



Indo-Anglian Novel: The impact of the west on Indian life from a sociological point of view

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor: 5.307 (SJIF)

Volume: 04

Issue: 06

November-December 2023

Received: 26-08-2023;

Accepted: 06-10-2023

Page No: 77-81

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to describe briefly the contribution of Indian writers in the literature in English language. Many Indian writers believed that English language is a gateway to western knowledge. Contact with English language and literature was fruitful to the regional languages, as it led to the growth and development of creative literature in these tongues. The use of English led to the Indian Renaissance of the 19th century. In this paper, two novels, *Music for Mohini* and *The Serpent and The Rope*, have been discussed to prove that English has acted as a link language among various regional languages, meanwhile, those novels exposed the conflict between two cultures and showed the direct or indirect impact of English language and culture on the Indian traditions and spirit.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2023.4.6.77-81>

Keywords: The Indian English novel, Gandhian Movement, A Conflict between Two Cultures, The Richness of Indian Culture, Psychological Motivations, The Spiritual Experience

1. Introduction

Similar to Latin in Medieval Europe, Indian literature has been based on numerous works of drama, lyric and poetry scripted in Sanskrit. The previous Indian literature was standing on Hindu themes but with the arrival of foreigners, Indian literature has got a new spirit. With the arrival of English in 1600AD, Indian literature has entered a new era called Indo-Anglian literature. With the arrival of Scottish and English Christian missionaries, English became the medium of correspondence of India and the tool for young intellectuals to decorate their wisdom and patriotic feelings. Renaissance is the first stage of Indo Anglian literature and Raja Ram Mohan Roy is the first pioneer of this stage. K.R.S. Iyengar has referred that "Ram Mohan Roy mastered the English language, and wrote and spoke forceful English years before Macaulay wrote his minute." (Iyengar, 1973, p.33)

The next writers to Ram Mohan Roy of the period from 1850 to 1900 have been influenced by the Romantic and Victorian English period; thus they were conscious to emphasize the effect of landscapes, moods, fancies and dreams on literature. The writers of the period from 1900 to 1947 were nationalists; therefore they have reflected the need to search for the sense of origins and destiny, while the writers of the generation that followed were busy with the contemporary situations beside their influence by existentialism, positivism, phenomenology, surrealism and the new Aesthetics.

The impact of English literature and culture led to develop the modern form of novel at the latter half of the nineteenth century and many novels by different writers have been written in English. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the pioneer of the Indo-Anglian novels, has released his first novel *Raj Mohan's Wife* in 1864 and it was followed by many novels showing romance, comedy, humor and historical novel. Many novels appeared later by other Bengali novelists such as *Hindu wife* by Rajlakshmi Devi, *Bianka* by Toru Dutt, and *Roshanara* by Krishna Lahari but the famous works were written by Rabindranath Tagore in which he is considered next to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. He succeeded to transfer rationally the cultural, political and social atmosphere into successful novels which reflect the spirit of India at the later nineteenth century.

2. The Gradual growth of the Indian English Novel

The Indian English novel has witnessed a gradual process of growth and development in which it moved from imitative to realistic and to provide the sociological stage a psychological aspect as well as the wars of the country has turned it from idealistic to realistic. The well-known writers R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao have discussed many themes and they have made a notable growth to the Indian English Novel. Mulk Raj Anand has been able to portray the suffering of the ordinary people and his famous writings of *Untouchable*, *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud* have showed him as a humanist beside being a realist and have showed him aware to the dehumanizing social evils. Mulk Raj Anand has succeeded to reveal the deep emotions and psychological arguments of the common human beings.

The impact of Gandhian ethos are clear in the writings of R.K. Narayan. As a celebrated novelist, R.K. Narayan has presented many works mixing comedy with seriousness and sentiment with hurdles. His famous works are *Swami And His Friends*, *Bachelor of Arts*, *The Dark Room*, *The English Teacher*, *The Financial Expert*, *Waiting for the Mahatma*, *The Guide*, and *My Dateless Diary*; meanwhile the impact of Mahatma Gandhi and the Western and the Eastern cultures is vivid on Raja Rao. In autobiographical mode, Raja Rao has released in 1960 his famous novel *The Serpent and the Rope* which can be considered a spiritual journey of a South Indian Brahmin, Rama Swami.

So many writers come under the Post-Independence writers have added their significant style and themes to the Indian – English novel. They discussed in their writings the themes of hunger, freedom struggle, nationalism, social and political realism of contemporary India and The East-West encounter. Bhabani Bhattacharya was successful to depict the sufferings of common people and was successful to change the Romanticism mode into realism. Through his novels such as *So Many Hungers*, *Music for Mohini*, and *Who Rides a Tiger* the usual sufferings of ordinary people have been discussed and a deep analytical study for his writings reveal that he honours the glorious past but he welcomes the western thought for the progress of the nation.

Mr. Manohar Malpnkar who is next to Bhabani Bhattacharya has made an attempt to present life of army in his first novel *Distant Drums* while Kushwant Singh has portrayed in vivid picture the themes of Quit India Movement especially with his novel *Train to Pakistan*. Many new concepts shaped the Indo-Anglian novel and the East-West encounter which occupied a prominent place brought with it concepts like freedom, individualism, pragmatism and rationalism. Most of the writers have shown the East-West encounter for the reason that they are inherent with the historic events and as a kind of responsibility they have tried to prepare their society to oppose alien rule and to mould the society in the light of their understanding and appreciation of certain western ideas and practices

"The reason for this East-west obsession is inherent in the historic situation of the Indo-Anglian writer himself. The educated Indian has for several decades been shaped by the immigrant influences of the west as well as the native culture of the land and its tradition".

(Meenakshi., 1974, p.20)

The Indo –Anglian writers has moved later to depict the impact of the west on Indian life from a sociological point of

view.

Referring to some of Bhabani Bhattacharya's novels may spotlight the conflict between the two cultures as he had a close acquaintance with the life in the East and the West and was able present the West as a character once a time and an attitude another time or may be a set of values. Although he has studied in London and has been affected by the ideals of democracy but he was very conscious of his Indianness the difference in the two systems of values. He has portrayed the conflict of values of these two cultures in his major novels such as *Music for Mohini*, *Shadow from Ladakh*, and *A Dream In Hawaii*

So Many Hungers has been Bhattacharya's novel first novel in which he has depicted the destruction of personal and social life and values during the rule of The British as well as it highlights the Indian society at the time of Quit India movement. The novel depicts a revolutionary movement in a village called Baruni during the British rule as the impact Gandhian movement was vital there. The oppressive system and The freedom movement under the Mahatma's leadership has awakened people of the village. Thus, Devesh Basu, one of the peasants, has begun educate the people of the village by revolutionary views against the Western colonialism.

Bhattacharya has woven his novel on the story of his protagonist Rahoul, a son of a lawyer Samarendra Basu who is a selfish speculator having no sense for the fellow beings. Rahoul has recently returned from England and the western civilization has been clear on him through his habits of dress and food but his education has given him an insight on the real suffering that ails India. Bhattacharya has created his protagonist to be a mixture of two cultures; his protagonist likes the Western music and dance, likes drinking Brandy, and likes to go to hotel with his wife enjoying dinner and dance but at the same time is a staunch nationalist opposing the hypocrisy of the foreign rulers and is fighting with his people to get freedom.

When Rahoul has found that the foreign government is unable to solve the problem of the people; he soon realized that the struggle for freedom is an imperative need. He has joined the Quit India movement with a large numbers of students and he has been sent to jail. He is a patriot and fights for the sake of his people and country. Although he is a foreign educated young man but he acts with no vanity and his heart is with his people and even has attempted to lessen the suffering of people by running a Relief Centre in which he is able to feed the destitute people daily and used to provide people food and shelter during the famine.

3. *Music for Mohini*: A Conflict between Two Cultures

The conflict between the two cultures has been revealed with Bhattacharya's second novel, *Music for Mohini*. Dr. Syamala Rao states that

"Probably Bhattacharya wished to design an ordinary story. To drive home the underlying principle of the unanimity Between the East and the West, it brings out the eternal conflict between the two cultures of the East and of the West" (Rao, 1988, p.43).

Bhattacharya's protagonist in this novel is a daughter of a widower professor. The professor has Western concepts of reason and he has aimed to provide his motherless daughter with all kinds of comforts; he has sent her to an English convent and lets her learn music. The professor aimed to

bring up his children with English education and despite the fact that he honors his mother, but he is against her insistence regarding the orthodox views. The professor's mother believes according to her traditional views that the girl would be treated with scorn if she goes outside saying: "Girls of the most respectable houses and ladies of the highest social status have put their songs on gramophone records. Why this fuss?" (Bhattacharya, 1955, p.15).

The novel is considered a clash between two generation of opposite poles. Western concepts have been based on liberty of thought, reason and innovation in which the professor aims to spread them in his family. The professor reflects Bhattacharya's point of view concerning the short comings of his society the novelist protest against the traditional views of society and religion and attempt to make readers cope with the new concepts. When Bhattacharya has refused the practices of Sati, polygamy, child marriage, and marriages of minor girls, he aimed to resist ritualism and blind faith and meanwhile asserts the idea of love and personal fulfillment. The new concepts of love and marriage have attracted Mohini and let her behave in a different manner with her boyfriend Somer whom she has known unexpectedly. The thoughts that her old mother tried to root in her are on their way to be vanished as she goes with Somer after she has accepted his invitation to the theatre to be her first time to sit beside a boyfriend. So many new tendencies besides falling in love have been shown by the novelist. Through his mouth piece Mohini, Bhattacharya reveals his disgusting against the meaningless blind faith and dowry system. When the professor has attempted to find a groom to Mohini following the old woman with her traditional customs, the grooms had to make a survey to Mohini to find out whether her complexion is natural or painted and to inspect the shape of her ankles and legs and to know the length of her hair besides so many other meaningless practices that made Mohini gulp in shame.

Following the horoscope, the professor's mother insists on a groom who descends from a very rich and respected family that lives in a small and far village called Baruni in Bengal. Mohini moves to live with her groom who is named Jaydev the house in which Jaydev lives is called the Big-house. Now onwards Mohini has to follow the instructions of her mother in law who is tougher than the professor's mother and who follows the traditions and customs of the orthodox. Mohini is under many restrictions now as she doesn't have to laugh or speak loudly. The traditions of the Big house forces Mohini to wear cotton sari and arrange her hair and either she can't go outside freely besides so many other rules which she has to follow.

The beautiful widow, Jaydev's mother, wears a white sari according to the customs and although she is very beautiful with long hair but she cuts her hair into short following that customs; she even was ready to sacrifice her life on the funeral pyre of her husband's dead body; she saved her life for the sake of her son and she sacrificed not using her right just for lord Siva to protect her son from sickness. Blindly she believes in astrology and when an astrologer has told her that her son would be in danger at the age of twenty six, she soon thought that saving the life of her son lies on her grandson born to Jaydev. When Jaydev has been bitten by a snake one day, his mother believed that the only way to save him from danger is to shed blood from woman's bosom and for this she has forced Mohini to do that but Jaydev could finally save his wife from the barbarous act of blood sacrifice resisting his

mother's wish.

Jaydev is considered one of best heroes that Battacharya focus on as he is an educated man and inspired by the western concepts but not completely western minded. He uses the western concepts to develop the village and its people. He studies and researches Indian culture and civilization. His aim is to reform society and religion in which people can get rid of orthodox views and blind faiths and beliefs in horoscopes and astrology. He believes that Indian culture is inferior to western culture but just need revival with the new concepts of liberty, equality and nationalism. As he also the mouth piece of his creator, Jaydev stands against social evils such as caste system, child-marriage, practice of Sati, untouchability, marriage of minor girls.

4. *The serpent and the rope: The Richness of Indian Philosophy*

The richness of Indian culture has been enriched by the advent of English. Due to historical reasons English has permeated into social, cultural and linguistic levels. English has acted as a link language among various regional languages and also given rise to a novel phenomenon called Indian English and Indian English literature.

The interaction between English and the Indian languages is traced back to the ancient Greek tradition. It started initially in an encounter between the East and the West during Alexander's invasion of India. Ever since, the East and the West contacts have been repeated and reinforced from time to time with varying degrees of intensity. Between Alexander's invasions and Renaissance the interaction was chiefly in the form of historical and commercial intercourses. The interaction was not directly with English as a language and as a culture. The connection with English was only indirect through the ancient Greek language. The direct interaction began in the wake of the East Indian Company making its commercial inroads and subsequent British colonization of India followed by the establishment of the British Empire. Since the advent of the East Indian Company in India, the English language has been used with varying degrees of prominence in different parts of the country. With gradual establishment and expansion of the British Empire, the English language developed its roots in Indian society.

This interaction and expansion of English in India has been through three phases. In the first phase, the Christian missionaries who moved to many interior places in the country began to spread English besides Christianizing lower classes of the society. In the second phase, in the 8th century and the early 19th century prominent Indian leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal and Rajunath Hari Navalkar in Maharashtra made efforts to introduce English education in India. The third phase saw the firm growth of English language in India with the introduction of Lord Macaulay's New Education System.

The entire history of Indian English Novel can broadly be divided into two periods –pre independence and post-independence. The pre-independence period witnessed a slow growth of Indian English novel since the publication of Bankim Chand Chatterjee's *Ram Mohan's wife* in 1864. The novelists of this period mainly wrote under the influence of Gandhism and nationalism. They devoted their novels on one hand to the exposition of social evils, customs & traditions, rites & rituals, poverty & illiteracy, bonds & bondages and, on the other hand, they made their works a powerful medium of highlighting the east –west encounter and of spreading the

nationalistic ideas of the great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi. Raja Rao made a departure from the dominant trend by assigning ample space to the richness of Indian philosophy in his *The Serpent & the Rope* and *The Cat and Shakespeare*. Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope* is a very complex work, in which the potentialities of the English language are adroitly exploited for narrating the soul-searching experiences of an expatriate Indian intellectual mostly in Indian idiom and Indian rhythm. The novel came after a long wait of twenty years after the publication of his first endeavour (Kantapura).

The Serpent and the Rope is an attempt in fiction to recapture the spiritual anguish of a person who is temporarily alienated from his roots, though physically. The novel has an unconventional and peculiar form. It is a series of metaphysical musings on life as experienced by the central character Ramasway, who is both the reporter and the interpreter. The novel is largely autobiographical. Rama's spiritual anguish, his metaphysical questioning, his search for happiness, and his yearnings, his return to India and his search for a guru which ended at the feet of Swami Atmananda. But the novel is much more than purely autobiographical utterances. It is allegorical; it is an intellectual treatise on the East and the West cultural tensions and a metaphysical contemplation on life.

To Raja Rao, as it was to umpteen ancient Indian Kavis, Literature is meant for spiritual experience, it is for him a theological thirst. Raja Rao himself says:

“For me literature is Sadhana (Spiritual discipline)....., my writing is mainly the consequence of a metaphysical life, what I meant Sadhana. And by man I mean the metaphysical entity. So the idea of literature as anything but a spiritual experience is outside my perspective”
(Niranjan, 1979, p.21)

The Serpent and the Rope is such a spiritual experience to the novelist. He communicates the soul-searching experiences of a metaphysical entity, a typically Indian theme in a form and a medium that is alien to him. So it is a challenge to the writer. While a native experience is sought to be communicated in tire form of the novel which is Western in origin, the grammar, the idiom, and the rhythm of a native language are inextricably woven into the foreign language. Out of the interaction between what is native and what is foreign, emerge intricate patterns of rhythm and syntax interesting exclusively to the student of style and stylistics. It is for the same reason the form becomes a peculiar one. Ramachandra Rao rightly observes:

“Raja Rao's penchant for the vernacular with its rhythm and spirit, interpolating into English idiom, creates a unique literary style which claims some distinctiveness and international appeal”. (Rao K.R, 1971, p.106)

The Serpent and the Rope is a representative Indian English novel and has set a standard. In this novel Raja Rao has moved from simple narration to complex analysis. The novel has created a sensation among the readers and the critics as well. Mulk Raj Anand feels that, “Raja Rao defies the novel form and uses it for philosophical essay” (Anand, 1970, P.119) Whereas Meenakhi

Mukharjee questions, “Are these two books (*The Serpent and the Rope* and *The cat and Shakespeare*) to be regarded as

fiction or as treatises of philosophical enquiry? (Mukharjee, 1967 P.67). David McCutcheon in his critique, of the novel questions, “Is this a novel at all?” (David, 1961, P.92)

The novel evokes such criticism as all the central concerns of the western novel like social relations, psychological motivations, characterization, judgment and a passion for the concrete are missing from the novel. The answer to all these criticisms can be found in Raja Rao's Indianness. The Malaysian critic Boo Eng tries to provide an answer to this query, by explaining that, *The Serpent and the Rope* is. self-sufficient; unlike a philosophical dissertation it can be understood on its own. He says: “Readers to whom its background is alien had first bone upon it”. He writes: “I believe; however that such an attitude severely underestimates both the self-sufficiency of Raja Rao's novel and the inherent and potential common humanity of readers whatever their backgrounds may be”.(001 BOO,1984,P.73)

S. Nagarajan defends Raja Rao for adopting such an unconventional style of writing a novel. He observes: “Rao has tried to convey the feel of a world view very different from that which has shaped the idiom of the English language.....Raja Rao's aim is to create a style that will reflect the rhythm and sensibilities of the Indian psyche and since it is in Sanskrit that Indian mind has found its most consummate literary expression, he tries to adopt his English style to the movement of the Sanskrit sentence” (S. Nagarajan, 1961, 516)

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The Serpent and the Rope is an attempt at Indianization both in form and spirit. It does not cling as a rule to conventional moulds and patterns of well-made novel. Rather the novelist has employed Indian traditional method of story-telling to explore the totality of human existence. The narrative contains stories within the story. It contains long philosophical discourses on history, philosophy; philosophical reflections on Christianity, Buddhism, Vedanta, Tantra, Mystical experiences, initiation tests and interesting observations on religion, politics, womanhood and manhood. The narrative is also embossed with fables and legends from Indian kavyas and puranas. And above all, the narrative contains excerpts from the diary of the narrator. On the whole, the novel emerges as a complex work and the complexity is the outcome of the multifarious influences on him of Indian metaphysical tradition and his susceptibility to western culture.

5. Conclusion

Indian English has become an emergent medium for organic expressions of the urge of a fairly, large part of the Indian people and Indian writings in English has carved out a distinct identity of its own.

Bhattacharya's second novel, *Music for Mohini* (1952) portrays the opposite characteristics of the Indian heritage and Western culture. He describes the consequences of post-Independence in India. The novel is a combination of opposite cultures of the city Calcutta and the village Behula in Bengal. It is a mixture of two cultures, a fiction of the East

and the West. Bhattacharya explained in detail the realistic pain, agony and struggle of the oppressed in the Indian society. As a major twentieth century humanist, he is much more a novelist of social ideas than personal emotions. His basic concern for the poor and his desire to build new world with ideal values is clearly explained in his novel *Music For Mohini*.

The Serpent and the Rope can be described as the spiritual autobiography of a consumptive, hypersensitive individual with a poetic disposition. The protagonist has been temporarily alienated from his root as he has been to France to complete his research work. There he marries a French girl but that relationship does not last as his wife becomes a devout Buddhist and he returns back to India. The story is so complicated that it cannot be expressed fully by the western style of narration. So the story has to be told in a puranic style and the narration should amalgamate the narrator's ancestry, cultural upbringing and his encounter with the west.

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