

Rushdie to Adiga: The Edifice of The Indian Narrative

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Abstract: The present paper traces the excellence achieved by the Indian Booker prize-winning novelists and their novels, which have generated the image of Indian English Fiction as the hot new cakes of world literary scenario. The novelty of expression and representation inherent in the works will be taken up for analysis in the paper as the required merit of achievement on a global scale as well as their influence on the whole gamut of Indian and world literature.

Keywords: Diaspora, Narrative, Meta-narrative, Flashback, Stream of Consciousness, Metaphor, Imagery, Indianization.

Introduction: Indian English fiction owes its grandeur to the literary experiments and innovations of its stalwarts like the path breaking genius of Salman Rushdie, the panache of regional flavour in Arundhati Roy, diasporic consciousness in Kiran Desai and social critique in Arvind Adiga. The experiments in language, theme and technique have engendered their art as exquisite pieces of literature that has prompted the whole world to stand up and take notice. In the present paper the novels of the four Booker Prize winners will be studied focusing on the narrative skills and expertise in the select novels: *The Midnight's Children* (MC), *The God of Small Things* (GST), *The Inheritance of Loss* (IL) and *The White Tiger* (WT), respectively.

In the year 1981 was published a novel that has continued to win laurels even after two decades. Salman Rushdie's groundbreaking novel *The Midnight's Children* was a pioneer of sorts in the history of Indian English Fiction. It heralded a new beginning for the genre that had seen the likes of such literary geniuses as the celebrated trio of Indian English Fiction amongst a plethora of so many others. His novel proved to be the beginning of a new era with its unabashed expressions, use of language, extravaganza and multitude. A saga of a country's journey from inception to partition and freedom, it juxtaposed the realms of personal with public, history with fiction, realism with magic; a trend that influenced the coming generation of writers and is visibly reflected in their art. The contemporary structure of Indian English Fiction; its edifice rests assuredly on the capable shoulders of its new generation of writers who have followed in the footsteps of Rushdie. In 1997, Arundhati Roy bagged yet another Booker prize for an Indian, with her novel that centred on the representation of the patriarchal Indian society, the class structure and gender discrimination. Drawing up a regional picture of rural Indian society in South India, Roy reveals glimpses from

her own life through the eyes of the young twin.

Kiran Desai, the next Indian to win the coveted prize in 2006, is a diasporic writer like Rushdie. It's the characteristic backward look of the Diaspora that finds an expression in her works that are based on Indian society, culture and ethos. Her narratives are the portrayal of small town India with all its idiosyncrasies, beliefs, and social and cultural life that gives a charm to her fiction. Unlike Desai's nostalgia for her home that finds an expression in her choice of themes and settings for her novel, Arvind Adiga, the winner of 2008 exposes the underlying dark belly of Indian society, culture and politics. The novel is a harsh indictment of India and the Indian way of life and ethos. It attempts to represent the other darker side of 'India Shinning', hitherto neglected and ignored in contemporary fiction. All the novelists and their literary art are winners and have richly contributed to the development of the genre, giving a shape and form to the edifice of the Indian narrative. Literally speaking, a narrative is a story that tells a tale through images, pictures, characters, dialogues, verse, etc, as per the genre. In other words apart from fictional narrative, poetry, drama as well as non-fiction can also employ the narrative structure as its mode of representation.

Edifice of Indian Narrative: The narrative style that has evolved and developed from Rushdie to Adiga is characterized by the postmodern technique of an amalgamation of various narrative voices within the story. The narrator is often the protagonist of the novel around whom the action revolves, not only on the personal front but the public as well. In Rushdie's *The Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai's life is closely intertwined with the life of the nation. He is born at the time of midnight when India achieves independence and this uncanny fusion of personal and public becomes an integral part throughout his life. The narrative in Roy's *The God of Small Things* though not akin to that of Rushdie does represent the Indian social and cultural life through the life of its characters. It does not mingle the personal with the public explicitly but provides a comment on the public through the personal. The treatment that Ammu faces in the hands of her own family and from society at large, the exploitation and suffering of Velutha are all examples that reveals the prevalent social prejudices and evils. In her novel, Desai wraps up her representation of the diaspora 'within' and 'without' through the characters of the Judge and Biju along with the contemporary North Eastern situation plaguing India. Her narrative presents a perspective on the social, cultural, psychological and political situation of present-day India. Adiga's narrative is the continuation of the style conceived and conceptualized by his predecessors as well as a deviation from their technique. In his narrative style there is a strong influence of his journalistic experience that brings in a dash of investigative approach to a social and cultural issue.

The postmodern condition in literature is preoccupied with the idea of representation of life: knowledge, history, and reality through the employment of the meta-narrative. Meta, which means beyond and narrative that refers to the story merge to form the distinctive literary

style of the meta-narrative. The meta-narrative is in fact an attempt to give a voice to the different stories hidden within the narrative of one single story. It is an endeavour to comprehend life in all its variedness and complexity, and also bring into focus the neglected and marginalized perceptions of knowledge and experience.

In the emerging narrative techniques a discernible reader can easily notice the double consciousness of the narrator. Since 1990 the narrators in Indian English Fiction speak in the language tinged with a deep anguish for the motherland. There is deep-rooted awareness of the belonging to the periphery. (Bhandari)

In Saleem's voice is heard the voice of a generation marginalized and tormented by the partition and disillusioned by the post independent India. The story of Ammu is an expression of the women pushed to the peripheries of existence by a patriarchal society, while the plight of Velutha reveals the deep tentacles of casteism in the Indian society, administration and politics. The hierarchy implied by the class structure is given a new expression in the social structure wherein resides Judge Jemubhai, his cook and the cook's son, Biju. Balram Halwai is again the voice of the migrant workers and servants, the exploited and the homeless suppressed by the caste system and people in power. In building up the edifice of the Indian narrative, the writers have employed the technique of the meta-narrative to represent the voices from the periphery. It in fact is an aid to another postcolonial literary technique of dismantling the hegemony of power structures by lending space to the 'others'. In all the novels mentioned, the narrative forms a story that liberates and asserts all the various stories within. They are the meta-narratives; a fusion of multiple voices and stories.

In each of the narratives, either the first person narrative is employed through one of the characters or the third person narrative, fused with dialogues or monologues, multiplicity of voices, fragmented trajectory of time and stream of consciousness, linguistic experiments, and satire. The writers employ one or the other literary technique to give credibility to their stories, yet in their employment of techniques they differ in style and temperament. The Indian narrative tradition inherent in the oral tradition of storytelling and enactment of tales in the folk theatrical tradition has a significant influence on the art of the writers. Their fictional narrative is tinged with these traditional techniques of storytelling and also literary tradition from the West.

Influence on the narratives: Rushdie's narrative in *Midnight's Children* displays a strong influence of the oral tradition of stories in India. In his novel, the narrator is performing the role of the Sutradhar in a traditional folk tale/play, often digressing from his tale, re-inventing facts and mingling elements of fantasy with them. Saleem Sinai narrates the story of his family, spanning three generations. It is through his voice that the tale of his life and the nation unfolds. Rushdie alludes to "Scheherazade" (MC 9) of *The Arabian Nights* while referring to the role of the narrator. In Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the narrator is the omniscient author/narrator who gives a voice to adult Rahel returning from the U.S.

Written in the third person narrative it is a versatile narrative style; the past recreated through her memory as a child and as an adult living in the present. In her narrative can be found the traces of the oral tradition of rendition as found in the traditional art of the Kathakali dancers. The story unfolds through Rahel's perspective that introduces us to Ammu, her life, desires and her tragic end. The oral tradition of storytelling in the manner Rushdie employs in his novel is missing in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Like Roy, here it is the omnipresent, invisible narrator/author again, who introduces the setting, the characters and theme of the novel. The characters and themes unfold before our eyes through the narrative of the author. It is Desai who gives a glimpse of her characters and their thoughts, likes and dislikes. In her employment of the third person narrative she follows the traditional narrative mode predominantly in use since the inception of the genre itself. The narrative style employed by Adiga is unique and quite different from those of his contemporaries. In *The White Tiger* Adiga follows the epistolary tradition of writing, representing his story through a series of letters written by the protagonist Balram Halwai to the Chinese Premier.

Stream of Consciousness: Contemporary fiction adheres to the postmodern technique of non-linearity and time jumps. In a world where borders and boundaries are fast disappearing, time leaps in consciousness is common and central to the narrative structure. The employment of flashback, stream of consciousness and digressions marks the narrative style of these writers. Rushdie's Saleem relives the history of his entire family through his memory. Like Rushdie's Saleem, Rahel takes the readers on a journey to her past and presents a, "life reconstructed out of the memories of the past" (Sodhi 42). She recreates the life and trials of her mother Ammu and draws up the other characters as well, often giving an expression to the views of the young Rahel. Roy follows a non-sequential narrative mode, tagging along her character's narrative and her perception of the life and society. In Kiran Desai, the narrative is based in the present with Sai coming to stay with her grandfather, the Judge, Jemubhai. Her arrival, interaction and assimilation into her new surroundings take the story forward while it drives the Judge on a trip down memory lane. The reminiscences of the Judge display Desai's use of stream of consciousness and flashback in the narrative. In Adiga's novel, the stream of consciousness or flashback technique is self-evident as the entire narrative rests on the memories narrated by Balram. It is through his memory that cast-ridden India; corrupt and unscrupulous comes to life.

Magic Realism: All the novelists represent the contemporary creed of writers who are known for their penchant for portray of realism in their fiction. However contemporary realism is an idea subject to varied interpretations and perspectives. In Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, realism portrayed through symbols and metaphors; it is a realism that gives space for alternative aspects of realism to come forth from the periphery and assert their presence. The extensive use of the postmodern technique of magic realism lend a unique charm as well as complexity to

the novel that endeavours to satirize and present an ironical picture of India's political history thereby breaking the structure free from the hegemony of the centre, as such the voices from the periphery: Saleem, Parvati, Picture Singh and all the other subdued voices can be heard. The technique is expertly employed by Rushdie through the characters of the midnight's children and their magical powers. In Arundhati Roy the technique is less obvious than Rushdie and is employed primarily through the hallucinations and dreams of Rahel and Ammu. Rahel imagines Sophie move in her coffin and hears her scream when being buried. Likewise, "... Ammu traveled upwards through a dream in which a cheerful man with one arm held her close by the light of an oil lamp. He had no other arm with which to fight the shadows that flickered around him on the floor." (GST 205). The technique of magic realism that has come to characterize contemporary narratives is however not employed by Kiran Desai and Arvind Adiga. The narratives of Desai and Adiga are marked by their direct and explicit approach to reality that undermines the possibility of their usage.

Metaphor/Imagery and other Features: Rushdie's fiction abounds in the use of metaphors and images, myths drawn from religion, caricatures of political figures, facts and fantasy. Saleem is the metaphor employed to symbolize the birth, illusion, hopes and disillusionment of India as a nation. Political allegory, fragmented and complex narrative, multitudinous, vast, extravagant, etc are some of the features that describe his legendary novel that refers to facts as the Partition, War, Emergency, and Widow, and juxtaposes them with the magical powers of the midnight's children. Arundhati Roy is an activist-novelist and the strains of her calling can be seen in the social realism of her novel. Feministic in approach she exposes the prevalence of castism and gender discrimination, a prominent theme that she best expresses through the metaphor of the 'Lalturn' and the 'Mombatti'. In Desai can be found strains of similar realism and social concern; evidenced in her choice of setting that highlights the North Eastern situation of India. Her characters are more than individuals; the Judge, an anglophile stands for the 'ridiculous Indians' while Biju symbolizes the average Indian person enamoured of the West and its illusory greener pastures. Adiga supplies a very striking metaphor of 'Darkness' and 'Light' in his novel that echoes the employment of similar images by Roy and that best illustrates the major concern of both the works with the theme of power structures; the 'centre' and the 'other', "Men with Big and men with small Bellies." (WT 64). Adiga's extensive use of animal imagery reminds of Orwell's *Animal Farm*. To describe the landlords and the powerful men in his village he names them after animals, the Buffalo, the Wild Boar, the Stork and the Raven, while he groups the servants in one category and calls them the 'Rooster Coup' for their servile attitude.

Language: Experimentation with the language has been an area of expertise for all the writers concerned. Tracing its development from the early novelists, it has matured greatly in the hands of the contemporary novelists like Rushdie and his fellow writers. In *Midnight's Children*,

Rushdie has made a liberal use of the Hindi and Urdu words and expressions. Sometimes he has employed the word as it is: Baap-re-baap, Kali-yuga, Gandharva, falooda, etc., while at others he has given a literal translation: “Piece-of-the- Moon” (MC 9). Expressions like “Godown, gudam, warehouse, call it what you like” (MC 71) presents the peculiar fusion of language variants by Rushdie. The form of Indian expressions employed in the regional tongue lends a native flavour to the language. Roy's use of the vernacular is an example of Indianization of the English language: “Aiyyo kashtam” (GST 169), “Ividay!” (GST 68), and so is Desai's use of the influence of the regional tongue portrayed in the conversation of Biju or the cook, “Ai aaa, ai aaa . . . please, I'm a poor man . . .” (IL 5), “Shopping ke liye jaenge, bhel puri khaenge . . . dollars me kamaenge, pump um pump um.” (IL 298). Adiga also follows the lead and employs the language along with its regional flavor, 'paan', 'vada', 'daal', 'hahn', 'pooja', 'ghat', etc. His language is conveyed in various tones, in tune with the class, education, profession and background of the character; Balram's attempts to articulate terms as Mall or Pizza result in, “Mool . . . Mowll. Malla.” (WT 147), “Pijja. Pzija. Zippja. Pizja.” (WT 155).

Conclusion: The pioneering work that was started by the early phase writers of Indian English fiction has come of age in the present scenario. Rushdie, Roy, Desai and Adiga are the proud and capable flag bearers of the genre who have contributed immensely to the enrichment of the edifice of the Indian narrative. In their talented hands, the genre has matured and attained an identity of its own within the nation as well as on an international scale. Diverse and multifaceted the genre has its own distinctive Indianness in the choice of themes, settings, characters, and language. The story that it endeavours to represent; the narrative style that it gives shape to is rich, vibrant, traditional as well as contemporary, fresh and fascinating. Its uniqueness lies in its perfect blend of ethnicity with modern modes of expression and representation. Rushdie and Adiga's narrative is laced with satire that is an indictment of the social and political situation prevalent in the nation. Roy and Desai on the other hand represent the social, cultural and political in a realistic tone. The famous four Indian Booker Prizewinners have carved a niche for themselves and for the genre of contemporary Indian English fiction, thereby strengthening further the edifice of the Indian narrative.

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