

From toddler to a giant: Genesis of Indian English Novels

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Abstract

Present paper aims at studying the genesis of the genre novel with reference to Indian English Novels. In this paper, researcher has focused on the questions like what were circumstances that initiated novel writing in India! Was it just an imitation or an urge of socio-cultural milieu? It is true that as a literary form novel has remained modern. It has always broken the conventional literary methods and differs from traditional forms of literature. Even with certain prejudice for the present form, people gladly accepted and cherished it because of its inherent quality of being “ordinary” yet “extra-ordinary.” A novel talks about routine life of an ordinary man but with invariable insights within it as it reveals the irony of human life by removing the outer surfaces. Indian – English novels as in the beginning, at more or less extent were derivative. They were the result of imitation but later socio- cultural upheaval helped the offshoot of Indian English Novels.

KEYWORDS: Indian English Novels, Genesis, Imitation, Need of an era.

According to Krishnamurthy, the novel was not totally a new genre to Indian literature. In one of his scholarly research paper entitled as “The makings of the Indian Novels”, he opines that the novel was not totally an outsider form to Indian literature. He explains his statement by giving illustration of Brahatkatha – a collection of short-story written by Gunadhya around the fourth century. According to Krishnamurthy Brahatkatha contains many of the peculiarity of modern novels. According to him incidents woven in the story are truly founded on the basis of social realism. The stories also contain modern narrative technique like flashback. So he argued that novel as a literary genre was not totally new to the Indian literature. Contradictory to the Krishnamurthy’s view, Dr. Alphonso Karakar, in his research article writes that the form novel was totally new for India. He writes:

The novel, whether in Hindi or English or any regional language, as a literary phenomenon is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short-stories and fables have their own ancestries...Only during a period of century (that) the novel has occurred and taken roots in India. It was basically a result of the western impact on India’s cultural front... (quoted in Ramamurti 37)

Thus, Alphonso Karkala strongly believes that Indian – English novels owe its emergence and development to the west and western literary ideologies in novel. Dr. Karnath also in his scholarly article opines that: “our initial Indian novels in English were influenced by early English novels...works such as epics, puranas, tales and fables could not by their very nature provide the seeds for this particular literary form...” (Karnath 89)

There are the examples which support the argument. The novels which appeared between 1856 and 1920 were poor, mediocre imitations of Victorian novels. For example, *The Hindu wife* written by Raja Laxmi Debi (1876), a long narrative poem, obviously reminds us of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But on the other hand there are writers who gave individuality to Indian-English novels with their geniuses and sense of belonging to Indian tradition. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) is an example of creativity with its seminal fusion of myth and history. So the question that arises here is under what circumstances novel writing was initiated in India – only as an imitation or it was an urge of the era?

During colonization Indian society was undergoing a transformation. All the new ideas and new consciousness which were beginning to take hold of the Indian society were the mere manifestation of the rationalistic urge created by the impact of western culture. This was also a period of rationalistic reaction against established traditions. The impact of western learning embarked Indian classical learning and the introduction and study of the European arts and sciences gave rise to an unprecedented awakening in India. This social reformation was an outcome of western education which simultaneously encouraged novel writing. K.S.Ramamurthy regarding the rise of Indian – English novels opines that:“The rise of the novel in India was not purely a literary phenomenon as much, rather the fulfillment of a social need .” (Ramamurthy, 24)

It's true that social transformation and “social need” always become a subject of literature. As it has been discussed prevailing Indian literature forms like poetry, epics, dramas were unable to reflect the changing scenario of Indian society. As the very nature of the novel is realistic while mentioned forms are highly moralistic, idealistic and less realistic. Under the influence of Western education and culture, Indian society overcame from her age old dogmas and shackles of blind superstitions. Implementations of Western educational strategies were resulted in to the social awakening, rise of science and reason. So in a way there are two reasons that can be identify as an instrumental to the novels writing in India: These two reasons are complimentary to each other.

1. Change in the educational strategies.
2. Internal social transformations.

(1) ***Change in Educational strategies and further development:***

Social upheaval might not have took place without implementation of reinvented educational strategies western education, in India, gave a way to liberal tradition. Western education brought about a new era of radical transformation that created fruitful soil for the development of novel writing.

Before the approach of invaders and colonization, India had its own, rich and old, education system. Monastic form of education was prevailing in India. Education was imparted under the supervision of auspicious Guru. The knowledge in these monastic orders was often related to the casts and ultimately the tasks- a section of the society had to perform. The upper class, the priest, the Brahmins were imparted knowledge of religion, Philosophy, and other ancillary branches. While the warrior class, the Kshatriya, were trained in the various aspects of warfare. The business classes, the vaishya, were

taught their trade and the lowered class of Shudras was generally deprived of educational advantages. The book of laws, Manusmriti, Atharvaveda were among the influential works of this era which reflect the outlook and understanding of the world at that time. Apart from this monastic orders, institutions of higher learning and universities flourished in India well before the common era and continued to deliver education into the common era secular Buddhist institution copped up along with monasteries practical education. But during the Middle ages, in India, lower cast people the untouchables and female were Kept deprived of getting education. Unlike, Vedic era, women were ceased up to their household duties under the practice of patriarchy, Nalini Natrajan in her scholarly article, included in the text Handbook of twentieth century literature of India, admits that:

While feudalism controlled art and Kept it limited to self-serving ritual forms, caste- prohibited literary production because education itself was prohibited to the lower castes. The Brahmins maintained a belief that the untouchables would pollute the sacred language Sanskrit. The gradual breakdown of such structures of oppression opened up the culture and made the rise of the novel possible.(Nalini 190)

It is a noteworthy fact that "opening of a culture" simultaneously gave way to the novel writing and this was possible due to English education. English became the language for all as English education was not being imparted on the basis of class and caste. In older Indian tradition, one had to choose their profession not by his skills or interest, but the profession that his class and caste allows to choose, the only profession which was chosen by his ancestors before the decades! But English education was accessible for all and which gave an individual various options to choose the profession. Even women empowerment and education was also insisted by some of the noble English officials. Such reformations created a vast effect on society and later on they came into novel writing as the basic themes and principal characters. English Education strategies, in India, which played an important role for the growth of novel writing, can be divided into three steps:

- (A) Opening of Schools and Colleges.
- (B) Missionary Activities.
- (C) Rise of Journalism and printing.

These three reasons all together set the platform of educational spread which instigated the social reformation in India and ultimately created a background for the growth of the form novel. Mentioned points need deeper look. Educational strategies manifested by English rulers played a dominant role in encouraging social mobility, eliminating religious superstition and uplifting the status of women.

During the initial stage when English education was introduced to the Indians, only a self centered motif existed which was to acquire well mannered and well trained staff to serve East India Company. Notable thing is that Indian people welcomed western education open heartedly and grab every opportunity leading towards self development. Besides the motives of gaining of well learned and trained employees, some of the English officials implied change in the education all strategies for the sake of social reformation. For an instance Sir William Jones, Charles Grand, William Carey, Alexander Duff strengthens the idea of emancipating English in India to remove widespread ignorance and social degradation. But change was felt when, T.B. Macaulay was appointed and his educational recommendations were accepted. These universities inspired Indians with those liberal ideas which were sweeping over England and led to gradual individual enlightenment. English became the medium of instruction in these universities which accelerated the number of people knowing English. More and more Indians switched to the reading of Western literature. They read the novels of Scott, Jane Austen, Defoe, Dickens and a number of pre-Victorian and Victorian novelists. Introduction of English education, English literature and science offered a chance for the growth and expansion of English in India. The expansion of English at various stages created a favorable environment for the growth and development of Indian novels. C. Paul Varghese opines that English language became the medium of expression which was the result of British education. He writes:

A study of the problems of the Indian writer in English is intimately bound up with the historicity of the development of English as the official language during British rule and as an important common medium of expression among the cultured Indians of the time, and occasionally also, as the vehicle of creative expression for a few Indian writers.(Varghese 2)

Thus, establishment of colleges and universities and imparting education through English language gave a way to the European literature and science. This created an environment for cultural and intellectual upheaval and few Indian writers, with an impact of Victorian novels, started voicing their new sensibility in the form of novel. Missionaries came to India with the sole intention of spreading their religion but Indian people hesitated in abandoning their thousands year old religion and tradition. But with an intention to spread Christianity, these missionaries worked over vernacular languages which indirectly gave a hand to the growth of Indian English novels.

Some of the missionaries and scholars of the West functioned zealously to spread western religion and philosophy by doing translations and compiling dictionaries. Soon the western classics, including novels were translated. Particularly noble minded missionaries like William Carey and Charles Wilkins

played a dominant role. Prof. Dinesh Chandra sen in his *History of Bengali Language and Literature* Writes that:

Besides translating the Bible, he (William Carey) Compiled, wrote or edited and published the following in Bengali: A Dictionary of the Bengali language in 3 volumes comprising 80,000 words, a Bengali Grammar..... (Chandrasen, 37)

Above discussed factors proved instrumental in spread of English language and literature among the intellectual class of Indian society. Imparting of English education in various universities gave exposure to English literature, especially novels. Thus, it was a journey from nothing to everything for Indian English Novelists. Today, by achieving many prestigious international prizes, Indian English Novelists have successfully make their presence feel across the globe. Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy are some of the names that should be mentioned here.

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