

MULTICULTURALISM – A NEW TECHNIQUE OF INDIAN MODERN WRITERS

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ABSTRACT: *Indian English has been universally accepted as a unique style of discourse with its own nuances giving expression to Indian Multiculturalism. In the works of writers in India or those abroad not only the new Indian writers in the west, expatriates, second and third generation writers, but also the classical authors like A. K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Bhabani Bhattacharya are being interpreted in the new old critical mode as well the current critical styles of multiculturalism. The concept of Multiculturalism recognizes the ethnic diversity within a society and has enlightened worthwhile contributions to society made by people from diverse backgrounds. Multiculturalism as a social theory brings together different themes such as cultural diversity, recognition, mutual concern, and peaceful co-existence of many cultures and sub-cultures.*

KEYWORDS: Multiculturalism, Ethnic Diversity, Contribution, Recognition

INTRODUCTION

There was a time, not so long ago, when a visit to a Kolkata bookshop to browse its section of Indian Literature would be a somewhat depressing experience. There would be a handful of stellar stand-out names, of course; Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and one or two others. But the collection would be a half-hearted affair, seemingly there more out of duty than joy, and usually it would be hidden away at the back of the shop.

“Now, that has all completely changed,” laughs V K Karthika, publisher and chief editor of Harper Collins India. “Now those books are at the front of the shop. What’s more, they’re actually the books you want to read, rather than the books you read because you feel you should.”

According to Ashcroft, Bill and others – Post colonialism deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. Diasporic fiction in English in the post-colonial period has not only been exciting but abundant, but has undergone some fundamental transformation of theme and technique. Indeed the Indian writers of this period have internalized the qualities of versatility and multiplicity of a globalized society. The emergence of globalization and internet superhighway coupled with liberalization of economy has accelerated the attraction of diasporic life.

In India, the growth seems more obviously apparent in the sheer variety of genres that now fill the shelves. There is more fiction, non-fiction and travel writing than ever before; between them, the major publishers now annually produce around 600 new titles each year. But within these broad headings there is huge diversity that would not have been imaginable a few years ago. Today’s India is producing crime novels, comic-strip books, and memoirs such as *Maximum City*, Suketu Mehta’s seminal account of Mumbai. There are books set around the campuses of the country famed technology Institutes, and there are books about young Indian women smoking, drinking and falling in love with hapless, inappropriate men.

For more than a decade, a period bookended by Arundhati Roy's Booker prize success in 1997 with *The God of Small Things* and Aravind Adiga's similar achievement as a Winner of 2008 Man Booker Prize, India has been enjoying an English language literary boom. *The White Tiger* explored the dark underbelly of the new, modern India and was a fixture on Best Seller lists across the country. A newly buoyant middle-class, better travelled, more curious and with more disposable income, has been devouring books like never before. Almost every year now it appears that there is a new trend-pulp fiction one year, chick-lit "sari fiction" the next – as Indian publishers find new ways to tap into the market and reach out to more readers.

One change that the market has noticed is that while the expanded literary market place may have been created by economic liberalism and a more globalized India, many among the new stable of Indian writers beyond their own shores. Indeed, many of the novels and non-fiction works now being produced might be a struggle for International readers to relate to.

As one commentator observed, many South Asian writers began their careers in the eighties and nineties as "Rushdie's *Midnight Children*", and there was a glut of forgettable novels written in the magic realist style, replete with separated twins, talking animals, filmi reference, and miraculous talents. Yet the best of this (slightly) younger generation of writers- Vikram Seth , Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Arundhati Roy, and Robinton Mistry-either avoided magic realism altogether , or worked with it before moving on to experiment with other forms," wrote Claire Chambers in an article title- " South Asian writers making waves" .

Like Chambers rightly said , these authors spoke about the " Real India" we live in which is replete with poverty portrayed widely in the western movies, Bollywood, hero worship, corruption, Red tapism, politics, the great Indian middle class, chaos, madness-all these elements served with oodles of humor.

While the older generation continues to produce literary masterworks, a newer generation of writing talent has emerged, ensuring that the fountain of imagination in the country does not run dry.

Indian writing in English has been acclaimed around the world for its innovation, radical new approaches to the art of storytelling and language modification.

Jhumpa Lahiri- One of the most prominent of a number of American writers who harken back to the South Asia of their predecessors. The Lowland making the shortlist of the 2013 Man Booker Prize. Her works are plangent portrayals of the immigrant experience and attempt to bridge the cultural and social gap between her adopted America and the India of her parents and ancestors. In her works the nature and concept of home comes into question, whilst seemingly fixed categories of nationality and culture are persistently, subverted and revealed to be fluid, opaque concepts. She depicts the slow process of cultural assimilation for second generation immigrants in a way that few writers have, and the growing popularity of her works reveals how much these issues are shaping modern societies, both in the West and Asia.

Indian English literature is a blend of continuity and experiments. The history of Indian English literature shows the constant introduction of new themes and techniques with their newfound confidence. The obvious example of this is Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*, a novel written in verse and magic realism is an alternative name of Salman Rushdie.

The frequent imaginary slips into history, homeland and memory load them to the recreation and reconstitution of a new world, which is blending of both history and present. Vijay Lakshmi writes,

“Memory, invented or real, helps the writer escape the confines of conformity and creates new literature – a hybrid literature -, which does not conform to any one tradition or culture but creates a new world.”

With the interdisciplinary nature of the literature where there has been assimilation of history, politics, psychology, ecology, films, journalism, geography, etc., the Indian English writing in the hands of writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, M. G. Vasanji, Bharti Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and many others has earned international laurels. Decolonization is carried out by the presentation of Indianness. Indianness has elements, reflecting the variety of life, unity in diversity and a rich civilization. Indian civilization has been enriched by many cultures and mingling spiritual and material aspects of living and is capable of becoming a source of inspiration for others and is of unique importance to make people proud for its antiquity and its application and relevance in the modern age.

Literature has always been subject to socio-political and economic pressures. The most recent phenomenon has been the emergence of the powerful post-colonial discourse writing back to the entire and asserting its own identity and cultural and national individuality.

“It is in the context of globalized cultural regimes of new forms of domination and exploitation of multiple displacements and cultural alignments that new approaches to culture and literature and new forms of writing and cultural practices emerge” (Nayar b)

With globalization English has acquired increased importance as a common lingua franca for the global community. Prof. Michael Toolan of the University of Birmingham remarks: Political and economic power and a facilitative technology, are what cause a language to ‘go international’ and even begin to have a global status. On all those counts, English has repeatedly turned out to be the language in the right place at the right time (2001, 48) English mediated products naturally gained priority over non-English –mediated products. Writing in English and getting published by British publishers gave the writer an advantage over those writing in regional languages or being published locally. The Diaspora writing from the west thus assume greater importance in the context of globalization.

Indian experience is the exotic raw material which is taken to the First World and processed there and the finished product receives much acclaim because it caters to cosmopolitan taste. None of these writers challenge the establishment of the First World. In the novels of Salman Rushdie, M.G Vasanji or Selvadurai the setting is in India or the characters are drawn from the migrant community in their adopted land and their negative representation only helps to strengthen the white orientation of the establishment. Resident or local writers, however great, their literary works, can seldom compete with the much-hyped products of this new class. This is the kind of cultural neo-imperialism heralded in by globalization.

Cyberspace that connects the world also contributes to the obliteration of national and geographic boundaries and fosters the new global culture owned and administered by companies in First World Nations. Just as post-colonial discourse sought to make interventions into the homogenized territories of colonial culture, cyberspace too has to be ‘vernacularized’ to use Prina Werbner’s expression (qtd Nayar 9)

Assimilation refers to the theory of “Melting Pot” proposed by Israel Zangwill in 1909 who mentioned that America is God’s pot. The idea behind this theory is that racial and ethnic groups should move towards the culture and society of the host, giving up their distinctive heritage along the way. The melting pot is a metaphor for a heterogeneous society becoming more homogeneous, the different elements melting together into a harmonious whole with common culture. The proponents of multiculturalism note that assimilation has often been forced and has caused immigrants so to have detached ties with family abroad.

Acculturation, equivalent of assimilation, means that one group adapts its culture to the cultural ways of the dominant group, usually through the one-way process of socialization. Another term “transculturation” being closer in meaning with multiculturalism, indicates the reciprocal process by which two cultures engage themselves in a system of give and take and adaptation to each other’s way. It is a two way process of cultural exchange, where the various groups learn from each other, each impacting the other, without totally losing their unique distinctiveness. Multiculturalism is a dynamic concept that can energize the individual into searching for an authentic depiction of self and grouping. The term “Salad Bowl” became popular in the theory of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is the way in which cultural and ethnic discrepancies may be accommodated in social, political and economic arrangements. In multicultural societies, particular groups and their cultural forms are designated as worthy of official recognition, protection and possessions. But not all the multicultural societies are successful in accommodating the discrepancies.

In his multicultural citizenship Will Kymlicka offers a liberal theory of minority rights who, stressing liberal principles, respond to the phenomenon of cultural diversity and foster possible ways of handling it on the level of state, social structures, and moral grounds. Since liberalism itself is a specific culture, a liberal theory of multiculturalism is logically incoherent. Kymlicka makes the further mistake of thinking that all cultured communities conceptualize and relate to culture in an identical manner. His discussion of the rights of immigrants rests on a flawed understanding of the nature of immigration, and is highly questionable.

Multicultural Literature is based on realism and its subject matter centers around issues related to race, class and gender. It shares some common themes in the writings of authors from many different cultures like discovering personal identity in the society which marks multiculturalism, forming individual and cultural values, familial relationships, childhood games, folklore of the culture, societal pressures: rewards and punishments, religious background, environmental adaptations that resulted from historical factors, socioeconomic changes, contact with other cultural group and forming personal relationships such as establishing family/marital roles, understanding gender roles, developing friendships and social groups and adapting to roles, developing friendships and social groups and adapting to roles defined by age. Multicultural literature explores and opposing social injustice and cultural conflicts in the people of different ethnic, religious and social backgrounds. Multicultural literature often focuses on the social contexts in the multicultural societies, on the experiences of the people of these societies, on the mixed reception which the minorities may receive in the country of arrival, on experience of racism and hostility and on the sense of rootlessness and the search for identity which can result from displacement and cultural diversity.

Multicultural literature sustains a strong ethnic group consciousness which is based on a sense of distinctiveness. The sense of collectiveness or communitarianism in multicultural literature relates the diaspora to homeland.

The morphing of the world into a sprawling global village and free passage of people across terrains are changing the tenor of contemporary literature.

“India unlike Australia, America or Britain does not have a rainbow population; hence the impact of multiculturalism in contemporary Indian Literature has been slow to seep in .It is just beginning to make its presence felt. Writers have started to trade in their identities to package it better in their literary pursuits so as to give their own places broader images, “capital-based novelist Rana Dasgupta said :

Dasgupta’s book “Solo” won the prize for the best book in Europe-South Asia region.

He said: “The last decade was reflective of this phenomenon when culture, its loss and revival through story telling became big literary themes.

“The decade was marked by the growth of new literary genres like the Chetan Bhagat phenomenon and chick lit. Such stories had to be told because the literary culture of India is broadening and changing. Writers are no longer trying to communicate what being an Indian is, but also India as a social and political entity.”

Canadian writer Shandi Mitchell, whose book “Under This Unbroken Sky” won the best first book award in the Caribbean and Canadian region, said “ in her country , multicultural experiment was two-pronged-one distinctly Canadian and the other, an assimilation of all that was Canadian by the culturally diverse communities.”

“But each culture speaks to one another,” Mitchell said.

CONCLUSION

So plurality of culture is all about being human and expressing humanity without recourse. Indian English Writing has acquired a distinct and unparalleled position with an individual character of its own in a multicultural setting. Indian philosophy describes that the world is a family. In this context multiculturalism is considered as amalgamation of various cultures, achieving the great ideals of world peace and universal fraternity. The process of globalization has not only unsettled people and cultures but has created new identities and affiliations in terms of both conflicts and collaborations.

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