
MAGIC TO REALISM: THE RISE OF POST-RUSHDIE INDIAN FICTION

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Abstract: India found a place in the literary map with the publication of the epoch making novel *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie. This unrepeatable novel was an innovator in the theme and treatment which crossed all the limitation of imaginary possibilities. The post-Rushdie generation of writers like Amitav Ghosh, Vikas Swarup, Arundhati Roy, Aravind Adiga etc., is no more a generation of such an affluence. They have broken the spell of Rushdian magic. This 'midnight's grand children' show more a sense of belonging to their 'real' and conscious world. Fiction is no more fictitious in their hands. They provide a kaleidoscopic portrait of modern India like gender issues, social malaise, economic disorder, cultural fragmentation and degeneration, sensitizing class issues, the voice of the marginalized and the real under belly of India which is chaotic and equally enchanting in their novels. In other words the world of Indian English fiction is no more under the spell of 'magic' but is more under 'realism'.

Key words: Indian fiction, Post Rushdie fiction, , Realism, Social realism.

Introduction: Indian English fiction is a result of the awareness of the colonial exploitation. In its infancy it was more aping the west than the reality of the east. In the hands of the pioneers like Tagore, Bankim Chandra, R.K. Narayan and others, the genre was less a weapon and more a new medium of entertainment. Fancy, fantasy, dream and creativity were the rich source of fiction which could be seen at its crowning glory in the magical world of Salman Rushdie. Fiction obviously was more fictitious. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand and a few innovators made it more a medium of awareness and awakening. It has now evolved into the clarion voice of the voiceless.

Salman Rushdie, the doyen of the art of spinning fantasy, mythology, religion, tradition, politics etc., started off with *Grimus*, a fictional fantasy in epic scale and is celebrated for his *Midnight's Children*, the winner of Booker's Booker. His *The Satanic Versus* earned him 'fatwa' and his *Shame* is peerless. He used a hybrid language –English generously peppered with Indian terms – to convey a theme that could be seen as representing the vast canvas of India. He is a branded magical realist, the mode of writing most famously associated with Gabriel García Márquez. In all his novels he approaches and capsulates the bitter reality with the magical sugar coating. His optimal creation Salim Sinai, who is hand cuffed with India has the unusual powers to connect all the midnight children. He has four fathers and three mothers as in a fairy tale fashion. All the midnight's children like Salim, Parvathi and Shiva posses some incredible gift. This super power sustains the plot and the readers. It keeps the readers under the spell.

But the post-Rushdie generation of writers are more concerned with the reality in all its dimensions like society, culture, the underbelly of the metropolitan, IT technocrats, gender issues, social malaise,

economic disorder, cultural fragmentation and degeneration, sensitizing class issues, the voice of the marginalized and as many as the diversities in India. The contemporary novelists like Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Vikas Swarup, Aravind Adiga etc are a handful to name who mirror the society to the world in all its true colours. Theirs is a social document, a new history that interprets the past to the future.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the makers of the new patterns of writing novels with a postmodern thoughts and emotions, who has been influenced by the social, political and cultural milieu of India. As an anthropologist, he studies the cultural degeneration, materialistic off shoot of modern civilization, dying human relationships and power structure in his novels. Borders according to him are a hindrance and a cause of war. Hence favoring globalization, he roves around the world and weaves the narratives. The havoc caused by the Japanese invasion in Burma and India and its effect on the life of an army officer and the people across the borders in India and Burma forms the crux of his novel *The Glass Palace*. The life of half bread RajKumar who strives to become a real 'rajkumar' is filled with tragic wars, devastation and dislocation. The novel also capsulates the pathetic conditions of the working slaves in tea plantation and the teak camps in Burma. The communal riots of 1963-64 in Calcutta and Dhaka shatters the life of Tridib and May Price in his *The Shadow Lines*. They are the blood written statements of the life of Thamma, Tridib, May Price and Jitamoshai who live more the life of a corpse throughout their life. The life of the indentured laborers and convicts who are transported to Mauritius in the ship called *Ibis* is yet another reality in his novel *The Sea of Poppies*. His novels are the social documents of the communal violence that shook the life of Calcutta and Dhaka.

Vikas Swarup's Q&A is another record of the darkest real face of World's largest democracy, India, which is stricken with poverty, crime, violence, incest, child prostitution and all the incarnation of evil. The novelist acknowledges that the idea of the novel was triggered by a local news paper report on slum children's having access to the internet and mobiles. They have intuitively understood the modern innovation and technologies. The novel is a rip-off of the "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire", a program, a global phenomenon shown everywhere from India to the US. "I'm very interested in the human interest stories emerging from modern India. I get inspiration and a daily dose by reading the Hindustan Times." (Hindustan Times. New Delhi, January 28, 2013) acknowledges the novelist. Swarup's realism in his novels is a sort of 'google realism' that is his place of action and events that sets the backdrop can be surfed in the internet. Swarup records that he visited the chawls and the slums of Dhavi in Mumbai a thousand times to get a map view of the location to set his novel. "I need to meet people to be able to write" (Hindustan Times. New Delhi, January 28, 2013) is the documentation of his source.

His protagonist Ram Mohammed Thomas encapsulates to the 'sutradhar' of the novel Smita, a young lawyer, about how he came to know the answers for the million dollar questions from his own life and experience. The mode of unraveling the plot is similar to that of traditional mode called 'stalapurana' where the narrator narrates the story to a listener, as Rushdie's Salim narrates to Padma. Ram Mohammed Thomas starts from the first question and thus forms the twelve chapters of the novel. His life as an orphan in the slums and chawls of Dhavi, the communal riots that swept the city, the hero worship of the cinema stars by the Indians etc had provided him the first hand knowledge and experience what the learned are not much aware of. It shows that sometimes the street knowledge can be more important than the knowledge from the books. Ram Mohamed Thomas' life from the day he was found as a baby in the clothe's donation box of a church to his employment by a faded Bolly wood star and by a security crazed Australian army colonel and later as a guide to Taj Mahal is a cross section of the life of the deprived in the capital.

The intrinsic theme of the novel being 'jugaad', meaning 'getting the job done' or 'making a breakthrough' is the spirit of India. The means do not mean anything, but only the end is the concern of the life in India. The life in the Juvenile homes, betting on cricket matches, the selling of the tribal girls in prostitution, the modus operandi of the contract killers voodoo do no more trigger shock from the

society. This rampant apathy of the degenerated world is the focus of the novel.

Similar to that of Swarup's outlook is the spectacle of the journalist turned novelist Aravind Adiga. The covetous winner of The Man Booker of 2008, *The White Tiger* is a record of unremitting realism. As a journalist Adiga has globetrotted India and its darkness has shocked his sensibilities. The novel is a vista of the true India which is in contrast to the value based traditional picture of India as projected to the world. It's a startling contrast between India's emerging as a global economy and the sorry plight of the marginalized in the rural India and the urban poverty. It's a faithful picture of the society which is both the prey and the predator.

Set in the heart of the rural India Bihar and Delhi and Gurgaon, the novel depicts the ambitious and frantic desire for the enchanted social status. Balram Halwai is the symbol of the 'new' Indian young man, who is ready to commit any heinous crime, even to slit the throat of his master, to achieve what he wants. His epistle to the yellow man Wen Jiabo stating the perils of socio-economic inequality, the evils of the feudal land lords and social injustices that Balram faced forms the vein of the novel.

To sum up- in the old days there were one thousand castes and destinies in India. These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat-or get eaten up (64)

Balram lives in a servant's quarters which are infected with mosquitoes and coacochs. This social divide is well brought out when Balram is humiliated by Mukesh and orders him to find his lost one rupee coin in the car. Balram kneels and smells the car mat as a dog does in search of it. Again when Pinky, Ashok's wife runs her car over a child and kills, Ashok emotionally pulls Balram by calling him his family member and makes him accept the charges. The novel depicts the way the underprivileged are exploited by the affluent.

Arundhati Roy presents the social, cultural and psychological reality of the typical Indian society on the other end of India, in Kerala says Amarnath Prasad in his article in *Indian English Fiction: A New Perspective*. The novel is the study of the pattern of living, daily routine, rites, customs and rituals that suppresses and marginalizes a sector. The Paradise pickle factory, the Indian Cinema Hall, the satellite TV shows, the 'mundoo', elephants and coconuts are the spicy exclusive flavors of Kerala.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* x-rays the plight of the lowly and the lost, the Dalit and the deserted, untouchability and the evils the underbelly takes everyday as ordials. After the invasion of the British in Malabar a number of the low caste people including Kelan Velutha's grand father became

Christians hoping of getting liberated from the clutches of untouchability. But, by doing so they have jumped from the frying pan into the fire. They were given separate churches, priests and parish. They were labeled as 'rice Christians' as they received charity and rice for the propagation of Christianity.

Roy's Velay Pappan is the Bhaka of Mulk Raj Anand in his *Untouchable*, who hesitates to abide by the hard and fast rules of the society regarding untouchability. Velutha is not allowed into the Aymenem house by the old Pappachi. He is not even allowed to touch any of the belongings of the house being of the deprived class. During Mammachi's times the Paravanas are not allowed to walk on the public road. They should walk backwards with a broom sweeping their footprints. So that any of the Brahmin or the white Christians shall not defy himself by footing on the footprint of the untouchable. The low were not allowed to cover the upper part of their body and should be bare. They should cover their mouth while speaking to the Brahmanas to prevent their polluted breath mingling with the Brahmanas' purer one. This cross section of the suffocating society took the world of writing into the storm. The novel is an exploration of the plight of the minority, a major concern of contemporary literary world.

Conclusion: In short the contemporary writing is more a narration of the suffering, exploitation and of the marginalized. It also constructs a virulent critique of the growing economic inequality, castism, greed consumerism, middle class hypocrisy, corruption and as many evils as the diversities in India. Civilization made man out of a beast. But in the name of the same

man has become a beast who consumes its own community. Fiction has become more a vehicle of propagation of the pain and suffering, a see through x-ray of the society. It has become more a medium of the voice of the marginalized like deprived, weaker sex, trans culture, trans gender, immigrant community, and the victims of the social injustices. Imagination, fancy and fantasy have been morphosised into reality. Today's reading community need not willingly suspend their common senses to read a piece of literature as Coleridge and other Romantics demands the readers as the spirit of this fin de siècle is realism. Literature is less a day dream and more a night mare, but seen with our eyes wide open. Fiction is less fictitious today and more a live documentation of the working system and structure that operates the society. This midnight grand children are less under the spell of magic and more under realism.

But these works do not come out with a solution for the problems they deal with. They aim at making the readers community aware about the conditions in which they live. They end up in open ended questions and leave the solution to be structured by the society, the reader community. They wake us up to see the reality that the society is both: the problem and the solution. Contemporary fiction by committing to realism has undertaken a task of engineering a better future out of a worse today. With a purpose of vindicating and trying to change the fossilized customs, fiction is perfect to be called a part of literature, as the great literary architects like Aristotle and Plato have structured it.

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