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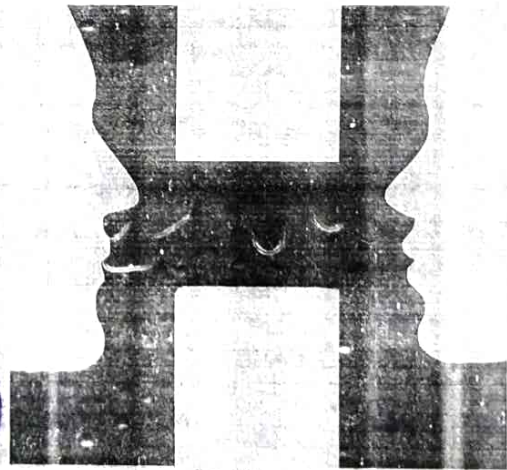
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Special Issue On

INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

(Book 1)

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33. The Growth of Indian Drama From Pre to Post Independence Era -A Bird View Analysis | Shruthi.T. & Dr.S Venkateshwaran | 189
34. Role of Fate And Chance in Shashi Deshpande's Novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* | Dr.Chandrashekharappa S. | 196
35. Diasporic Women Writers: An Overview | Vishwanath M Ainapur | 200
36. Trends/Themes in Indian-English Poetry | Mrs. Reshma Peerzade | 205
37. Portrait of Women Characters in R.K.Narayan's Works: An Overview | M. S. Bhagyashree | 209
38. Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: An Interrogation For The Identification | A. Aarthi | 214
39. An Ecocritical Reading of Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* | Jerusha | 219
40. Feministic Consciousness: A Critique of Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things* | S. Indumathi & Dr. K. Ravichandran | 224
41. Subjugation of Woman In Arundhati-Roy's *The God Of Small Things* | Dr. M. Santhosh & Dr. J. Samuel Kirubahar | 231
42. Partition and National Identity in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* | A.Mohan & Dr. K. Ravichandran | 235
43. The Image of India in Selective Travel Writings | Dr.A.Ananthi | 238
44. The Survival of The Fittest: An Exploration into the Psyche of Men and Women in the World of Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* | S. Subalakshmi | 244
45. Themes in Pre-Independence Indian English Fiction | Shridhar Vijay Nayak | 248
46. Cultural Identity and Feminist Perspectives in Sujata Bhatt's Poetry | Prof. Ramesh .P. Chavan | 253
47. Breaking the Shackles: An Overview of First & Second Generation Women Novelists in Indian English Literature | Amogh A M | 258
48. A Stylistic Study on the Collected Short Stories of Jhump Lahiri | Dr.A.Chandra Bose | 262

THEMES IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION

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Indian Writing in English has a very recent history, which is one and half century old. Britishers ruled India for 150 years. India and England had dealt with each other in trade, military and political affairs. During this period, England acquired wealth and empire of India. India, in return, got English language and the concept of constitutional Government. From the historical perspective, Indian English Literature has passed through several phases such as Indo-Anglian, Indo-English, Indian Writing in English and recently Indian English literature. In spite of its diverse cultures, races and religions Indian Writing in English has successfully recaptured and reflected the multi-cultural, multilingual society. As a result, it has aroused a good deal of interest at home and abroad also. Many Indian writers have chosen English as a medium of expression and left a great impact on different forms of literature. They have been using English to represent the Indian culture and spirit.

Indians possess the gift of storytelling from the time of Rig-Veda and Upanishad. There was *Thirty Two Tales of the Throne* dealing with King Vikramaditya. In the beginning the translations of the western classics have appeared. Then translation took the form of adoption and summarization and finally the creation of the original works took place in the form of an imitation of the western models. It is assumed that Indian novel in English has its roots in nineteenth century realistic tradition of English novel. The impact of English education, national awakening and the influence of European models are the chief factors responsible for the rise and development of Indian novel in English. Indian novel in English has become thoroughly Indian in terms of themes, techniques and human values.

Novels written in the first phase from 1864 to 1930 are entitled as the novel of nativity. The novels written in the second phase from 1931 to 1980 are called as novel of confluxion and novels written in the third phase from 1981 are known as the novel of culmination. During the first phase, novelists had concentrated on social realism, Indianness, Indian political movement, Indian Freedom Struggle,

Indian History and Gandhian philosophy. Indian political and historical novels were also written before and after Independence. These novels are set in situation of freedom struggle, Gandhian movement, British rule, historical stories of prince and princess, Kings and Queens. Themes are appropriately adjusted to the location and setting both in political and historical novels.

The time between 1930 and 1965 was a flowering period of the novel form. Three pillars of Indian novels in English Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao the Big-Three contributed in this period. The credit of fame and reputation to Indian fiction in English goes to them. It was during this period that Indian fiction in English discovered its most significant themes, such as struggle for freedom, EastWest encounter, communal problem, plight of poor and untouchables, plight of women and landless poor etc.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy an advocate of English education was the first Indian to write prose in English. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) was the founder member of the modern school of Indian fiction. He was the first Indian to write a novel in English. He began with *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864). Later the nationalistic zeal forced him to write in his native language i.e. Bengali. Ravindranath Tagore's 'Choker Bali', which was originally written in Bengali, was later translated into English in 1902. Tagore translated many of his works into English, which were originally composed in Bengali. R. C. Dutt has written six novels in Bengali; two of them were translated into English by himself. R. C. Dutt and Tagore influenced the early Indian English novelists. Dr. Radhakrishnan, a great writer and philosopher expressed philosophical thoughts. Swami Vivekananda's speeches and writing spread over the volumes. Other legendary thinkers like Keshab Chunder Sen, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Ravindranath Tagore and Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj have contributed for social, educational and religious reform through their works. Of four novels of Sirdar Jogendra Singh 'The Romance of an Indian Queen' (1909) is a historical novel of the Mughal age. The Indian English novel after 1920 was deeply influenced by the epoch-making political, social and ideological ferment caused by the Gandhian movement. Mahatma Gandhi's writing was marked by simplicity, pointedness, and clarity of thought, which are the essential attributes of a good prose. His *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1940) is a great work. Jawaharlal Nehru's principal works include *Glimpses of World History* (1934), *Autobiography: Towards Freedom* (1936) and *Discovery of India* (1946). The impression of Gandhism is witnessed strongly on Venkataramani's second novel

'Kandan the Patriot' : A Novel of New India in the Making (1932) which is set against the background of the Civil Disobedience Movement of the nineteen thirties and it tells the story of Kandan, an Oxford - educated Indian youth who resigns from the Indian Civil Service to plunge into the freedom struggle and finally succumbs to a police bullet. A. S. P. Ayyar's both novels 'Baladitya' (1930) and 'These Men of Destiny' are set in ancient historical background of India. K. A. Abbas the novel 'Inquilab : A Novel of the Indian Revolution' is a more ambitious work offering a panorama of Indian political scene during nineteen twenties and thirties.

India has been facing a number of social problems related to caste, class and social discrimination within family and in social situations also. In 1930's Sirdar Jogender Singh attempts 'Kamala' (1925) and 'Kamini' (1931) as social novels where we can see the above said social problems. K. A. Venkatsamani's first novel 'Murugan, The Tiller' (1927) deals with social theme of establishing an ideal colony by advocating Gandhian principles by Ramu as the central Character in the novel.

The most significant event in the history of Indian English fiction in the nineteen thirties was the appearance on the scene of its major writers Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao. Anand's first novel 'Untouchable' deals with the life of Bakha, a young sweeper from the outcastes and Bakha fights for low classed treatment given by high classed society turning into one of social evils resulted out of conflict of classes and castes. His another novel 'Coolie' (1936) is an indignant comment on the tragic denial to a simple peasant of the fundamental right to happiness as the novel deals with social problem. Both of Mulk Raj Anand's novels Untouchable and Coolie are under the influence of industrialism, capitalism, communalism and colonialism. Many of Anand's novels written before Independence are influenced by the freedom struggle. R. K. Narayan's novels are 'Swami & Friends', 'The Dark Room', 'The English Teacher' before independence. Raja Rao has written last four novels beginning with Kanthapura (1938) which is the story of a small South Indian village caught in the freedom struggle of the nineteen thirties and transformed completely in the end that there is neither man nor mosquito left in it. It is only novel written before Independence.

Ahmed Ali's 'Twilight in Delhi' (1940) and 'Ocean of Night' (1964) are depicting middle class muslim family and loss of culture in their society. Bhabhani Bhattacharya's first novel, 'So Many Hungers' (1947) published within a few months of Independence, is set against the background of the 'Quit India' Movement. The novel deals with the

theme of exploitation of political, economic and social kind. Indian political and historical novels are influenced by political and Independent movement of Gandhi against the British rule. This kind of novel has also depicted history of Mughal and Maratha Empire during the British rule. In addition, these novels have focused on the theme of Partition of Hindu and Muslim after Independence.

The progress of the nation is measured on the basis of woman's status in it. It is a truth that a woman of any nation is a mirror to its civilization. If a woman of the nation enjoys good status, it is a symbol that shows that the nation has reached a level of maturity and a sense of responsibility. In the galaxy of Indian novelists in English, Indian women novelists too shine luminously along with their male counterparts. We have a list of women writers of the past that possess a skill of storytelling. The stories told by mothers and grandmothers were transformed into prose, poetry, novel or drama. The amount of Indian writing in English by women is definitely less than the writing by women in their regional languages. The last few decades show remarkable development in Indian women's writing in English. Indian women novelists constitute a significant group. Women novelists prefer to write about child marriage, protest against polygamy system and widowhood in the earlier days.

The Indian novel in English before independence was male dominated. Very few women novelists emerged in this era. The first generation of the women novelists describe the traditional women. Toru Dutt (1856-1877) has dealt with the archetypes of women like Sita, Savitri and Draupadi. Raj Laxmi Debi in her two novels 'The Hindu Wife' and 'The Enchanted Fruit' (1876) has revolted against the existing social conditions. Pandita Ramabai Saraswati (1858-1922) has written a book about 'High caste Indian (Hindu) women'. She expressed her views about the marriage system and commented on how women remain satisfied in their relationship with their husbands and how they were happy to be in the bondages. Swarna Kumari Ghoshal (1856- 1932), the elder sister of Ravindranath Tagore, was a poet, novelist, playwright, storywriter and a journalist. Her major works include *The Unfinished Song*, (1913) and *An Indian Love Story* (1910). Her works proved to be the torchbearer in the tradition of women writing in Bengal and showed the quality of woman's writing. Women characters in most of the early novels are typical traditional Indian women. These women hold their concern with the traditional feminine qualities of faithfulness, sincerity and love. All these writers wrote about the contemporary social situations. They have written about what

they have suffered. Their real aim was to exhibit and explore the real status of women in Indian society.

CONCLUSION

Indian English Novel written before Independence have dealt with social issues, problems and evils prevailed in Indian family system. India is a nation of different castes, creeds and classes and the problems related with castes and classess are serious. They are all treated in proper way by Indian novelists of all times. Plots, settings and character sketches are properly chosen for fiction writing and they have helped to produce positive effects of themes involved in novels. Novels have portrayed social realities with human touch and have attracted readers towards better society in future. Indian English novel has successfully depicted social pictures of past and present life of India.

