,

Teacher

M.S.B.B. Sarairanjan, Samastipur

(BH) INDIA

ABSTRACT

*The 21st century has proved to the world that English literature is no longer the sole province of the imperial England. Although English literature started and flourished in England, it has gone on to sow the seeds of creativity in English in other parts of the world. Interestingly, the English people themselves paved the way for the unexpected developments that we witness today. When the English colonizers went to America, they began to write their own literature of the Americas. Similarly, those English men and women who went to Australia began the process of a new literature called Australian literature. And so is the case with Canada, India, and Africa. With colonization in some parts of the world, especially, Africa and Asia, there emerged a new literature which later came to be known as the Commonwealth literature, New Literature in English, postcolonial literature and so on. Not to be left out, even those countries which were not colonized by the English like Bhutan, China, Iran, Japan, Thailand, and Nepal started their own literature in English. Gradually all these literatures in English have come to announce that here is a different kind of literature but in English. The pinnacle of such a literature is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* winning the status of the double Booker Prize novel. These trends were expected and started growing in a similar fashion.*

Key Words: Contemporary writing, Commonwealth literature, Indian English literature.

INTRODUCTION

In medieval Indian literature the earliest works in many of the languages were sectarian, designed to advance or to celebrate some unorthodox regional belief. Examples are the *Caryapadas* in Bengali, Tantric verses of the 12th century, and the *Lilacaritra* (circa 1280), in Marathi. In Kannada (Kanarese) from the 10th century, and later in Gujarati from the 13th century, the first truly indigenous works are Jain romances; ostensibly the lives of Jain saints, these are actually popular tales based on Sanskrit and Pali themes. Other example was in

DR. POOJA KUMARI

1P a g e



Rajasthani of the bardic tales of chivalry and heroic resistance to the first Muslim invasions - such as the 12th-century epic poem *Prithiraja-raso* by Chand Bardai of Lahore.

Most important of all for later Indian literature were the first traces in the vernacular languages of the northern Indian cults of Krishna and of Rama. Included are the 12th-century poems by Jaydev, called the *Gitagovinda* (The Cowherd's Song); and about 1400, a group of religious love poems written in Maithili (eastern Hindi of Bihar) by the poet Vidyapati were a seminal influence on the cult of Radha-Krishna in Bengal.

The full flowering of the Radha-Krishna cult, under the Hindu mystics Chaitanya in Bengal and Vallabhacharya at Mathura, involved *Bhakti* (a personal devotion to a god). Although earlier traces of this attitude are found in the work of the Tamil Alvars (mystics who wrote ecstatic hymns to Vishnu the 7th and 10th centuries), a later surge of *Bhakti* flooded every channel of Indian intellectual and religious life beginning in the late 15th century.

In the 16th century, the Rajasthani princess and poet Mira Bai addressed her *Bhakti* lyric verse to Krishna, as did the Gujarati poet Narsimh Mehta.

Bhakti was also addressed to Rama (an avatar of Vishnu). most notably in the Avadhi (eastern Hindi) works of Tulsi Das; his *Ramcharitmanas* has become the authoritative.

The early gurus or founders of the Sikh religion, especially Nanak and Arjun, composed bhakti hymns to their concepts of deity. These are the first written documents in Punjabi and form part of the *Adi Granth* (First, or Original, Book). the sacred of the Sikhs, which was first compiled by Arjun in 1604.

In the 16th century, Jagannath Das wrote an Oriya version of the *Bhagavata* and Tuncattu Eruttacchan. the so-called father of Malayalam literature. wrote recensions of traditional literature. Added, in the 18th century. was a deliberate imitation of Sanskrit forms and vocabulary by *Pandits*. In 18th-century evolved Assamese and Marathi prose chronicles, ballads and folk drama involving much dance and song.

The only Indian writings that incontestably predate the influence of classical Sanskrit are those in the Tamil language. Anthologies of secular lyrics on the themes of love and war, together with the grammatical-stylistic work *Tolkappiyam* (Old Composition), are thought to be very ancient. Later, between the 6th and 9th centuries. Tamil sectarian devotional poems were composed. often claimed as the first examples of the Indian *Bhakti* tradition. At an indeterminate date between the 2nd and 5th centuries, two long Tamil verse romances (sometimes called epics) were written: *Cilappatikaram* (The Jeweled Anklet) by Ilanko Atikal. which has been translated into English (1939 and 1965); and its sequel *Manimekalai*



(The Girdle of Gems), a Buddhist work by Cattamar. Thiruvalluvar, a celebrated Tamil poet. wrote the Tirukkural, a work on ethics in Tamil literature.

During the last 150 years many writers have contributed to the development of modern Indian literature, writing in any of the 18 major languages (as well as in English). Bengali has led the way and today has one of the most extensive literatures of any Indian language. One of its greatest representatives is Sir Rabindranath Tagore, the first Indian to win the Nobel Prize for literature (1913). Much of his prose and verse is available in his own English translations.

Work by two other great 20th-century Indian leaders and writers is also widely known: the verse of the Islamic leader and philosopher Sir Muhammad Iqbal, originally written in Urdu and Persian; and the autobiography of Mohandas K. Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth*, originally written in Gujarati between 1927 and 1929, is now considered a classic.

Several other writers are relatively well known to the West. They include Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) for his *Glimpses of World History*, *Discovery of India* and *An Autobiography* (1936); Mulk Raj Anand, among whose many works the early affectionate *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) are novels of social protest; and R. K. Narayan, writer of novels and tales of village life in southern India. The first of Narayan's many works, *Swami and Friends*, appeared in 1935; among his more recent titles are *The English Teacher* (1980), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1983), and *Under the Banyan Tree* (1985). Among the younger authors writing of modern India with nostalgia for the past is Anita Desai—as in *Clear Light of Day* (1980). Her *In Custody* (1984) is the story of a teacher's fatal enchantment with poetry. Ved Mehta, although long resident in the U.S., recalls his Indian roots in a series of memoirs of his family and of his education at schools for the blind in India and America; among these works are *Vedi* (1982) and *Sound Shadows of the New World* (1986).

The other well-known novelist/ writers are Dom Moraes (*A Beginning*), Missim E Zekiell (*The Unfurnished Man*), P Lal, A.K.Ramanujan (whose translations of Tamil classics are internationally known), Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar and R. Parthasarathy; Toru Dutt; Sarojini Naidu; Aurobindo; Raja Rao, GV Desani, M Ananthanarayanan, Bhadani Bhattacharya, Monohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, , Khushwant Singh, Nayantara Sahgal, O.V. Vijayan; Salman Rushdie; K.R. Sreenivasa Iyengar, C.D. Narasimhaiah; M.K. Naik; Vikram Seth; Allan Sealy; Sashi Tharoor; Amitav Ghosh; Upamanyu Chatterjee; and Vikram Chandra.

Trends in Indian English Writing in 21st Century:

The 21st century has proved to the world that English literature is no longer the sole province of the imperial England. Although English literature started and flourished in England, it has



gone on to sow the seeds of creativity in English in other parts of the world. Interestingly, the English people themselves paved the way for the unexpected developments that we witness today. When the English colonizers went to America, they began to write their own literature of the Americas. Similarly, those English men and women who went to Australia began the process of a new literature called Australian literature. And so is the case with Canada, India, and Africa. With colonization in some parts of the world, especially, Africa and Asia, there emerged a new literature which later came to be known as the Commonwealth literature, New Literature in English, postcolonial literature and so on. Not to be left out, even those countries which were not colonized by the English like Bhutan, China, Iran, Japan, Thailand, and Nepal started their own literature in English. Gradually all these literatures in English have come to announce that here is a different kind of literature but in English. The pinnacle of such a literature is Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* winning the status of the double Booker Prize novel. These trends were expected and started growing in a similar fashion.

A few distinct trends are dominant in the late twentieth century and the early 21st century. A major trend is the original creative writing in English in the Indian subcontinent, among others. After the trio of Raja Rao, R K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand in the middle of the twentieth century, we have a multitude of writers both men and women from different walks of life on various themes. While economic and social development was a priority for political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, the psychological and sociological consequences of development became a major preoccupation for writers like R K Narayan and Kamala Markandaya as in *The Painter of Signs* and *A Handful of Rice*, respectively. They dealt with a less complicated and largely rural life in a leisurely fashion. Their overtly political and social themes required a slow space for introspection at every stage.

If the pre-independent authors dealt with nationalism and patriotism, the post independent writers faced the challenge of handling the new-found political freedom. Notable among them in the post-Independent India are Salman Rushdie Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Aravind Adiga and Chetan Baghat. But the post-modern writers like Rushdie and Ghosh had to delve deep into the impact of freedom on the Indians. A novel like *The Hungry Tide* by Ghosh clearly shows how the hard-won freedom has not liberated the tribal people from the local oppressors. For another example, Manju Kapoor's *A Married Woman* articulates a different of freedom within the family. In fact, another kind of environmental and social freedom struggle continues in our country even today as represented by a number of writers, including Arundhati Roy and Chetan Baghat. Roy and Baghat have attracted a large following among the Indian youth. They have a clarion call for value clarification, which is the need of the hour.

Another trend is the translation of regional literatures into English. For example, almost the entire works of Premchand or Rabindranath Tagore or Subramania Bharathi or Vijay



Tendulkar or Vasudevan Nair are available in English not only for the English people but also for the people of the world who have some knowledge of English as a second or foreign language. Takazhi Sivasankarapillai's *Chemmeen*, Kesava Reddy's *He Conquered the Jungle*, Sundara Ramasamy's *Tale of a Tamarind Tree*, U R Anantha Murthy's *Samsara* and so on are great contributions to literature in English translation. Of these translated texts, we have a unique trend of women writers emerging on the national scene. A case in point is Mahasweta Devi of West Bengal. She is an activist-writer who has championed the cause of the marginalized tribal people in West Bengal in such works as "Draupati". An interesting aspect of this creative translation is the work of Girish Karnad, for he wrote most of his plays in English but translated them into English himself. His plays from *Tughlaq* to *Wedding Album* point to the historical and social problems facing our country.

Yet another trend is the emergence of writers from the Dalit and other marginalized sections of the society. A remarkable work of international standing is Bama's *Karukku*. Yet another work in this category is Ompuri Valmiki's *Joothan*. These writings erase the distinction between fact and fiction. Some autobiographies of these writers are presented so vividly that they claim the status of great fiction. Further, the shocking plays of Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan belong to a different strand of margin, away from the mainstream literature.

A dominant trend is the motivational and autobiographical work of prominent personalities like Dr Abdul Kalam. *Wings of Fire* and *Turning Points* are both scientific and political in their overtones, but do not lose sight out on guiding the Indian youth for a better India. Associated with this trend is the biographical writing of well-known political, industrial, social, sports, spiritual and media leaders. Every president and prime minister of our country has at least one biography on him or her. Industrialists like J R D Tata, Dhirubhai Ambani and Aditya Birla also have found a place among biographers. Actors like Rajinikanth too have popular biographies on them.

Notable Contemporary Indian English Writers:

Anita Desai is a celebrated figure in the Indian literary world, having been shortlisted for the Booker prize thrice. Her works have received much praise, such as the post-partition novel *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In Custody* (1984), which was adapted into an English film by Merchant Ivory Productions, and *The Village by the Sea* (1982), for which she was awarded the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize. Desai also received the Sahitya Akademi award for her novel *Fire on the Mountain*.

Noted works: *In Custody*, *Clear Light of Day*, *The Village by the Sea*, *Fasting Feasting*, *The Village by the Sea*



There must rarely be a millennial who hasn't heard of the fictional town of Malgudi, the creation of RK Narayan that features in several of his works like *Malgudi Days* and *Swami and Friends*. RK Narayan is among the leading authors of early Indian English literature who used humour, nuance, and compassion in his stories that garnered a global readership. His stories have also been adapted for both TV and cinema, with the Doordarshan Malgudi Days series being a staple of everyone's childhood. Another significant literary work by RK Narayan- *The Guide*, was the Sahitya Akademi winner and adapted into the critically acclaimed movie of the same name starring Dev Anand.

Noted works: *The Guide, The Man-eater of Malgudi, Swami and Friends, Malgudi Days, The Financial Expert, My Dateless Diary, The Bachelor of Arts, God, Demons, and Others*

Mulk Raj Anand, along with his peers R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, are regarded as the trailblazers of Indian English fiction. Incensed with the social structure in the Indian society where the caste system was (and still is) a prevalent mode of exploiting people born in the lower caste, Mulk Raj Anand wrote about the lives of the oppressed, giving an incisive insight into their impoverishment and misfortune. His first novel was *Untouchable* (1935), which gives a harrowing depiction of the life of a toilet-cleaner who accidentally bumps into a member of a higher caste. Mulk Raj Anand was also among the first writers to use Hindustani and Punjabi idioms in English, giving a defining regional flavor to his novels.

Noted works: *Untouchable, Across the Black Waters, coolie, The Big Heart*

Shashi Tharoor is a popular Indian politician and former international civil servant who has garnered a lot of buzz for his outspoken views on different topics, e.g. the historic injustice done by the British Empire on Indians, as well as for using new, intricate words in his tweets that have served as a vocab booster for many of his followers. He has written a total of 16 bestselling books, both fiction and non-fiction, revolving around Indian culture, history, society, politics, and more. To understand more about India, there is no better way than to pick up a Shashi Tharoor book.

Noted works: *PaxIndica, Riot, Show Business, The Great Indian Novel, An Era of Darkness, India Shastra, India: From Midnight to the Millennium and Beyond,*

If you dig poetry then the mesmerizing works of Kashmiri-American poet Agha Shahid Ali will certainly be your thing. An English language poet who introduced the Ghazal form in American poetry, Agha Shahid's poetry collection is an exquisite medley of poignant emotions, personal experiences, his identity as a Kashmiri, as well as themes of illness, loss, and mortality.



Noted works: *The Half Inch Himalayas, A Nostalgic Map of America, The Country Without a Post Office, Rooms Are Never Furnished*

Notwithstanding the controversy around *The Satanic Verses*, Salman Rushdie remains one of the most influential and acclaimed writers not only in South Asia, but around the world. His works imbibe magical realism, wondrous metaphors, and delightful puns, touching on topics such religion, life, and death, intertwining of Western and Eastern cultures, and a lot more. He won the Booker prize for *Midnight's Children* in 1981, which also won the Booker of Bookers prize on the 25th anniversary of the award.

Noted works: *Midnight's Children, The Moor's Last Sigh, The Ground Beneath Her Feet, The Enchantress of Florence*

Writer, journalist, lawyer and politician, Khushwant Singh was a maverick personality in the Indian literature world. His historical novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956), which narrates the partition of India by focusing more on the human aspect of the event, is considered a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the tragic consequences of political gambling and religious strife.

Noted works: *Train to Pakistan, I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale, Truth, Love and a Little Malice, Delhi: A Novel, and The Company of Women.*

Arundhati Roy burst onto the scene of Indian literature with her debut novel *The God of Small Things*, which won the Booker prize in 1997. After a prolonged gap of 20 years, during which she was active in political and environmental causes, she again wrote a fiction novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Her non-fiction works and essay collections are regarded as important commentary on the Indian politics, making her among the most followed writers in contemporary India.

Noted works: *The God of Small Things, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, The End of Imagination, The Cost of Living, War and Talk, Capitalism: A Ghost Story*

When you combine delicate prose, poetic devices, and multi-faceted characters to explore deep meanings and emotions, you get a Vikram Seth novel. This Kolkata-based writer has written many bestsellers, of which *The Suitable Boy* comes at the top of the list, staking its claim in history as one of the longest novels ever- a whopping 1,349 pages with 591,552 words! Vikram Seth has written novels, poetry, as well as non-fiction and children's fiction.



Noted works: *A Suitable Boy, The Golden Gate, The Humble Administrator's Garden, Beastly Tales and Mappings.*

One of the most prolific and highly regarded authors of modern Indian literature, Amitav Ghosh has written numerous works of fiction and nonfiction. Among his popular works are his debut novel *The Circle of Reason, The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide, Sea of Poppies,* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, which is a sci-fi novel. He has written many noted non-fiction books as well e.g. *In an Antique Land, The Imam and the Indian, The Great Derangement: Climate Change and The Unthinkable.*

Although diasporic writers like Bahrathi Mukherjee, Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai have different windows on the world of their lives in India and abroad, they too share the common concerns of Indian writers in terms of cultural bondings and bindings that help and also hinder us from evolving into a higher level of life, especially a higher standard of peaceful life for all Indians all over the world. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreters of Maladies* has smacks of disease. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* is a poignant story of an Indian unable to live here or there or anywhere, for the social and political forces are against him.

A discordant note that we observe is the lack of support for poetry and poets. Initially it was poetry that was the chief medium of writing for the educated Indians. But today poetry does not sell like short story collections or novels. Somehow, drama continues to manage the show on the stage and in printed texts too. Whether this state of affairs is due to the capitalistic and consumerist society that we live in now or due to erosion of poetic sensibilities, time alone will reveal.

In addition to the Indian English literature from our own country, we have a large body of writing from our neighboring South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations and also African nations, among others. The recent blockbuster *I am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai from Afghanistan points to the future of promising great young writers. The future of "English literature," as we have expanded, is very bright with more creative outputs are to come out from a large population from the downtrodden sections of the society. Especially China has a lot of scope to produce a vibrant literature in English in the years to come as the Chinese are learning English in a big way now.



REFERENCES

Haq, Rubana (ed.). The Golden Treasury of Writers Workshop Poetry. Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 2008.

Hoskote, Ranjit (ed.). Reasons for Belonging: Fourteen Contemporary Indian Poets. Viking/Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2002.

Singh, Bijender. "Indian Writing in English: Critical Insights." New Delhi, Authorspress, 2014.

Indian Writing in English I Men and Dreams in the Dhauladhar by Novels by Indian Authors Kochery C Shibu

Joseph, Margaret Paul. "Jasmine on a String: a Survey of Women Writing English Fiction in India." Oxford University Press, 2014.

King, Bruce Alvin. Modern Indian Poetry in English: Revised Edition. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987, rev. 2001. ("the standard work on the subject and unlikely to be surpassed" — Mehrotra, 2003).

Mehrotra, Arvind Krishna (ed.). The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets. Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Parthasarathy, R. (ed.). Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets (New Poetry in India). New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Prem, PCK. English Poetry in India: A Comprehensive Survey of Trends and Thought Patterns New Delhi: Authorspress, 2011. ASIN 8172736029

Reddy, T. Vasudeva. A Critical Survey of IndoEnglish Poetry New Delhi: Authorspress, 2016. ASIN 9352072499