

Emergence of New Novel and Contribution of Salman Rushdie to Indian English Fiction

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Abstract

After the publication of Salman Rushdie's second novel *Midnight's Children* (1980), there is an emergence of New Fiction marking the beginning of New Era in the history of Indian Writing in English. A large number of novelists living in India and abroad write fiction in great number and thereby breaking the stigma of the marginalization of Indian English Fiction. They introduce various components of modern theories regarding the composition of the fiction. They also prove their superiority over their western counterparts by achieving remarkable recognition on international platforms and by winning various coveted awards like Booker Prize, Pulitzer Prize and even Nobel Prize by V S Naipaul. These Indian English writers include Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Pankaj Mishra, Chetan Bhagat, Rohinton Mistry, Arvind Adiga, Shashi Tharoor and many more. The New novelists of the 21st century handle the themes of globalization, Political reality and cross-culturalism more effectively and brilliantly. In the present paper the focus will be on the assessment of emergence of New Fiction with its various traits and contribution of Salman Rushdie in Indian English Fiction in the development of New Novel.

Keywords- Cross-culturalism, Globalization, Marginalization, New Fiction, Political Reality.

The development of novel in English as a literary phenomenon took time because in the beginning Indian writers found themselves in difficulty to accommodate themselves to express their thoughts and feelings in this alien language. As in the second half of the nineteenth century novels came to be written in India as much in Macaulay-maligned dialects or the so-called vernaculars way. But within limited time they showed mastery over English although they did not fully express themselves in this. Meenakshi Mukherjee writes about the problems faced by the Indian English novelists: "Novels in English hardly ever provide us with the examples of self-reflexivity about the language they use, enclosed as they are generally within the cognitive and cultural limits of their linguistic medium" (p 20).

From 1864 to the beginning of the 21st century, during one hundred thirty-five years, Indian English novel is able to establish its own name and fame in terms of literary perfection combining both quality and bulk. Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Raj Mohan's Wife* (1864) was

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considered as the first Indian English novel which shows a great variety of themes and a structured plot. Indian English writers have aroused considerable interest both in India and abroad. In the field of novel writing in the beginning as it is natural, only a few novelists show stamina, consistency of purpose and excellence. The development of novel in English in India was centered around the novels of the great trio-- Mulkraj Anand, R K Narayan and Raja Rao who have exhibited high class mastery over their themes and stylistic perfection like their Western counterparts. Indian English novel writing was fortunate enough to have novelists like them in the beginning of the first half of the 20th century in order to uplift the standard of novel in India. Mulkraj Anand brings humanity to Indian English fiction in his novel *Untouchable* which introduces us to the world of outcaste like Bhakha. *Coolie* is a study of the village lad Munoo who struggles too hard to survive under exploitation and suppression. *Two Leaves and a Bud* paints the exploitation of the peasants by zamindars and *The Village* portrays the downtrodden, underprivileged and underdogs of the society. Then, Raja Rao in his *Kanthapura* tells a tale of a village told by the grandmother showing her intellectual accomplishment. His famous novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* is symbolic in delineating illusion and reality in the Indian Tradition. R K Narayan is different type of novelist who takes up the psychological aspects of human emotions. His novels include *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Art*, *The Dark Room*, *The Guide*, *Mr Sampath*, *A Man Eater of Malgudi* and *The English Teacher*.

Thus, the contribution of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R K Narayan have great impact on the forthcoming generation of novelists who face the double problems whether to follow the footsteps of the great trio or to adjust themselves in modern ways in presentation and content of the themes. At this juncture, Salman Rushdie emerges as phoenix on the Indian horizon and turns the table of writing in English into a mature path. If the great trio were the heroes to be emulated before 1980, Salman Rushdie seems to dominate Indian English novel writing after 1980. He leads from the front after the publication of *Midnight's Children* in 1980 and its winning the prestigious Booker Prize gave a boost to his standing as a powerful universal novelist. He is well recognized and well appreciated both in India and abroad. The other Indian novelists who were writing during 60s, 70s and 80s like Amitav Ghosh, Bharathi Mukherjee, Abhimanyu Chatterjee, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai etc also kept the new tradition alive and wrote with renewed fervor. Gradually New Novel became well oriented and well-marked phenomenon not only in India but also in abroad. M K Naik and Shayamala A. Narayan feel the same point:

The first significant fact about the 'New' fiction is that the number of Indian novels published during the last two decades easily surpasses the total output for any corresponding period earlier. But the quantity, of course, does not automatically guarantee quality; hence attention must also be drawn to the increasing recognition and respect the new novelists are winning in the literary world today. (Naik, 2004:34)

Writers of the New Fiction apart from Salman Rushdie like Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Raj Kamal Jha, Pankaj Mishra, Vikram Seth, Rohinton

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Mistry, Amit Chaudhuri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni are aware of the problems of handling English language. Anand's handling of English in his novel, *Untouchable*, Raja Rao's accomplishment in English through *Kanthpura* and *The Serpent and the Rope* and R K Narayan's subtlety in handling English in his novels are the permanent trend setters. Their diasporic living helps them immensely to insulate in English and they are able and ready to express their thoughts and feelings in subtler way.

M. K. Naik, a great critic of Indian English Writing, expresses his views:

Born and brought up in the post-colonial world, the new novelists, many of whom are a part of the great Indian diaspora, had no reason to feel self-conscious in handling the English language, which, for them, carries no colonial baggage, It is for them simply a tool- and a most resourceful and pliant one- which their education and upbringing have placed into their hands, and which they have thoroughly mastered, with the typical Indian flair for languages. One mark of this is the fact that most New novelists do not feel the necessity of appending to their novels and annotated list of Indian words in the text, explaining their meaning. (2004: 44)

There is a difference between the older generation and new generation of the novelists in the handling of English. The predecessors were more keen to follow British rules and regulation in handling of English and stylistic perfection. But the new generation of novelists need not to show any kind of sympathy towards Englishmen. They follow their own method of expression. They do not need to give footnotes either as Raja Rao's *Kanthpura* carried a sixty page long glossary of Indian words. A large number of Indian origin words of Hindi and Sanskrit have been included in English dictionary.

In New Fiction, Indian novelists in English show strong consistency and finesse in the handling of postmodern themes. The social, political or economic problems are no more the subject matters of the novels. All the earlier themes- the problem of poverty, blot of untouchability, class and caste prejudices, starvation, silent suffering of women in the hands of men, pathetic condition of the poor, exploitation of the orphans, child workers and factory workers, etc., do not form any kind of inclination towards the new fiction in English in India. The novelists of the New Novel like to present the conflict between inner self and outer self, the psychological problems, identity crises, paradoxical feelings, distortion, bewilderment, etc., of human being.

The New novelists handle the theme of globalization more effectively and efficiently. They differ from their predecessors in this direction of multi-dimensional approach. Even though Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao spent considerable period in the West but in their writings, we do not notice any kind of western influence. But the case with the new novelists is quite different. In Vikram Seth's *Golden Gate* the entire setting is American and the names of the characters are also American. The same thing happens in his novel *An Equal Music* in which scenes and characters shift from England to Australia to Italy. They do not hesitate in intermingling Western characters in their novels.

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Salman Rushdie, who is perhaps the greatest among his contemporaries, after completing his early education in Bombay went to England for higher education. Rushdie has lived in England ever since. His childhood and adolescence play a major role in shaping his mind because in his writing we find the great Indian cultural feeling and the great Cultural civic sense. Rushdie is well informed about the great culture of India even though he spent his major portion of his life in the West. He studies the world history minutely and there is great influence of such reading in his writing. He himself says about those influences in his *Imaginary Homelands*: “My writings and thoughts have...been deeply influenced by Hindu myths and attitudes as Muslim ones.” (Rushdie, 1991:404) Salman Rushdie’s life in diasporas in the west helps him immensely to go through different cultures, different civilizations and different milieu of human behavior with his shrewd observation and brilliant vocabulary.

Cross-culturalism with mythical Narratives

His novels are extremely rich in thematic perception and stylistic connotations. He brilliantly handles the themes of cross-culturalism, cultural-pluralism, mythical narrations, magic realism and political reality in almost all his novels. His first novel *Grimus* was published in 1975 after his approaches to several publishers. It is a study of the location of the protagonist who is in search of his real identity symbolically. The protagonist, Flapping Eagle, an American-Indian, is in search of his lost sister. Flapping Eagle succeeds in locating her sister on a Mediterranean island controlled by Grimus who is a magician. The narrative of the novel is very interesting because it blends myth and magic, reality and romance. It is supposed to be a half-science fiction and a half-myth fiction and the greatness of the novelist lies in combining both these factors into one whole. The novel did not make any obvious impression on the readers but it did make him popular enough to be noticed.

Surreal Fantasy with Picaresque Extravaganza

In 1980, Rushdie published his second novel, *Midnight’s Children* which created havoc and commotion in the world literature with its multi-dimensional effect with a bundle of themes like history, riots, secularism, individual struggle, question of identity, alienation and suffering. This novel is regarded as the landmark in the history of Indian English writing. Although it is a very long book, it is very interesting too and its every reading gives a new point to the readers. *Midnight’s Children* is a wonderful story of Saleem Sinai who was unfortunately born on the midnight of 14th August 1947, the time and year of the birth of two nations- India and Pakistan. It is a painful story which intermingles the events of Hindu-Muslim riots, Indo-Pak war and the emergency of 1975. It is a political allegory which blends beautifully the reality and romance which is the chief stylistic feature of Salman Rushdie as a novelist. This novel questions about the identity of such persons who belong to everywhere or nowhere. M. K. Naik rightly comments on its multi-faceted dimension: “It is a multi-faceted narrative, which at once an autobiographical bildungsroman, a picaresque fiction, a political allegory, a typical satire, a comic extravaganza, a surrealist fantasy, and a daring experiment in form and style.” (Naik, 2004:39)

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Political Allegory with Historical Assertions

His *Shame* came in 1983 which further accelerates the development of the multi-dimensional themes of *Midnight's Children*. If India is the concern of *Midnight's Children*, Pakistan is the background of *Shame*. If *Midnight's Children* is the macrocosm of Indian politics, *Shame* is the microcosm of Pakistani politics. *Shame* is also a political allegory in which Salman Rushdie beautifully handles the theme of shamelessness in orthodox and traditional society. It begins on the note of obscenity, describing how three lovely Sakil's daughters are unable to get married and sequestered in a big mansion of his bankrupt father. In this novel Salman Rushdie has in his mind to focus on Pakistani political history to use real life material. He beautifully succeeds in fictionalizing some of the prominent items in this novel which have been taken from everyday life and politics of Pakistan.

Magic Realism Established

In 1988, Rushdie's most controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* was published. The publication of the novel creates worldwide controversy especially among the Muslim countries. The Muslim population found it blasphemous and Ayatollah Khomeini, the religious leader in Iran, declared a death sentence 'fatwa' on him. In chapter 53 of the holy Kuran verses number 19 and 20 refer to Lot, Uzza and Munnat, three deities worshipped by pagan crabs in Mecca. This verse was written under the influence of Satan and it is never the part of holy Kuran. According to Hatish, these verses were followed by a verse glorifying these pagan idols. Salman Rushdie is highly fascinated by this imaginary event of the holy Kuran. He adds something new by magnifying it in his chapter called Mahound. This section throws lights on the real events at the time of the making of Islam. With the help of his magic realism, Rushdie tries his best to locate his real Muslim identity which in reverse is not appreciated by orthodox Muslims. Critics appreciated *The Satanic Verses* for many reasons and in spite of controversy, this novel provides him immortal name and fame. He was well appreciated in the West because he acted like the critic of the Islam who could speak freely about his own religion. After getting 'fatwa' for hanging over his head, he was forced to go in seclusion and loneliness and live under police protection in London. In this seclusion he wrote another novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, a delightful child fiction in 1990. This novel is the outcome of his powerful creative imagination which he transforms in artistic manner.

Multi-Dimensional Amalgamation

After the gap of five years, his wonderful achievement in the form of *The Moor's Last Sigh* was published in 1995. The novel covers a large canvas and the characters of this novel belonging to the several generations. It is the best novel in the form of magic realism of which he is an undisputed master. *The Moor's Last Sigh* also has multi-dimensional themes; it carries its plot in several generations. The hero of the novel is 'Moraes' which is shortened as Moor in the novel. It has a combination of history, myth, reality and romance. Several historical events are being matched with the contemporary events. M. K Naik rightly appreciates the use of magic realism in this novel:

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All the usual ingredients of Rushdie's fiction are here: a large canvas; a narrative covering several generations; characters sporting different kinds of eccentricities; employment of thinly disguised real-life personages; Magic Realism; a conscious attempt to allegorise; and constant word-play. (2004: 44)

Symbolic Parallelism with a mix of Myth and Reality

After the outcome of *Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie was interested to try his hands in the field of love and romance. His next novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* was published 1999. This novel attempts to deal with the theme of love. As it is usual, Rushdie combines both fact and fancy and myth and reality into one whole. In this novel, Vina Apsara is a versatile and talented singer of immense name and fame. Her feet are worshipped by her lover Ormus Cama who is the incarnation of great mythological character Kama. Here the novelist draws a symbolic parallelism between the modern love story and the mythological and legendary love story of Orpheus and Eurjudice.

Post-Modernism and Millennium Ideals

His next novel *Fury* was published in 2001, in the new millennium. The novel throws light on Rushdie's visit to India in 2001, for the first time after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. This novel reflects some of the key features in the life of Salman Rushdie after receiving life threat in 1988. He implies the theory of postmodernism to portray the author figure caught in the maelstrom of the postmodern world. It is the story of Malik Solanka who is the historian of ideas. He abandoned his family without a word of explanation and flew to New York. There is a fury within him and he fears he has become dangerous to those her loves. He has been caught in the cobweb of his own world and does not come out to cope with life. This novel is the presentation of bewilderment and distortion which feature human life in the 21st century. A critic appreciates this book in *Financial Times*: "He writes like an angel; an erudite, playful, imaginative, wildly, intelligent angel - the cadences of every paragraph are graceful as landing swans, Rushdie is an impressively playful entertainer as well as a web-weaving storyteller."

Cultural Plurality Abounds

In 2005, Rushdie published his famous novel *Shalimar the Clown* which acclaims wider appreciation by the critics. The novel, as the name suggests, presents Rushdie's wider travelling of vast panorama of this universe. The world has become a universal village and our lives and our society are bit separated but it has become totally a part of one culture or one civilization. Rushdie believes in cultural plurality and his combination of history and myth and reality and romance makes this book wonderful in creating new imaginary homeland, not only for his but for everyone. Rushdie clearly writes in *Shalimar the Clown*: "Everywhere was now a part of everywhere else. Russia, America, London, Kashmir. Our lives, our stories, flowed into one another's were no longer our own, individual discrete." *Shalimar the Clown* is an epic narrative because the geographical boundary of the novel moves from California to France, England and above all Kashmir. It is a tale of earthly

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paradise and the description is so natural that it paints the marvelous picture of the mountains, lakes and valleys of Kashmir.

Elements of Magic mixed with Religious structures

In 2008, Rushdie got published his other novel, *The Enchantress of Florence*. In this novel he reiterates all the old concerns –magic realism, religion, power structures, globalization, colonialization, history and exile. All the stories in his novel have an overpowering element of magic in them. The stories of the Enchantress are replete with miracles and spell weaving. The text of the novel exhibits a palpable excitement with the possibility of the narrative and a distinct and savouring of the way words are threaded together into a narrative garland. Meenakshi Bharat appreciates the thematic and narrative pattern of this novel:

So falling back on his pet leitmotifs and novelistic modus operandi, Salman Rushdie manages to highlight persistent, and hence, abiding and contemporaneous concerns and tensions running through the world, his stories becoming a meaningful confluence of motive, impulse, vision, and aim. His supremely receptive mind allows everything that experience has to offer to filter through to mount a well-stacked, self-aware narrative mirroring his multi-limbed approach to fictional creation. (Bharat. 2009:323)

Immigrant Experience in Modern America

Salman Rushdie's recent novel *The Golden House* (2017), a modern American epic set against the backdrop of contemporary politics and current American culture, it also marks Salman Rushdie's convincing and exciting return to realism. The result is a modern epic of love and terrorism, loss and reinvention, a powerful, timely story told with the daring and panache that make Salman Rushdie the standard-bearer of our dark new age. Replete with allusions to literature, film, mythology and politics, the novel simultaneously channels the calamities of Greek drama and the information overload of the internet. The result is a distinctively rich epic of the immigrant experience in modern America, where no amount of money or self-abnegation can truly free a family from the sins of the past.

Trauma of Cyber Age's Unstable Times

Inspired by the classic *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, Salman Rushdie's newest novel *Quichotte* (2019) is the story of an ageing travelling salesman who falls in love with a TV star and sets off to drive across America on a quest to prove himself worthy of her hand. *Quichotte*'s tragi-comic tale is one of a deranged time, and deals, along the way, with father-son relationships, sibling quarrels, racism, the opioid crisis, cyber-spies, and the end of the world. *Quichotte* sees Salman Rushdie at the highest peak of his powers.

Thus, the novels of Salman Rushdie are multi-dimensional in terms of thematic delineation. He does not play with emotion or fantasy or satire. His novels are the novels of strong individuals struggling against the odds and oddities which they face in the vast panorama of the world. Salman Rushdie's most important themes are migration, difference, duality, creation, metaphor cross-culturalism, human struggle, conflict, etc. There is a strong sense of individuality in his novels in spite of common themes. Salman Rushdie, being a

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conscious and hypersensitive artist of literature, is highly critical of modern world developments and failure of human struggle to cope with unsustainable human problems. Salman Rushdie's presentation of the world is neither dramatic nor too much realistic, it is semi-fictional world where there is an excellent blending of past and present and myth and reality through his forte, Magic Reality.

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