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## A STUDY OF THE EMERGENCE OF NEW INDIAN ENGLISH NOVELISTS

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### **Abstract:**

*Instinctively, the Indian English Novel has directly or indirectly depicted the different social realities prevailing in the contemporary society. As a literary genre, it could not escape from the impact of the changing socio-cultural and socio-political factors and the emerging literary theories. It has resulted in that now the readers can witness a huge change in the Indian English Novel in terms of subject matter, technique, characterization, etc. The 1980s witnessed the emergence of new Indian Fiction in English which has change in tone, tenor and content. The new writers are seen bringing new conviction and maturity. It was a time when there was a rise of a new middle class in India who wanted to know its country in English, the feeling of nostalgia, sense of alienation resulted by dislocation, they were curious to know their own culture, roots and country in the west particularly U K and U S A. This paper attempts to have a bird's eye view on the new Indian English Novel: its beginning, its attributes.*

**Keywords:** *Indian English Novel, Emerging New Literary Theories, Style, Technique, New Novelists, etc.*

The Indian English Novel, as a genre, since the beginning has directly or indirectly reflected the social realities. As the literary genre, it has always been influenced by the changing social, cultural and political factors. Progressive Writers Movement, Modernism, post-modernism and the emerging literary theories have had impact on the content, technique and the style of Indian English Novel. It has resulted in that now the readers can witness a complete paradigm shift in the Indian English Novel.

The 1980s was marked by the emergence of new Indian Fiction in English. Fiction of 80s does have change in tone, tenor and content. The new writers, in their works brought new conviction and maturity. There was a rise of a new middle class in India who wished to know its country in English, the nostalgia of immigrant communities, their curiosity to know about its culture, roots and country in the west particularly U K and U S A.

The credit of changing the concept of Indian writing in English really goes to Salman Rushdie. He brought his *Midnight's Children* (1981) and later on *Shame* (1983). His writings reflect the Indian reality fantastically. He made fusion of history, myth and autobiography exquisitely. It is another matter that his *Satanic Verses* (1988) proved to be the novel more burnt than read. Rushdie is constantly aware of the agonizing problems of identity crisis. His *Midnight's Children* depicts the permanent plight of individual identity in the hostile modern world.



The 'new' novel differs from the old in another aspect. It is in the sense that the new novel has become far more 'globalised' in many senses. Anand (1905-2004), Narayan (1906-2001) and Raja Rao (1908-2006) have all lived in the West for a considerable time span, but their primary engagement has mostly been with India. But the new novelists go much ahead. Vikram Seth in his *The Golden Gate* (1986) selected all his characters that are American; and also in his *An Equal Music*, the characters are British and the scene European. Bhabani Bhattacharya in his *The Gabriel Club* of which setting is Hungary, took all the characters mid-European. The new novelists have been much fascinated by magic realism. The new novelists seem to have greater affinities with Marquez and Gunter Grass than with Narayan and Raja Rao. The young 'new' Indian English novelists are the contemporaries of Salman Rushdie. They are also called as Rushdie's Children. These novelists include Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, I, Allan Sealy, Vijay Singh, Upmanyu Chatterjee, etc.

In the novels of Amitav Ghosh (b.1956), there is a fusion of Magic Realism through which he has presented a meaningful vision of life. In his *The Circle of Reason* (1986), the central character is Nachiketa, a Bengali orphan. He is nicknamed as 'Alu' (potato in English) as his head is shaped as potato. Alu, is falsely accused as a terrorist and is forced to run away from his village. He is taken to the Middle East. Then he is seen moving from Al-Ghazira to Cairo, Egypt, the Sahara and finally Algeria. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1989) won him the Sahitya Academy Award.

His *In An Antique Land* (1992) and *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996) are different in theme, spirit and tone. His *The Glass Palace* (2000) traces the British occupation of Burma, the exile of Royal Family to India and their dwindling fortunes. It narrates the story of Rajkumar, the protagonist in a picaresque style. Most of his novels combine the areas of history and anthropology.

In the 'new' novel Magic Realism seems to be the most dominating form, however, the continuity of social realism can't be denied. It is because man has always been the centre of the novel; he is the integral part of society; and the traditional content of the novel is society. The idea of social realism has kept flourishing. Hence, it may not be surprising that in the heyday of Rushdie and Magic Realism, we have still a dazzling school of realism that is led by Vikram Seth (b. 1952). His *A Suitable Boy* (1993) has got much attention as Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*.

Boman Desai, Rohinton Mistry and others have dealt with social realism. Rohinton Mistry's (b.1952) *Such A Long Journey* (1991) and *A Fine Balance* (1995) portray authentic studies of middle class Parsi life in Bombay. Ardesir Vakil's *A Beach Boy* (1997) represents an authentic impression of an expatriate writer trying to jog half-forgotten memories.

Upmanyu Chatterjee's *English, August: An Indian Story* (1988) is thinly autobiography of a sensitive administrative officer, August, who is posted to a small town where he finds life full of ennui, his colleagues dull, his work mechanical. Since August has to bear monotony and creakiness, he is seen suffering from the sense of loneliness. He has to bear physical, mental and cultural dislocation, listlessness, meaninglessness and rootlessness. And to get rid of such pathetic situations, he takes support of drugs, drinking and masturbation. This novel has uncommon amalgam in expression through a mixture of wit, sharp expression and refreshingly foul language, a fundamentally anarchic iconoclasm but with satirical tone.



In his *The Mammaries of the Welfare State* (2000), August seems to be an unheroic hero without charm; without development after years of experience. This novel also reflects the Blunderland of Babudom, and its absurdities, bureaucratic red tape, corruption, nepotism, sheer unreasonableness etc.

His *Weight Loss* (2005) is a story of Bhola, the protagonist and his lustful adventures with Subaltern of both sexes. Bhola is an embodiment of rootlessness, immorality, misanthropy, restlessness, thus he seems to be sandwiched between confusion and self-hatred. He is seen to be standing at the centre between indulgence and denial, conscience and materiality reasons and passions, rationality and irrationality.

Parsi community recently has been seen to be fast diminishing religious group of the world. Parsi writing is necessarily dealing with the problems of an ethnic minority and presenting the dilemmas of Parsi community. Rohinton Mistry, even in the era of post-modernism prefers to old values of well-told story. He has used linear narrative pattern and occasional flashbacks in his writings. Rohinton Mistry (b-1952) in his *Such a Long Journey* (1992) presents the predicament of modern individual. The protagonist of the novel, like a classical tragic hero, is seen passing from happiness to misery. This novel focuses on the social and political evils of India and also ridicules the corruption in India. It is the story of a middle aged Parsi, that is full of hardships. The protagonist is a bank clerk. He unwittingly becomes the partner of his friend involved in bank fraud. But fortunately, he escapes. His friend mysteriously dies in prison. This novel is based on the famous case called 'Nagarwala Case' during the rule of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. This novel also deals with the state of Emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. It shows a 'fine balance' between hope and despair in the lives of the major characters. It shows how innocent people were deprived of their fundamental rights and freedom. It focuses on the pathetic situations the innocent Indians went through during the two years of Emergency period.

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) is a fine example of Magic Realism. He uses the technique of running a continuous parallel between antiquity and modernity. It parodies Vyasa's Mahabharata to analyze India under Mrs. Indira Gandhi's rule. The novel shows the correspondence between the characters in Mahabharata and the political figures and events in the modern India. The novelist himself spoke about it, "to retell political history of 20th century India through a fictional recasting of events / episodes and the characters from the Mahabharata" (S. Tharoor, Myth, History and fiction, Seminar 384th, August, 1997. P30). In this novel, there is a fusion of myth and history. Tharoor detests communalism of any sort. He wants sustainability of India's pluralism and diversity. He is an admirer of novelty in novel. He declares: "I write about India because I care about India. I've not wanted to write about other places in the same way anchored to this place and to the preoccupations of Indians" (The Hindu, Aug. 19, 2001).

Communal disharmony, root causes of the communal riots and their unwanted consequences have always been the subject matter for most of the Indian novelists. The worst communal riots in 70s and 80s and Gujrat massacre show that Gandhian principles of love and non-violence do not seem to be adequately effective in bridging gap between Hindus and Muslims. Nayan Tara Sahgal's *Mistaken Identity* (1988) realizes the futility of Gandhian



principles. She believes that only a Hindu-Muslim marriage can bring the communal harmony back.

Shiv. K. Kumar's *Nude Before God* (1985) deals with the same idea. This novel describes how Razia, a beautiful Muslim girl was raped by four turbaned Sikhs and how she was assaulted by her own father, the Nawab. It covers the bitter truth of our society. Firdous Kanga's *Trying to Grow* (1990) presents the theme of perverted love and sex.

Boman Desai in his *The Memory of Elephants* (1988), uses the same technique of going back to the past. In this novel Homi Seervai, the young Parsi scientist in U.S.A. invents a machine that can activate human brain. This machine makes the scientist capable of relieving the past, not only of his family, but that of his entire race. It is an encapsulation of 'History of Parsi Community' with their origin, religion, life, culture and character.

I, Allan Sealy's (b-1951) *Totternama: A Chronicle* (1988) is about Anglo-Indian. It was fainted by the controversy generated by Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. It is a story of seven generations of the Trotters, the descendents of a French mercenary, who settled near Lucknow in the 18th century. It ends with most of totters migrating to England and Australia, after India got independence from British rule. Sealy has used the technique of narrative like mock-heroic and parody. Sealy's *Hero* (1990) presents the political progress of a South Indian film-star towards his Prime-ministership.

Farrukh Dhondy's (b-1944) novel *Bombay Duck* (1990) deals with the contemporary issues such as communal fundamentalism which objects to the multinational caste of The Ramayana. It focuses on the picture of Bombay as a microcosm of India, and presents a deep insight into England what it is likely today in context of coloured immigrants particularly.

On one hand the novel of social realism seems flourishing, on the other hand, we see its counterpart i.e. the fiction of the interior world of the mind and sensibility led by Amitav Ghosh. Ghosh, as a novelist is a restless experimenter. His *The Shadow Lines* (1988) reflects the 'lines' dividing people and creating entirely avoidable misery. Upmanu Chatterjee's *The Last Burden* (1993) is an inward-looking narrative. It focuses on the burden is that of family ties, that results into resentment, irritation and tensions.

A new genre has recently been added to the Indian English fiction. It is termed as Science Fiction. This genre is pioneered by a distinguished scientist, Jayant Narlikar. He produced *The Return of Vaman* (1989) and *The Message from Aristarchus* (1992). These are quite credible narratives, though the style is rather rigidly functional. Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosomes* falls in this category. It won him Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction. This novel also covers a mystery, a ghost story and dystopia, with Ronald Ross, well known researches in malaria at its centre.

In the novels produced in the last decade of 20th century, there is a new sensibility. The novelists have new vista of experience with a world view that is richer. The urbanized writers have no longer been limited up to India, but they have got global recognition. Kirpal points out the difference between the Euro-American post modern English novels and the Indian English ones: "In the former as meaning is different endlessly the text becomes wordy language game; their politics is textual. In the latter, there is an electric limited engagement with certain deconstructive practices used to dismantle the ideological basis of establishment power structures in Indian Society."



In *An Angel in Pajama* (1996) of Tabish Khair (b 1966), there is mixture of Social Realism and Magic Realism. Mukul Kesavan (b.1957) produced *Looking Through Glass* (1995). Hari Kunzru published his *Impressionist* in 2002. His *Transmission* (2004) focuses on globalization, nomadic geeks and invisible lettuce pickers. The characters are shown familiar with the use of e-mail in the world of Information Technology. It is a melancholic story of the man living in the modern era. It is a post-modern novel which deals with a saga of history, identity that is written in evocative language.

Kaavya Vishwanathan, just 19 years old, a student at Harvard University (USA) published her *How Opal Mehta Got kissed, Got wild, and Got a life*. It presents her experiences of college 'boot Camp.'

Amit Chaudhari's novels present the numerous insignificant details of everyday life. His *A Strange and Sublime Address* is written in third person narrative. It deals with the story of Sandeep who moves from a high-rise in Bombay to an extended family in Calcutta. This novel presents the ordinary everyday incidents of life.

Vikram Seth (b.1952) belongs to the school of Social Realism. He has produced a book of poems, *Mapping*, a travelogue, *From Heaven Lake*, three novels and a biography. He is inspired by Alexander Ruskin's *Eugene Onegin* (1831), a novel in verse. He produced his *The Golden Gate* (1986). It is a novel in verse. He has stunned the literary world by his voluminous novel *A Suitable Boy* (1993). This novel presents the history of a country through narrative. His third novel *An Equal Music* (1999) is accepted as a bold experiment.

In the last decade of 20th century few women novelists emerged on the literary scene. They were with a new vision and conviction in their fiction. They attempted to deal with the universality of all human experiences. Both women and men novelists seemed struggling for self-recognition; individuality.

Anita Nair, born in Kerala wrote few poems and collection of short stories. Her novel *The Better Man* was hailed as a 'genial, meandering tale' that has a surprising climax. The novel deals with the hope which compels man going even in the midst of seemingly insurmountable tragedies. By using the leitmotif of loneliness, the novelist has successfully created sympathy and empathy in the readers' minds.

Jaishree Misra, believes in Malay Karma in Malayalam means ancient debt or that joy and sorrow follow each other in cycle. Her novel *Ancient Promises* deals with the self-discovery, or a quest for self-realization. Janu, the protagonist has to obey the traditional norms regarding marriage. Her submissive nature compels her to accept her marriage. She unfortunately finds herself trapped in the matrimonial life that is void of love. Then she makes a painful journey towards the discovery of her true potential.

Suma Josson's *Circumferences* (1994) is a story of young Sarala. Her ambition is to be a painter but her ambition is hardly appreciated by her parents. Her parents rather want Sarala to get married and to have children.

Lakshmi Khanna's *Going Home* (1999) ridicules Indian Tradition that opposes to women in the matter of having share in ancestral property. East-west nexus seems to be a favourite theme for the women novelists, particularly who have been living in the West. Bharati Mukharjee's *Jasmine* (1989) is the best example. Sunetra Gupta in her *Memories of Rain* (1992) presents the fruitless married life of a Bengali girl who marries an Englishman



who is visiting Calcutta. After going to England with her husband, she is much astonished to know that her husband is unfaithful to her. And "search for love" could be an ideal title for Gupta's second novel, *The Glassblower's Breath* (1993).

The chief motif of Atima Srivastava in her *Transmission* (1992) and *Looking for Maya* (1999) is to focus on the generation gap between the old and new immigrants in England. Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) presents how the protagonist, a nine years old Punjabi girl who is an immigrant, attempts to adjust with her new surroundings.

Anurag Mathur's *The Inscrutable Americans* hailed as the funniest book; however it had to face condemnation. This novel is ironic hilarious and cynical in tone. It deals with the cultural shock and adapting oneself to a new milieu. It also deals with the unconventional East-West encounter.

Ashok Banker's *Byculla Boy* presents the harsh, brutal and pitiable life of a boy of eight years old, Neilkant Jhaveri. His parents got separated i.e. divorced leaving their innocent child, Neilkant, to face the unhappy and miserable life. In the second half of the 20th century, no doubt, the Indian Novel in English seems to have undergone many changes especially in terms of the themes. No doubt, the new novelists stand on the shoulders of their predecessors, but today they are globally appreciated and winning awards.

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