
THE PLACE OF FICTION IN ANGLO-INDIAN WRITINGS

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For the last couple of years there has been a remarkable rise in the fiction-novel-writing in English by both the established and the emerging authors of India. Writers like Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Chandra, Arhashir Vakil, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, have all started writing Indian fictions in English. Their writings have successfully taken the world appeal of the cosmopolitan "Indian Novel." This has made many Indian supporters rush into an explanation about the rising status and growing popularity of Indian fictions written in English, which is catching the world market. Salman Rushdie is one of the many supporters.

In his famous introduction to his Co-edited anthology: *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing: 1947 - 1997*, also published as a separate article entitled, '*Damne, This is the Oriental Scene For You*,' in the *New Yorker's* special fiction issue June 23 and 30, 1997, Rushdie makes a few startling statements. First, he insists that the prose writing produced by the Indian writers working in English 'is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the 16 'official languages' of India.

The English readers everywhere in the world read the Indian writings produced in English. Through the Writings, mostly fiction, written in the English language, the Indian authors are able to expose to the world of English Literature, the Indian traditional values, the Indian cultural values, and the changes India has, and is, making after the independence. It is making the world aware of what India has been through times memorial; the social, cultural and religious lives of people living in the past years, and also of those living now in the present. It has also made the world aware of what India is capable of achieving through expressive and creative voice in the fictional fragments in this generation. The image of India, and that of the Indians living in India are given significance through the characters in the fictional writings.

This fictional prose, written in the most popular language of the world, will live on against all time, and forever. It will keep alive the characters of the past in the time they lived at, as well as allow the readers to accept the changes in the present time, in the light of the past. The fictional writings will never allow the past to die out, but keep them in the memories and documents of the present time. While reading the fiction, the readers shall experience the culture and the society of the period in which the story takes place. According to Salman Rushdie, the "Indo-Anglican" literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.

Novels and newspapers are the print-forms through which nations, races, cultural groups, and communities recognise themselves. Nations are imaginative and cultural artefacts rather than empirical and scientific entities. They are imagined into coherence because, 'the members of even the smallest nations, never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'. The novels and the newspapers are in this context, the two technical secular forms capable of containing, and representing - in one place - the impossible diversity that is the nation.

Thus the novel becomes a sort of proxy for the nation and its communities. Its pages communicate the solidity of a single community, embracing characters, authors and readers, moving onward through time. This does not at all mean that the novel is *ipso facto* a truly democratic, authentic, objective, natural and unmediated slice of 'national' life. It so happens that nations are shaped and sliced according to the informing tastes and appetites of novelistic consumers and producers. The novel in its fictional form is appropriate to the characterisation of a society that tends to imagine the nation as and through the middle-classes and their sensibilities in the past and the present times.

Could we even say that nations are imagined and invented when the middle-classes are interesting enough to have novels written about them? The interests of the middle-classes is, of course, historically and culturally changeable. Let us take the the Indian *babu* for an example. The role of the Indian *babu* has changed considerably over time to become, over the last couple of decades, more and more mobile, affluent, globalised, metropolitan etc etc. Inevitably he now wants this self-

image to be consolidated and confirmed in the novels he reads and sometimes writes. It could be said that he wants and is able to imagine the nation as the embodiment of his aspirations.

So has the Anglo-Indian community changed in India and overseas. Through them we come to understand both the pleasures and the limits of the world in which we find and recognise ourselves. In only pursuing the Victorian England into 'postcolonial' India, novels become boring if it is not skilfully indicative of the sensibility through which the newly elite Anglo-Indian middle-classes recognise their community in the Indian nation. Very few, challenge the limits of this sensibility, fewer still refuse the postcolonial middle classes the narcissistic pleasures of self-recognition.

Amongst the Anglo-Indian writers, Allan Sealy's *Trotternama* received world recognition because it has a story of an Anglo-Indian family along with the Anglo-Indian culture, lifestyle, and food recipes. The book has made the world aware of the Anglo-Indian middle class, surviving in India as a community that inherited the culture of both India and the Europeans, and made a community which was exclusively Anglo-Indian, a blend of the west and the east. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* describes in the fictional prose, the plight and origin of the Anglo-Indians on the last day of the Colonialism in India, and the dawn of the independence of India. Both the authors have given to the world stories, which will relive the time in the minds of the readers. The characters, middle class, come alive every time the book is read. The best way to keep a community living forever is to write their stories in the present climate, as it is now in the present.

Colonial times writers and the British writers wrote exotic stories of orient India from their own perspective and observations. *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling is an excellent fiction which has culture and animal stories for the children from India. It has survived for many years, will live on for time immemorial. The stories written of India by the British authors are mostly about the natives and animals, which seemed to be suppressed as natives in the circumstances they were placed. Those nineteenth century novel of oriental India was the paradigmatic cultural form through which the 'West' represented and narrated its possession of the rest. In the present climate it seems to be the obligation of the authors of the 'third world' or the

independent India, to self-consciously do postcolonial things like 'write back to the West', 'find its voice', 'appropriate' and perennially 'subvert' the English Fiction. In the words of Said, 1993, pp.34-35), " Many of the most interesting postcolonial writers bear their past within them - as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices...as urgently reinterpretable and re-deployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the entire..'

At the present time, most Anglo-Indians have left India, those that are still living in India are trying desperately to assimilate into the culture of India. A culture to which their parents and ancestors could never belong to. They were always brought up as the westerners in India during the British Raj. All the Anglo-Indians were born and brought up in the western culture and religion of the British in India. But not many in the world were aware of it. And now they are supposed to assimilate into the culture that was and is foreign to them. The Hindu culture has the main and dominant factor, the caste system, into which every Hindu is born, and lives until death. Unless the Anglo-Indian writers decide to write about this confused state of life in India, and express their coping with it, or about their coping in the country they migrate into, their success and achievements, no one will know of them. The community shall die the death of an unsung and unheard hero if they are not given a voice to speak through written prose of fiction. The people of the prehistoric times have continued living through years because of the fictions written about them. Rudyard Kiplings *Kim* lives on, and so do the *Trotternama* family created by Allan Seally in the books and the minds of the readers and so will the Anglo-Indians whose descendants will proudly relate to them in the future. The past stories of the Colonial times and the British ancestry is valuable but the present is just as important. Why the rich and the elite European and British ancestors have their place in the lives of the Anglo-Indians to give them the identity, the present middle class families are just as important to keep the community alive and surviving through times. Just like the Indian Authors, who have started writing about the social and cultural stories of the middle class Indians in the present times, and have managed to show to the world their success, achievements, and the changes, in the independent India. The Anglo-Indian writers must also show their achievements and success through the stories of

their communities' present life in a fictional prose. This would help the community to survive through time.

The Anglo-Indian community has seen a lot of changes since the Independence of India. Both the ones who migrated overseas and those that remained back in India have had to face a struggle to survive. Starting a life again in a new country has never been easy, nor has it been for those who decided to stay back in India under the ruler who was not of the same religion and culture. In spite of the struggles, the Anglo-Indians in and out of India have made good progress and achievements. The stories of theirs would be good examples for the future generation and for the survival of the community. The hardships, pain and joy can be written for experience and understanding of the subculture, the Anglo-Indians.

In my next novel, *The Professor and Me*, a fiction, I have written about a few Anglo-Indian families living in India. A girl from one of the families decides to marry into a Hindu family. Her struggles and frustration in the caste conscious family makes her decides to migrate into Australia. In the new country she finds herself struggling to re-establish herself. But because of the Anglo-Indian culture she grew up in India, she is able to settle down and make a success of her life. The story is about the present time, and the difficulties of the changes that the Anglo-Indian has to face. It is about the ability of an Anglo-Indian to face the challenges of diverse cultures, changes, and hardships, and still remain calm, hopeful, and optimistic about the bright future yet to come. The Anglo-Indian has a great faith in God and lives happily in most conditions in hope and belief of better days to come. The character of my story is a hardworking single, devoted, mother. I have always met and known the Anglo-Indian women to be hard working, devoted mothers, wives, and sisters. My fiction is about one such woman. Irrespective of how the British and Indian writers have portrayed the Anglo-Indian woman, I being an Anglo-Indian, and knowing many others of my community, have portrayed the main female character of my fiction as most dignified, honest, committed, and responsible lady.

The beauty of fiction writing is that the characters take the shape and description according to the author. Like the painting has the colour and the drawing of the painter, the fiction has the characters and the theme according to what the author has in mind. The author would create his situation and the plot of the story according

to the society, experience, and the environment he lives in at the time. Although the fiction is not a true story, yet there are always the elements of the reality and truth in the situation, and the characters. The Anglo-Indian author can make the characters the way he knows them to be in his community. Like the Indian writers, the Anglo-Indian writers can also make their fictions world appealing, and international. Through the fiction prose, the Anglo-Indians can spread the subculture of theirs for understanding, knowledge, awareness, cultural values, religious and social values. Besides it being the best way of keeping alive the Anglo-Indians of yesterday, today and tomorrow, it also helps to gain respect for the community and spreads understand and awareness in the world at large.