

History without Footnotes: The Paradoxes of the Paradigm Shifts in Indian English Writing Literature

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Abstract

Indian English Writing has been suffering from various Paradigm shifts right from the colonial period to the present day. No other country's literature has gone into various labels or misnomers as Indian Literature. Indian Writing in English has been termed by many paradigms Indo-Anglo Literature, Indian Writing in English, Commonwealth Literature, Third World Literature, Diasporic Literature, Post-colonial Literature and India Studies.

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Writers and Readers of Indian English Writing have been struggling for an identity or for a time and a place for the literature produced by Indians in English within clear national boundaries. Scholars and literary historians have attempted to find a label for Indian English Literature, but the attempt has resulted only in the Paradigm shifts: Indo-Anglo Literature, Indian Writing in English, Commonwealth Literature, Third World Literature, Diasporic Literature, Post-colonial Literature and Indian Studies. Their endeavor has raised the question: What is the place of Indian English Writing in the international literary history? What are the time and the space of the Indian English?

Time runs like a stream creating, preserving and destroying things. Life teaches the use of time, Time teaches the value of life. As Wilbur Scott says a writer is not born in a vacuum. He is a product of Time, race and *milieu*. He is conditioned by the Time and Time is manipulated by him. He is fixed in a time and space, reacts and responds to the feelings of that particular time

and space. In fact, he is influenced by the context of that specified period and society in order to influence it.

Historically, during the pre-independent India or the colonial India, the literature produced in Indian English was being termed as Indo-Anglo Literature by the Indian literary history and at the same the British wanted it as Anglo-Indian Literature. It is a historical term. They are many issues like the colonial rule, which have caused to affect the paradigm shifts. Some other issues are the lack of historical sense, the confusion with history with tradition, the tradition with myth. But most of the issues are centered on Indian English writers' choice of English for creative expression. One should have an understanding of the composition of the Indian psyche to realize the shifts in the paradigms. India is a unique land which is dominated by traditional thoughts, mythological beliefs, philosophical percepts, multilingual expressions. It is divided by languages, customs, beliefs, culture, religion, and caste. Yet one tries to find a unified India among these diversified elements and wants to popularize the slogan: Unity in Diversity. Are Indians really united? Naipaul answers *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. Eventually these multifarious statuses of the Being India have gone into the shaping of the Becoming India.

Though The two great epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* have shaped the Indian tradition and mythology, it is not only confined to the epics, It goes back even to the Vedic period and appears in many forms and garbs in Sanskrit literature. The poets and dramatists take full advantage of it and build their stories and lovely fancies around it. Indian have read a lot of mythological stories, for example, the stories of the adventures of Kama, the god of love, and his wife, Rati with their friend Vasanta, the god of spring. When Kama shoots his flowery arrow at Lord Shiva himself and is reduced to ashes by the fire that flashed out of Shiva's third eye. These stories have influenced the psyche of the Indian people. They still believe as real occurrences of the past. Most of the myths and stories are heroic in conception and teach adherence to truth, justice, faithfulness or sacrifice for the common good. One cannot ignore these myths as unnecessary. For instance Goethe has condemned those who narrated old Roman Stories of heroism to young people as spurious and false. But if the Romans were great

enough to invent things like that one should at least be great enough to believe them. People believed that these stories would bring the heroic traits in their children.

Indian is a land of sathus, saints and philosophers. All human actions are being interpreted by Philosophical meaning. Indian Philosophers are great thinkers and metaphysical. Such Philosophical bend of mind has made Indians stronger believer of destiny. They have never experienced any existential problems in their life. They have developed a strong sense of resignation to fate and the sense of tolerance. They wait for the destiny to decide things for themselves. Probably Naipaul was correct when he said that India needed to be invaded. Indians seek philosophy even when they discuss serious scientific discoveries, or, some serious critical analysis. For instance, Mulk Raj Anand during his observations of the form “novel” in his essay, “Reflections of a Novelist: Some Notes on the Novel” he mixes wonderfully mystery and philosophy with his serious discussion. He closes his essay with the following words:

The first novelist in the world was the God Brahama Himself, because he created the world through the sheer joy of creation. Each one of us is an incarnation of Ananda. We have to create new worlds, which may flow into other people's worlds. And as, through our creations, we cannot with others, each novel is part of our deepest urges for free love. (Indian Reading, 13)

Indians confuse history with tradition, science with philosophy, literature with history, myths with reality, criticism with theology. This is because they lack a proper intellectual sense and historical consciousness. They are often carried away emotionally by their involvement with philosophy and tradition. Mulk Raj Anand's statement, with all his communist thinking, is quite shocking and surprising because it came out from a novelist who had written a novel like *Coolie*.

India Psyche is traditionally oriented, philosophically thought, culturally divided, and overwhelmed by mythology, communicated in multi lingual expressions, but not historically written. Unlike the Greeks and the Chinese, Indians in the past were not historians. This was

very unfortunate and it has made it difficult for us now to fix dates or make up an accurate chronology. Little importance was attached to the writing of a chronicle or the compilation of a bare record of events. India has historical records written by foreign invaders, notable travellers and finally by British with some bias. Bankimchandra Chatterjee decries India's unpreparedness for nationhood in terms of its pre-modern lack of historicity: "Bengal has no history. Proud nations have an abundance of historical writings; we have none" (quoted in *Nationalist Thought* 82). Hegel says, "Indian has no history. Indeed India cannot have history because in the extreme zones man cannot come to free movement. The true theatre of History is the temperate zone." (quoted in Paul Sharrad, 4). V.S. Naipaul, years later in *An Area of Darkness*, derides his grandfather's homeland for its lack of historical consciousness.

Between Indus Valley civilization and today in India there are many gaps and periods about which one knows little. For the rest one has to go to the imagined history of the epics and other books.

Time past and Time future

What might have been and what has been

Point to one end, which is always present (Burnt Norton 1-3)

Time Past is history; what might have been is imagined history. Facts and Fictions are so interwoven together as to be inseparable, and this amalgam becomes an imagined history. Events run into each other, overlap and produce an enormous confusion. It is true that Indians are peculiarly liable to accept tradition and report as history, uncritically and without sufficient examination. They will have to rid themselves of this loose thinking and easy way of arriving at conclusions.

The Indo-English writer's choice of English is a natural one in the multilingual Indian milieu. Moreover there was no common language. The Indian character and behaviour appeared heterogeneous and not homogenous. Raja Ram Mohan Ray is called the "Maker of Modern India" and also "Father of Modern India". He is also regarded as the "Father of the Bengal Renaissance". He was the earliest person who showed some inclination towards learning

English. He supported induction of western learning into Indian education. He advocated the preference of teaching English to Sanskrit.

Most of the Indo-Anglo Literature is of Philosophical in nature. The works of Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo are philosophical postulates. They are the meditations of religious ideas and vedic sastras. R.K. Narayan observes the change when Indian English writers started in writing in English during 1930s:

A few writers in India took to writing in English, and produced a literature that was perhaps not first rate; often the writing seemed imitative, halting, or an awkward translation of a vernacular rhetoric... The English language, through sheer resilience and mobility, is now undergoing a process of Indianization...(Aspects,22)

The English language has been very flexible and It has accepted not only the Indianness but also the Indian terms. Writers were able to express the Indian sentiments, Indian culture, Indian thought. As Raja Rao says,

The tempo of Indian Life must be infused in our English expression g p even as the tempo of Irish or American life has gone into making of theirs. (Aspects, 38)

This has caused the paradigm shift from Indo-Anglo Literature to Indian Writing in English. One has started to find Indianness in these writings. Hence the term Indian Writing in English is cultural term.

Suddenly one feels the paradox. Indian English Writers have started to exhibit the historic sense. The lack of historical consciousness has made Indian English Writers more conscious about history. They sought historical events for inspiration. Their works became History without footnotes rather than works on specific issues. History has captured their minds and their love for writings. Rushdie's phrase "Handcuffed to History" suggests the argument that Indian modernity

is the product of a series of historical moments. Critics find that the consciousness of the history has dominated their writings, which are about historical “accidents”. Indian writing in English has helped to create a sense of the historical coeval with the nation, peppered with references to colonial times, and Gandhian resistance campaigns. Indian Writing in English has continually to advert to cultural continuity to affirm its own belonging. Meenakshi Mukerjee argues that through the Indian English novel the writer gives expression to a new kind of experience which will ultimately lead to the construction of nation. Some times their writings have appeared to be mythic. It is the process of building a nation and national culture, a process of finding a place in the world literature. Paul Sharrad underlines the intensity of the Indian English Writer’s engagement with history:

Without History there would be no Indian novel, and certainly no Indian novel in English (Paul Sharrad 6)

While writers like Khuswant Singh, Manohar Malgonkar was writing the gory incidents around the partition of India, for a time, Indian literature in English could ride on the nationalist bandwagon by virtue of all the Gandhian sentiment and pan Indian vision permeating works by Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan , Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya. Those who talk about the presence of the women in the novels of women writers, again, should understand the nature of Indian psyche which is tradition-oriented. Indian women are being oppressed by traditional values. Ironical these traditional values are being passed on to generations through women only. Indian women are either glorified like goddesses or ill-treated like servant-maids. Indian Feminism can be a study of the oppression by traditional values, traditional culture, the confusion with Westernization, the lack of awareness about the constitutional sanctions. By law an Indian woman is protected; but by practice she is oppressed.

After Independence, Commonwealth Literature, a new paradigm shift was created for Indian Writing in English, gathering all literature of colonial countries, and making London as the centre of the world. Common wealth of nations is a political body, therefore

“commonwealth” a political term. To talk of Commonwealth literature then is to hitch literary wagon to a political concept. Naipaul says, “The problems of Commonwealth writings are really no more than the problems of writings” (Critical Perspectives²⁸). He argues that writers of the various parts of commonwealth publish their works in London and this commercial mission gives “a false impression of a grand commonwealth cultural initiative.” Srinivasa Iyengar observes

Literature is always the means of giving form and utterances to the despairs and hopes, the enthusiasm and apathy, the thrill of joy and the stab of pain— all the vicissitudes in fact—of a nation’s history as it moves from freedom to slavery, from slavery to revolution, from revolution to independence, and again from independence to the tasks of reconstruction which involve further experience of futility and failure (Indian Readings, 22)

While Srinivasa Iyengar talks about the futility of the existence of commonwealth literature, Salman Rusdie argues that the term is unsuitable, because it is dominated by the imperialist spirit of the British:

Because the term [commonwealth Literature] is not used simply to describe, or even misdescribe, but also to divide. It permits – academic institutions, publishers, critics and even readers to dump a large segment of English literature in a box and then more or less ignore it. At least, what is called “commonwealth literature” is positioned below English literature “proper” – or ... it places English Literature at the centre and the rest of world at the periphery. How depressing that such a view should persist in the study of literature (Imaginary Homelands, 66)

He condemns the usage of the term, commonwealth, and goes on to tell that English language has become universal and any literature produced in that literature is a part of world literature:

I should rephrase myself: "commonwealth literature" should not exist. If it did not, we could appreciate writers for what they are, whether in English, or not; we could discuss literature in terms of its real groupings, which may well be national, which may well be linguistic but which may also be international, and based on imaginative affinities; and so far as English Literature itself is concerned, I think that if all English literature could be studied together, a shape would emerge which would truly reflect the new shape of the language in the world, and we could see that English Literature has never been in better shape, because the world language now also possesses a world literature, which is proliferating in every conceivable direction. (Imaginary Homelands,70)

The failure of the political term commonwealth literature has made another paradigm shift to Third World Literature. Some members of the commonwealth did not share colonial experience. Some countries had only weak indigenous tradition. More than commonwealth, Third world is a slippery political term. It lacks exactitude and precision. They and their literature lack unity and direction necessary for bracketing them together. Hence Third world Literature has lost its hold.

Colonialism has displaced many writers who have become expatriates physically, longing for the mother land psychologically. These exiled writers are termed as the writers of Diaspora. The paradigm Diaspora has been derived from the psychological nature of these exiled writers. Their writings are dominated a quest, a quest for identity, a quest for inner self. A version of Indian expatriation is found in the works of V.S.Naipaul, Bharathi Mukerjeevery, Vikram Seth who sit uneasily between past and future in a location at once his own and not his own. The people of Diaspora carry an opposition between a state of alienation and a desire to return. They are the guests and act as tourist, observe and write objectively. Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate*

has been berated by Narasimhaiah for not conforming to notions of Indianness. The book is very much a diasporic narrative seen from the point of view of an Englishman who has gone to Stanford to get a PH D. Anita Desai is not usually discussed in this kind of context. Her characters are often driven by dark forces. But once she steps out of Indian surroundings she becomes objective. “*Bye Bye Blackbird*” is a piece of truly objective observation. V.S. Naipaul becomes split when he returns to his ancestral India. When C.D. Narasimhaiah attacks him for the lack of compassion, Naipaul asks him, “Why are you angry with me? I am profoundly Indian in my feeling, profoundly Indian in my sensibility, but not in observation”(Moving Frontiers 35)

Rushdie, when he condemns Commonwealth, speaks of the existence of a literature of imagination in the international context. Any great work of art is both universal and particular. It will also be eternally contemporary. A work of art with its regionalism can de-territorialize the boundaries and can de-totalize the human experience. The magnificent use of the variety and the vitality of the English Language in which the writers like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, V.S. Naipaul, Nirad Chaudhari, Raja Rao, G.V. Desani and Rushdie have made of English has not only outwitted the mother language but has renovated it to experience it might not have undergone in its mother country. It is a happy situation that the connoisseurs of good English have now turned not to the British for a model, but to the post-colonial countries. One finds in post colonial studies a progressive theorizing of the place of history in literature and in culture in order to clear a space for not only Indian English writing but also the commonwealth. The presentation of history and the skilful employment of the English language have paved way for the new paradigm shift: The Post-colonial Literature.

Post colonial writers are constantly reimagining history which dominates their narration. India has a strong and deep root in its tradition, but it doesn't have any proper history. It is fictional narrative which provides the most flexible and evocative response, principally because fiction is best able to reproduce the fundamentally allegorical nature of history itself. Historical features remain visible through the screen. *The God of Small Things* has altogether deviated from the “novel-as-history” mode, since the “smaller things” are also historical. As a body of work

existing only because of historical “accidents”, Indian writing in English can do no other than at least to modern historicity. The engagement with the historical accidents has denied Indian English Writing a proper place, but now paradoxically their historic consciousness has helped to find a new paradigm shift which is based on a theory as observed by Paul Sharrad:

Critically the study of Indian Writing in English has a theoretical base in the broad area of New Historicism where in history is not seen as an extra-textual given to be transcribed more or less accurately into fiction, but is itself textually constructed, just as texts are historically situated and produced. Inside and outside not only overlap, but also interfuse because they are both part of the project of building nation and national culture. (Paul Sharrad, 14)

Certain events have been circulated at particular point of time and space with the intention of building an image of a nation and its national culture. Now the paradox is felt obviously. Once the Indians have been attacked for the lack of their lack of their consciousness in history, now they are recognized for the presence of history. Indian English writing, as a field of practice within a particular time and place, has moved from a regional or a nationalistic level to a level of “a threatening fellow traveller of globalization” (Paul Sharrad,15)

An understanding of the nature and workings of History is vital to postcolonial literary Studies. Even Resistance narratives are part of a historical process. Edward Said observes, “A whole movement, literature and theory of resistance and response to empire exists, and in greatly disparate post-colonial regions one sees tremendously energetic efforts to engage with the metropolitan world in equal debate so as to testify to the diversity and differences of the non-European world and to its own agendas, priorities and history”. (Modern Literary Theory, 379)

The treatment of history in the post-colonial writings has made the critics a search of related tools like Allegory, Metaphor, Irony, Travel, and Reconciliation, to interpret a post-colonial text. Allegory uncovers nature as history according to the order of time. It produces a history from nature and transforms history into nature in a world that no longer has its centre.

V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* is an allegory of the colonial world. *A House for Mr. Biswas* evolves out as an epic on an individual's escape from the world of colonial disorder. Naipaul discusses the colonial displacement with the depth of historical perspective. The description of the Hanuman house is allegorical:

Among the tumble-down timber-and-corrugated iron buildings in the High Street at Arwacas, Hanuman House stood like an alien white fortress. The queen of the fortress is Mrs. Tulsi. She manages the household through her sons-in-laws(A House,)

Metaphor is needed to supply the necessary containment, and then only as a succession of contradictions and approximations. One of the consistent metaphors of nations is the family. The story of the Indian nation is one of Bharat Mata and founding fathers, its history as a genealogy of the tribe. Mr. Richard Stone is the metaphor of colonial man, Ralph Singh is the metaphor of the mimic man, H. Hatterr is the metaphor of the post colonial man.

Irony becomes the key element of post colonial sensibility. Irony enables Naipaul to get down to the bare humanity beneath his history, because he is dealing with his own personal past, his irony does not preclude sympathy but reinforces it. He is able to answer in terms of creative sensibility a question to which he could find no satisfactory academic answer. His ironic distance provides him with a comic vision of life. This same element is also found in G.V. Desani.

Travel in post-colonial novels leads to reconciliation with the world. Travel is a process of learning. It brings an understanding of the lives of the fellow men. Characters undertake travel in search of a right place. Nowhere is safe now. To them any change of place would mean only a change of prison. One can find a wonderful picture of a journey with a departure and an arrival in arranging the titles of V.S.Naipaul's novels:

The Mystic Masseur from *Miguel street* starts his journey in search of *A House for Mr. Biswas*, passes through *The Middle Passage* finds *An Area of Darkness* is *Wounded* by a civilization, takes *A Bend in the River*, meets *Guerrillas Among the Believers* and again takes *A Turn in the South* to have *An Enigma of Arrival* in *India: A Million Mutinies Now* to help him *Finding the centre* of *A Way in the world* to live *Half a Life*.

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