

Indianness of Indian Critical Writings in English

Abstract

Indian Critics writing for Indian Writers' Series are analysing the representative works of Indian Writers of English with a view to winning attention to such aspects of their work as the organisation of the material, the range and depth of experience that have gone into the organisation, the resources of language, the adequacy of English for the Indian writer, the writer's awareness of his own tradition, the sense of his own age, and the sensibility—individual, racial or national—all which have shaped his work. They are interested in presenting the elucidation of the work and its assessment'. All these critics have done a lot to help the poets, the fiction writers and the playwrights to be true artists. They are not bereft of Indianness. But the focus of this paper is Indianness in the Writings of the Critics who are also creative artists. The critics who are creative artists speak with a more authentic voice than those critics who do not belong to this category. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot will ever be remembered not only as poets but as authentic Critics also. I, therefore, go to Tagore, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Mulk Raj Anand, the great fiction writers of modern India, to show how their criticism of Art is embedded in Indianness. Indians have always been interested in story telling. All the good and great ancient literature has come down to us through the stories. Tagore whose art is rooted in the soil and who draws his artistic sustenance from Indian heritage lays stress on the "Story" i.e, the Plot and Character. No expression of opinions on problems should break up the composition of the story and that no opinions can be substituted for the creation of character. Problems are materials and materials should not be confused with the finished product.

India is a land of diversity our country has various languages, cultures, traditions and religions. All these elements have created an impact all over the world. We see a glimpse of 'indianness' in the writings of different authors. It is not very easy to define the word 'indianness' but we can say. It is a quality which must be presented in the great works of all Indian writers. From R.K. Narayan to V.S. Naipaul all depict the daily life of a common man, his simplicity, his culture and values always remain a favourite theme for their writings.

Keywords: Diversity, Indianness, Simplicity, Eminent, Authentics, Embedded, Sustenance.

Introduction

"The critic and the creative artist should frequently be the same person,"¹ said T.S. Eliot. In the case of Indian critical writings in English, it would be useful, therefore, to consider the views of the creative writers on their own art and to examine how far the operative sensibility of the critic is essentially Indian. This would save us from running the risk of listening, to the unauthentic which justify Thoreau's remarks in *Walden*: The head monkey at Paris puts on a traveller's cap, and all the monkeys in America do the same. The history of Indian Critical Writings in English shows a similar trend. When the head monkey in London, New York or Stalingrad puts on a new literary thinking cap, all the descendants of Lord Hanuman in India run after him to call him their Father and guardian. This general statement would, undoubtedly, be resented by contemporary reviewers and critics and they would name a few stalwarts like K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, V.N. Bhushan, V.K. Gokak, Anand K. Coomaraswamy, D.P. Mukerji, Sisir Kumar Ghose etc. They would, in their support, assert that Iyengar gave us *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (1962). V.N. Bhushan compiled and edited *The Moving Finger* (1945), a Collection of Critical Essays, Professor Gokak² re-defined many of the terms current then. Coomaraswamy

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asserted that the only possible literary criticism of an already existing and extant work is one in terms of the ratio of intention to result. No other form of criticism can be called objective because there are no degrees of perfection, and we cannot say that one work of art, as such is 'work' more than another, if both are perfect in their kind. Coomaraswamy does not admit that different principles of criticism are applicable to different kinds of art, but only that different kinds of knowledge are required if the common critical method is to be applied to works of art of different kinds.³ D.P. Mukerji classifies the critics in three groups :

1. The critic who is a technician and exercises his sense of fact. He is more interested in 'detail',
2. The critic who is a judge of values. He will be pleased with a work of art based on some model,
3. The critic who discovers canons of art. He is a metaphysician and talks in abstract language. He is more concerned with the form which is more abstract than the content.⁴

According to Mukerji an ideal critic would have a beautiful proportion of the necessary doses of the sense of fact, the sense of values and the sense of the abstract.

Besides there are Indian Critics writing for Indian Writers' Series and are analysing the representative works of Indian Writers of English with a view to winning attention to such aspects of their work as the organisation of the material, the range and depth of experience that have gone into the organisation, the resources of language, the adequacy of English for the Indian writer, the writer's awareness of his own tradition, the sense of his own age, and the sensibility—individual, racial or national—all, which have shaped his work. They are interested in presenting the elucidation of the work and its assessment'.

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Tagore admits that human nature changes ; that its interests are shifting towards a discussion of

intellectual problems ; and that; such changes in interests should come out in a novel which must depict life. But he insists that the primary interests of human beings are comparatively stable, that the basic rules of literary composition are more or less immutable ; and that the enjoyment of literature is based on these permanent principles.

But story telling is not the only aim of the novel. A novel, according to Bhabani Bhattacharya should be concerned with social reality. He says :

" . . I hold that a novel must have a social purpose. It must place before the reader something from the society's point of view. Art is not necessarily for art's sake. Purposeless art and Literature which is much in vogue does not appear to me a sound judgement."⁵

Bhabani Bhattacharya asserts that a novelist should use contemporary reality. Paul Verghese challenges this view and says, "An artist who turns recent events into fiction, cannot easily succeed ; for the unconscious mind requires much time to perform its wonder of transmitting incident into Art."⁶

But Bhabani Bhattacharya scores over him by saying that "The creative writer has a well developed sensibility, though this does not mean that he understands or spares all emotions. The things he witnesses, the things he experiences, are likely to move him more intensely than what may be called recollections at second hand. Even the historical novel relies as much on the writer's personal experience as on imaginative evocation. A second point is that the true novelist writes because he must. If the events of today have moved him so deeply that he must have a creative outlet for his feelings, why should he put these feelings in cold storage, as it were, and leave them until the present time has slipped into the vista of dim yesterday."⁷

When some critics hold that the writings concerned with present day happenings degenerate into Journalism, Bhabani Bhattacharya does not accept their view and tells them that :

"A novelist may well be concerned with today, the current hour or moment, if it is meaningful *for him* (Italics mine) if it moves him sufficiently into emotional response. An instance that comes to my mind among a score of others is Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. That good book, depicting an immediate and acute problem of the time of its writing could easily have become brilliant journalism. Instead, it became a true piece of fiction."⁸

According to the writer, a novelist should think it his proud privilege to be living now and writing about the present day happenings and incidents in his novels. He says : "It is not often that a novelist is fortunate enough to live at a turning point of national life. The turning point faces us with its challenge. Will not some of India's novelists accept the challenge?"⁹

Bhabani Bhattacharya thinks that the writer should depict the truth as he sees it in 'terms of life' making it vivid by using the method of dramatization. He says:

"Art must teach, but unobtrusively, by its vivid interpretation of life. Art must preach, but only by

virtue of its being a vehicle of truth. If that is propaganda, there is no need to eschew the word."¹⁰

The artist should be committed. Of course his commitment should, on no account, impair the value of his art. His-descriptions must be true to life. He tells Sudhakar Joshi "Unless a writer has keen observation and an eye for noting the details of general behaviour of folks, he cannot write a-social novel. I have developed this habit and I have not missed a single opportunity of observing incidents, happenings, where I can gain something for the writer in me. Most of the characters have shaped themselves from the real earth."¹¹

Sex had never been 'taboo' in India., 'Sex' stood next to Dharma. It was the duty of man and woman to 'procreate'. Indians never laid emphasis on celibacy throughout life, nor was marriage a 'contract' to them. They observed the-D.H. Lawrence's description of sex, not to speak of Henry Miller's. Some of the critics who are much influenced by the West are becoming more liberal if not "Liberated". One comes across cases when books prescribed by them as text books have become centres of controversy like P. Keshavdev's. novel in Kerala; Rahi Masoom Raza's novel in Jodhpur University. May be, in future permissiveness becomes the rule of the day in spite of the Government legislation to curb overt-sex, violence and general permissiveness in not only literature and the arts but also in society. But Bhabani Bhattacharya. would take cudgels against such writers and throw a gauntlet to them to see the reality in India. He would stoutly proclaim :

"The so-called romantic writer of today seems to woo actuality by depicting in detail and with short photographic accuracy the sex convolutions of his Cinderella and his prince, thus giving them roots, apparently, in the common earth of life and time. Here is an adolescent determined to be an adult-It is, indeed, amazing that Literature today is so full of adolescence, preening itself in adult form but being betrayed by disorders of which it is a victim."¹²

In an interview, he would frankly tell Sudhakar Joshi: "The flow of cheap paper backed, vulgar, low-taste books revelling in sex descriptions cannot be welcome. They have a revulsion for them. But look at Lawrence. He creates a whole world of this much tabooed feeling and yet the descriptions are most beautiful and excel in their lyrical quality: look at Hemingway and you will learn how sex can be a theme to write upon, without making it repulsive."

Bhabani Bhattacharya has a definite theory of the novel which he applies to his own works. He has great admiration for the spiritual and cultural heritage of India, which he turns to again and again in his novels and criticism.

Mulk Raj Anand has discussed the art of the novel most consciously and comprehensively. His views are contained in his prefaces, letters, articles, conversations, interviews and three essays — *How I became a Writer*, *The Changeling—As Indo-Anglian Novelists' Credo* and *Why I write—and the Apology for Heroism*.

According to Anand the novel is different from the tract in that it is more human; it has a greater

scope to delineate contrary emotions, it has a lesser possibility of becoming biased ; it makes a 'concrete' and not a 'general' statement; and it only poses the question and does not answer it.¹³

Anand distinguishes between the modern novel and the novel written in earlier times. The novel in the previous centuries was concerned with moral values but the modern novel lays stress on the psychology and motivations of an individual.¹⁴

The modern novel portrays the 'soul drama' of man. It is very much distinct from the epic or bardic recital of the ancient days. "It may still remain amorphous, but it illumines the dark corners within the formal illogic of logic of the art form of the novel."¹⁵

He firmly holds that the novel should be an exploration of social realism. It should not be literary photography of social life, but should be inalienable from the artist's 'desire image, or the romantic will'.¹⁶

And when Anand talks of an artist, his Indianness comes to the forefront. He says that the artist remembers the words in the Mahabharata about Truth :

"Truth is eternal duty. One should reverentially bow unto truth. Truth is the highest refuge. Truth is duty. Truth is penance. Truth is Yoga. Truth is the eternal Brahman. Truth is said to be sacrifice of a high order. Everything rests on truth."¹⁷

Like all Indian critics, Anand also believes that a. novel is cathartic in its effect. For catharsis he uses the word 'KARUNA' (One of the Rasas) or compassion. In the Chapter, "The Yoke of Pity' in his unpublished lectures entitled "A Novel Form in the Ocean of Story", he says :

"The concept of Karuna or compassion came to men and women in travail as the first enunciation of expiation through art, centuries before Aristotle's famous Katharsis." Apropos of Karuna as an essential ingredient -of Literature Anand writes :

"We might have been able to extend our own consciousness as also to invoice Karuna from which alone any literature can be justified".¹⁸

Anand's idea of 'Karuna' clearly means 'expiation through art'. The sufferings of man if presented artistically and sincerely arouse Karuna 'aesthetic sympathy' in the reader.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this paper is to highlight, the 'Indianness' through the works of great eminent authors.

Conclusion

Anand discards the dictum of 'Art for art's sake' and asserts that art is for life's sake. Literature should be used as a means of alleviating the sufferings of fellow human being. According to him, every writer is a committed artist because the aim of art is to achieve integration, that is 'to effect connection' between man and man; and between the individual and the world. He moulds the values by which men must live. But this does not mean that art should be mistaken for the pulpit. He says : "All art is propaganda. The art of Ajanta is propaganda for Buddhism. The art of Ellora is propaganda for Hinduism. The art of the Western novel is propaganda for Humanity against the bourgeois."¹⁹

Endnotes

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2. *English in India* (Bombay, 1964).
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4. *Diversities*—People's Publishing House Oct. 1958 p. 292.
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17. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
18. Quoted by G.S. Balama Gupta, "Towards a closer Understanding of Anand—Indo-English Literature, p. 117.
19. *Speech*, *Soviet Review* (March 26, 1968) p. 92.