
M.A. English

Semester II

Course

VIII

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

BLOCK

I

Introduction



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Cover printed at
The EFL University Press

Published by
The English and Foreign Languages University
Hyderabad 500 007, India

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INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

BLOCK I

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BLOCK

This is the first block in the course on Indian Writing in English. Therefore it presents the theoretical concepts and issues that underlie the designing of the course. The two units here introduce you to the contexts that produced Indian Writing in English.

Unit 1 introduces Indian Writing in English as a distinct stream of literature. It starts by tracing its beginnings and then discusses the major themes and issues that the literature has dealt with over the last century and a half.

Unit 4 makes a genre-wise survey of Indian Writing in English and briefly lists and describes the work of the major writers in each genre and the themes they have creatively presented.

Taken together the two units in the block will prepare you adequately for the study of the writers and works that you will undertake in the remaining blocks of this course.

Unit 1

Introduction to Indian Writing in English-I

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Unit 1

Introduction to Indian Writing in English-I

1.0 Objectives

In this unit we will talk about the background and beginnings of Indian Writing in English and the factors that promoted the spread of the English language in India. Indian Writing in English has evolved over the years to become a recognized body of writing that explores diverse themes and issues. We will discuss the major issues that Indian writers in English have been preoccupied with and see the changes regarding issues, approaches and the modes of writing down to the present day avatar. By the end of this unit you should be able to identify major writers and the themes that characterize their writing.

1.1 Introduction

In June 1997, a special fiction issue of *The New Yorker* featured essays by Amitav Ghosh and Abraham Verghese, short fiction by Vikram Chandra and poems by Jayanta Mahapatra and A. K. Ramanujan. John Updike profiled R.K. Narayan and commented on Arundhati Roy's *A God of Small Things*.

Much of the best and most innovative writing in English today comes from outside the Western world, from writers who have adopted English as their preferred medium of creative communication. Indian Writing in English (IWE) refers to that body of work by writers who write in the English language and whose mother tongue is one of the many Indian regional languages. It also refers to the writing of the Indian diaspora – writers of Indian origin who have settled outside the country and write in English.

The Indian-British encounter gave rise to Indian writing in English and what started as a necessity – the learning of English by Indians for purposes of trade and commerce – gradually saw it being used for creative writing as well. English education was introduced in India in the early nineteenth century and it was to be expected that Indian pens would soon start pouring out essays, articles, fiction and poetry. We could also safely speculate that Indians had probably started writing in English even before the beginning of a formalized English education system as the English presence in India dated back to many years earlier. Much of the initial writing was about social reform and in the form of journalistic articles or treatises especially since English journals and newspapers had also started rolling off the presses. This contributed in no small part to the development of Indian prose writing in English.

1.2 Background

The East India Company was set up in 1599 at a meeting attended by leading London merchants and around a century and half after it was founded, the Company was in a position to dominate the commercial, political and social set up of Bengal and, as its power expanded, India as a whole. By 1813, the British had taken up not merely police functions but also the mission of educating and ‘civilizing’ Indians. In the beginning, the idea was to promote Oriental education, to which end an amount of one lakh rupees was set aside as a grant. There had been printing presses and books coming out in Indian languages as well as in English (grammars, dictionaries, translations) from around the early years of the eighteenth century.

The first English newspaper in India - *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* – started in 1780 and was soon followed by others. Private schools that promoted education in English such as those established in 1717 at Cuddalore near Chennai, in 1718 at Mumbai and 1720 at Kolkata, culminated in the establishment, in 1817, of the Hindu College (as it was initially called and later known as the Presidency College in 1855) by Raja Rammohan Roy, David Hare and Sir Edward Hyde East. It was obvious that the institutes which offered Oriental education were fast being overtaken in popularity and demand by those that offered Western education and although there was still some debate between the Orientalists and the Anglicists, it appeared to be settled by Macaulay's famous *Minute* which asserted that it was both necessary and possible to “make the natives of this country good English scholars and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed.” On 7th March, 1835, Lord William Bentinck resolved that “the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European Literature and science among the natives of India, and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone.”

Between the years 1835 to 1855, the number of Indians educated in English increased significantly. In fact, it was estimated that even before that, the number of English books sold was higher than those in Indian languages and the bulk of the demand came from educated Indians and not from Englishmen based in India. As distances started to get bridged through the introduction of the railways and the telegraph, a common medium of communication – English – started increasing in usage. In addition, European techniques in science and medicine started making their presence felt and it was through the English language that they spread among the educated classes.

Once Indians became familiar with the English language as they increasingly used it for utilitarian communication, they started making use of it for creative purposes as well. Essays, speeches, travelogues, letters, biographies, autobiographies, verse, drama, story – all the genres were soon being explored with the result that we now have a large corpus of writing in English that comprises the work of men and women from the subcontinent. Interestingly enough, the Indian involvement with English literature

stimulated creativity in other Indian languages as well and one can see the connections between Indian English writing and modern Indian writing.

Starting from a blossoming of native genius, Indian writing in English has gradually and increasingly grown to become a new form of very Indian culture and the voice that articulates the thoughts, passions and dreams of countless Indians while Indian English has become the language in which India converses regularly. I remember asking a few students some months ago – we were conversing in English – whether they read newspapers in a foreign language. Although all of them regularly perused English dailies, they replied with a concerted and vehement ‘NO!’ When reminded of the newspaper they gulped down with their morning tea, they looked astonished and refused to entertain the idea that English was a ‘foreign’ language in India now.

ACTIVITY A

Jot down the major factors that stimulated the spread of English education in India.

DISCUSSION

The assumption of political power by the British soon led to other developments like the introduction of the railway and telegraph. The establishment of English medium schools and English journals and papers were other factors that influenced the spread of the English language throughout the country. In addition, there was a deliberate effort to teach Indians the language so that they may serve the interests of the British Empire in offices etc.

1.3 Beginnings

The signposts of the landscape of early writings in English in India were sketches, memoirs and short fiction. The beginnings were not well documented and for a long time, Cavally Venkata Boriah (1776-1803) whose *Account of the Jains* was published in 1809, was usually acknowledged as being the first published writer in Indian English. K R Srinivasa Iyengar’s *Indian Writing in English* (1962) and M K Naik’s *History of Indian Literature* (1982) mention Boriah as the first writer. However, in as late as 1996, Michael H Fisher - a historian - narrated the life of an unknown Indian, Dean Mahomet, in his *The First Indian Author in English: Dean Mahomed (1795-1851) in India, Ireland and England*. Dean Mahomet (1795-1851) may be said to have the greatest claim to having been the first Indian writer in English as his travelogue *The Travels of Dean Mahomet* was the first published Indian English piece of writing in 1794. Written in an epistolary form, the travelogue is the first ever account written by an Indian about life with the East India Company. Although he is chronologically the first, it is still doubtful how many Indians of that time - or those who started writing later - were aware of his work.

1.4 Postcolonial writing

Indian Writing in English is also referred to as ‘postcolonial’ writing. So what exactly do we mean by the term? It does, obviously refer to writing from those countries which have experienced colonial rule and are now free of it, hence ‘post’ colonial. It stands to reason that such writing would be explicitly or otherwise, opposed to colonialism or imperialism in any form but it also discussed the effects of decolonisation on the political/cultural mind-set of people once oppressed by colonisation. Postcolonialism theory is also a literary tool with which to analyse texts.

In the context of Indian Writing in English, postcolonialism can be seen as the shedding of Western canons, thought and perspectives to bring about a new articulation rooted in the Indian consciousness. It can therefore be said that post-colonial English literature in India is a ‘writing back’, a ‘re writing’ or a ‘re reading’. Where the colonised had earlier been the subjects of someone else’s stories, they now felt the compulsion to tell their own stories and rewrite what had been told in the form of counter-histories. There are however, Indian writers who see the label of ‘postcolonial literature’ as too limiting.

It can be said that Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938) which is considered to be the first major Indian novel in English, achieves a decolonising of language and mentality, borrowing as it does, the style and structure from Indian tales and folk epics and experimenting with the language to follow oral rhythms and the narrative techniques of traditional ways of story-telling. As the celebrated writer U R Ananthamurthy says, ‘...departing boldly from the European tradition of the novel he has indigenized it in the process of assimilating material from the Indian literary tradition.’

The foreword to *Kanthapura* has in fact, been called the manifesto for the practice of Indian Writing in English as it points out the struggle of bridging the cultural gap between the English language and the Indian story – the difficulty, as Raja Rao puts it, of describing ‘in a language that is not one’s own, the spirit that is one’s own’. He goes on to suggest that this can only be accomplished by a systematic indigenization of English and by imbuing it with the breathless and unpunctuated tempo of Indian life. Similarly, given the Western origin of the novel, the Indian writer would have to locate his narrative in the epic legacy of India – the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

While post-colonial literature refers to that body of writing by Indian writers whose mother tongue is one of the many Indian languages, it also takes into account the writing of the Indian Diaspora – people who were born in the sub-continent but were raised, live and work outside it. Salman Rushdie is the most celebrated example of this group who, in his acclaimed *Midnight’s Children*, speaks of the staggeringly difficult task of forging a national identity in the midst of such vastly heterogeneous elements that Indian society is made up of.

Earlier writers like Kamala Markandeya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sahgal have delineated the spirit of independent India and the struggle to break away from copying British models as well as to make a transition into the modern age by questioning Indian traditional models in order to establish a distinctive identity. The writers of the seventies like Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh and Shashi Tharoor carried this forward with Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga winning the Man Booker. In addition, there have been writers like Manju Kapur and Vikram Chandra whose first books were given prestigious awards. Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, K K Daruwala and A K Ramanujam also strove to express Indian thought and ideas in English, thus giving their work a truly postcolonial flavour.

ACTIVITY B

In what way can Indian Writing in English be considered to be post colonial writing?

DISCUSSION

Since India had been under the yoke of colonial rule, the writing that came out of the subcontinent as a reaction and aftermath to colonialism is known as postcolonial writing. It seeks to move away from a blind imitation of Western concepts even though it may draw inspiration from them and to speak in terms of the Indian experience whether within the country or abroad.

1.5 Themes and Issues

Before we begin to talk about the issues that Indian writers have explored and the conflicts that they have grappled with in their writing, it would be a good idea for you to write down what you think may be key issues that crop up in their writing. Do you think that Indian writing in English would be substantially different from writing from other countries also in English? Do you think that Indian writers consciously or otherwise use quintessentially Indian motifs? Is it necessary for them to do so?

The 'Indianness' of Indian Writing in English continues to be an issue that engages writers and critics alike. Does one expect Indian writers to dwell specifically on matters that are unique to the Indian context or are they to articulate the feelings, hopes and dreams that are universal? Why would one come to Indian Writing in English only to find some more English Literature? On the other hand, should their writing read like a guidebook, as it were, to Indian places, habits and customs? The answer, as for most things in life, cannot be either black or white and lies somewhere between. While it is true that there may be certain issues that are unique to the Indian experience and context, there are others that are universal. It may be therefore be useful to rephrase Alex King, an Australian critic's words that we are all humans by necessity and Indians by accident. And any literature can only stand the test of time when it is able to transcend all narrow

barriers of geography and specificity and is able to speak to all of humanity. So it might be right to say that, with all the 'Indian' baggage which accompanies a good piece of writing that flows out from the pen of an Indian writer writing in English, there would still be certain concerns that would strike a chord in a reader regardless of nationality.

The quest for identity has been a recurrent motif in modern literature but one that specially resonates in the Indian context. With its multiplicity of languages, religions, customs and cultures, the added conflict of a postcolonial schism in the national consciousness has always raised issues of identity that writers have sought to address and resolve.

Indian writing in English can be said to belong as much to imperialist history as to the postcolonialist era. The themes that can broadly be said to have occupied the early writers in English were: the British imperial possession of India, nationalism and the freedom struggle, Independence and partition. There was also an involvement with the East-West conflict, Gandhian ideology and various socio-cultural issues such as caste, poverty and industrialization. While the early writers advocated modernity, they were staunchly opposed to imperialism. Post-colonial India saw writing that dealt with the issues of cross fertilization and hybridity of cultures and ideas, the colonial period and a re-examination of imperialism, multiculturalism, psychoanalysis of national identity and the emergence of India as an independent nation in its own right. Sociopolitical realities and the idea of the colonial person and colonial writing have also figured largely in the works of many writers like Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. Other writers like Bhabhani Bhattacharya and Manohar Malgaonkar have focused on the history of pre-independence India and social reality.

We could perhaps categorize Indian Writing in English according to some broad themes. While many of the works may not completely fit under one category, there might also be an overlap in some but it would nevertheless be helpful to identify the major issues that writers have been concerned with.

1.5.1 The Freedom Struggle and Nationalism

It is inevitable for any literature to reflect the times it was written in and the literary output during the nationalist period in India is no exception. If a certain period is specially marked by powerful activism or sustained political thought and action, the literature of that time would most certainly bear unmistakable signs of that ferment. And so we find that writers of that time - across all languages and genres - describe the freedom struggle and can be said to be the representatives of the nationalist consciousness.

For instance, Raja Rao indigenized the English language to serve the nationalist cause by loading it up with Indian mythological and cultural terms as well as an oral style of narration thus making emotional, what he termed as "the language of the intellectual make-up". Dada Bhai Naoroji wrote *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901), a powerful indictment of the British exploitation of India. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo demanded

‘purna swaraj’ in his fiery articles, enthusing and infusing the nation with his impassioned rhetoric. The Tamil nationalist-poet Subramaniam Bharati also wrote letters and articles in English that were published in *The Hindu* between 1904 and 1916. Shoshee Chunder Dutt wrote *Shunkur: A Tale of Indian Mutiny 1857* and *The Young Zamindar* (1883). Both the novels spoke about India’s cultural heritage and sought to make readers conscious of the need to fight for political freedom.

The influence of Gandhi on Indian languages and literatures was significant both directly through his writing in English and Gujarati as well as indirectly through the movements that were generated because of his speeches and writings. In addition, many political leaders of that time like Nehru, Rajagopalachari, Vinoba Bhave, Pattabi Sitaramayya, Rajendra Prasad, Abul Kalam Azad, and others were also social reformers, thinkers and writers who expressed themselves eloquently in English.

In addition, the intellectual elite of the country – all steeped in the study of the English language and its literature – and who also spearheaded the freedom movement, attempted to put together a unified national discourse that would speak to people in all parts of the country regardless of what their mother tongue was. This could only be done through English. By effectively using the language of the colonial masters to write against them, the Indians were displaying both assimilation and resistance at one and the same time!

The appropriation of the English language by Indian writers can be seen as a subversive strategy as, by adapting it to local culture and customs, it makes a subtle political statement, denies and rejects the political power that a colonizing language wields. As Salman Rushdie says, the conquering of the English language was one means of setting ourselves free from our colonial masters.

ACTIVITY C

Why do you think the earliest Indian Writing in English was so imbued with nationalistic fervour?

DISCUSSION

Indians started using more English at a time when the struggle for independence was just getting under way. English became the medium through which speeches, articles, letters etc. could reach a wide audience all over the country. As such, since the language was primarily being used to stir up patriotic sentiments, the tone of the writing was nationalistic.

1.5.2 Social and Political Concerns

Indian society is a complex, multicultural and multilayered one and all its richness and complexity have been effectively articulated by writers from

the earliest beginnings to the present day. Problems of hierarchies of class and caste, poverty, and the social evils of child marriage and dowry have found a place in Indian Writing in English. The modern day alienation and isolation of the individual under the onslaught of industrialization and the breakup of the old family structures and values have also found expression in a number of literary pieces of all genres as in for instance, Arun Joshi's *Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971). Along with class and caste issues, modernity vis-à-vis religion as well as the latter's role in both individual lives and in society as a whole, the effects of colonialism, the questioning and problematizing of gender roles and rural life have all been delineated over the years.

Writers from the earliest period of IWE have focused on the political scenario in the country and shown how politics can impinge on the social and personal lives of individuals. Writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, David Davidar and Adiga make strong statements regarding the nature of politics in the country while weaving it through the strands of social and personal narratives.

Issues related to women have also been dealt with extensively. The deification/demonization of women, the social and domestic factors that hinder their development and seek to rein in their aspirations, their innermost desires and anxieties and the torment of not being able to express or realize what they actually want can be found in writers as varied as Rammohun Roy, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya (*Rajmohan's Wife* serialized in 1864), Krupabai Sathianandhan (*Kamala: A Story of Hindu Life*, 1894), Shevantibai Nikambe (*Ratnabai: A Sketch of a Bombay High Caste Hindu Wife*, 1895), R K Narayan (*The Dark Room*, 1938), Kamala Markandeya, Kamala Das, Anita Dessai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Lakshmi Kannan, Raji Narasimhan, Suniti Namjoshi, Attia Hossain, Rama Mehta and others.

Concerns specific to the Indian milieu like untouchability for instance, have been focused on by early writers like Mulk Raj Anand (*The Untouchable*, 1935) and more recently by Arundhati Roy (*The God of Small Things*, 1997). The subaltern perspective is brought out in such writing and the reader is forced to look at the stark, unsavoury aspects of Indian life. Anand's *Coolie* (1936) and *Leaves and a Bud* (1937) are about labourers. Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers* (1947), is about the famine in Bengal. Poverty, deprivation, humiliation, desperation, exploitation – all the attendant miseries of the downtrodden in society – find due attention in Indian Writing in English in all the genres.

While the focal point in the poetry of the early 1960's poets like Nissim Ezekiel and Kamala Das was on the personal or family life, poets like Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Arun Kolatkar, Pritish Nandy, Dilip Chitre, AK Ramanujan and Jayant Mahapatra, who came later with their experimental poetry, exhibited a satirical yet compassionate strain while setting their sights on society and the individual and the combined heritage of both. A study of modern Indian poetry in English reveals a heightened sense of

awareness and the consciousness of the immediacy of Indian experience practically with every passing decade.

The partition of India was a huge cataclysm, devastating in terms of human suffering, displacement and separation and is a saga of tenacious survival. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Manohar Malgaonkar's *A Bend in the Ganges* (1964), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) are some examples of novels that deal with the tragic consequences of dividing people in the name of nationalism, religion etc.

Other themes include humour and satire, travel, social and literary criticism, historical and culture studies, the East-West encounter, biographies and autobiographies.

ACTIVITY D

In what ways does Indian Writing in English reflect social concerns?

DISCUSSION

Writers articulated their concerns regarding caste and class, the status of the family and individual in a changing society and women's issues and the earliest writing spoke directly about social reforms. Writers as late as in the 1990's still spoke about the tragic consequences of discrimination on the basis of caste as Arundhati Roy did in *The God of Small Things*. There was also an engagement with political trends and the reflection of a concern for India's rural land/mindscape.

1.5.3 Reinterpreting and Retelling Myths/Epics

The use of myth is common and long accepted as a valid and sophisticated way of defining and judging contemporary life. In the hands of a gifted writer, myths not only offer a re-evaluation of history but in the process, themselves are refashioned into something new. There is a plurality of perspective and a consequently, the barriers of ancient myth and modern reality blur into a comprehensive world view.

Even in the increasingly westernized pace of life in India, the mythic past is very much present. Many short stories of late 19th century and early 20th century were a kind of re-telling of traditional Indian legends and parables. The old myths and legends are retold and reinterpreted in the context of contemporary life, resonating in the Indian's consciousness in a new but still recognizable way.

Dedicating his poem *Love and Death* (1921) to his brother, Manmohan Ghose, Aurobindo wrote:

To take with a reverent hand the old myths and cleanse them of soiling accretions, till they shine with some of the antique strength, simplicity and

solemn depth of beautiful meaning, is an ambition which Hindu poets of today may and do worthily cherish. To accomplish a similar duty in a foreign tongue is a more perilous endeavor.

Aurobindo took up Vyasa's short narrative of the Satyavan-Savitri episode and transformed it into a long poem of 24,000 lines (*Savitri*, 1950, '51), attempting to go beyond the surface of the tale that is a part of the *Mahabharata*.

Other Indian writers in English have reinterpreted or retold the stories from the great epics as did Toru Dutt who went to the ancient ballads for material for her poetry. Vasudeva's *Nala Damayanti* (1920), T P Kailasam's *Karna: The Brahmin's Curse* (1940), Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, (1993), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, (2008) and Gurcharan Das's *The Difficulty of Being Good* (2009) are examples which go to show how Indian writers in English have, over the years, continued to engage with the ancient texts.

The nineteen eighties onwards has seen a surge of epic narratives in English. Maha Nand Sharma for instance, used the myths of Shiva for his *Rudraksha Rosary* (1987). S.M. Angadi's *Basava Darsana* (1986) talks of the phenomenon of Basaveswara, the founder of Virasaivism and Amreeta Shyam has transcreated the myths in her *Kurukshetra*(1991) and *Kaikeyi* (1992). And the grand old man of Indian literary criticism, K R Srinivasa Iyengar wrote *Sitayana* (1987), *Sati Saphthakam* (1991) and *Krishna-Geetam: Delight of Existence* (1994).

While Gurcharan Das's book discusses contemporary ethical problems and issues of dharma by referring to characters in the Mahabharata, Malashri Lal and Namita Gokhale's *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology* (2009) is a collection of essays which interrogates patriarchal readings of one of the most idealized women of India. Devdutt Pattanaik's *Jaya: An Illustrated Retelling of the Mahabharata* (2010) takes into account all the various folk renderings of the epic across India such as the Pandavani of Chattisgarh, Gondhal of Maharashtra, Terukkuttu of Tamil Nadu, and Yakshagana of Karnataka. Nanditha Krishna's *Sacred Animals of India* (2010) explores the traditional Indian religious conception of animals from Ganesha to others in the epics and in Buddhist and Jain narratives. Amish Tripathi recently published his first book (and the first of a planned trilogy on Shiva), *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010). Ashok Banker has published, along with others based on Indian myths, *The Slayer of Kamsa* (2010) which is on the life of Krishna while Ashwin Sanghi's *Chanakya's Chant* (2011) draws upon the legendary Chanakya to write a modern-day political thriller. Suniti Najoshi uses myths and fables from Indian texts to illustrate the condition of women. Similarly, Gita Hariharan revises, retells and rewrites myths from a woman's point of view.

Although their literature is set in the present and they use modern literary resources, their writing is imbued with the texture of the epics and one gets a sense of tradition that has survived and surfaces in unexpected ways and

places as their narratives reshape memories into a present-day contemporaneity.

Besides the myths and legends of ancient India, the nation's rich legacy of religion and philosophy has also been explored by writers like Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo, S Radhakrishnan and Khushwant Singh.

ACTIVITY E

Pick up any of the texts mentioned above and in the next unit and see how the writers have retold or reinterpreted traditional tales to make them relevant in the modern context. Make a brief note based on your reading and understanding of the texts. If possible, discuss it with an older friend or family member who is familiar with the traditional version and see if and how the newer ones differ from them or are similar, what has been enhanced or what taken away from the original rendering.

1.5.4 Diasporic Writing

The term 'diaspora' originally meant dispersal from the homeland (usually under compulsion or extreme circumstances) but has now come to denote all those who have settled in other countries both voluntarily or otherwise. The term also embraces the children of the migrant community who may never have set foot on the soil of their forefathers but who have imbibed their 'Indianness' from their parents or grandparents and the stories they have heard and read about India. For them, even if India is not a concrete reality in terms of felt experience, they still engage with the 'idea' of India which may be just as real.

'Diaspora' therefore, refers to exiles, refugees, immigrants, expatriates and their descendants whose lives have been shaped by their double – some might even say 'fractured' – consciousness of various factors in their native and adopted lands. These would include language and perceptions of culture as also the disorientation as well as reorientation of geographical displacement. In a sense, one could perhaps say that all the literatures of the world are diasporic in character as they are the result of migrations of various people and communities from one part of the world to another over countless periods of time.

Although writers of the diaspora are attached to and yearn for their homeland, there is also the necessity and desire to adapt and belong to the country in which they have settled. As such, they may perhaps be said to belong to two worlds or, paradoxically, to neither as they are forever caught between their roots and their place of transplantation, and thus, doubly marginalized.

While this situation of being 'unhomed' (to use a phrase by Home Bhabha) is associated with that of alienation, the wish to look back at the past is yoked to the desire to stay in the present and look forward to a future where one is assimilated into the culture and ethos of the adopted country in order to 'fit in'. As Bhabha so insightfully puts it,

...to be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself... taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of 'incredulous terror.

The old diaspora, made up largely of the subaltern and unprivileged class, and mostly illiterate, hardly produced any literature at all. There was still generally, an oral culture which consisted of stories, narratives, songs and texts that, by and large, did not enter into the print medium. This rich archive of oral culture and the narrations of self and community are yet to be explored and in many cases, it is the descendants of this older diaspora who are now writing and giving us an idea of what the fractured consciousness is all about.

Diasporic writing is creative and imaginative and shows all the positive signs of a cross-fertilization of cultures in terms of subject matter, linguistic experimentation and heteroglossia (conflicting discourses within a literary activity). They show an involvement with issues relating to race and ethnicity; identity and belonging; isolation and alienation; gender; homelessness and nostalgia; loneliness and rootlessness; questioning and protest, assertion and quest; subaltern and minority issues. Many of the texts show a healthy mix of more than one world-order, a refreshing change from the monolithic uncentric literatures of earlier times.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni for instance, while re-telling and re-interpreting the myths and epics of ancient India, refashions them in order to blend in with the stories of immigrant Indian women who are struggling to survive between cultures – the new way of life in an alien world on the one hand and the desire to keep the memories and values of the homeland alive on the other.

Raja Rao, A K Ramanujam, Nirad Chaudhari Salman Rushdie and Kamala Markandeya are among the celebrated writers of the Indian Diaspora while other notable writers are Bharati Mukherjee, V S Naipaul, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, KS Maniam, Edwin Thumboo, Kirpal Singh, Satendra Nandan, Yasmine Gooneratne, Uma Parmeswaran, Anjana Appachana, Mena Abdullah, Kiran Desai, Vassanji, Dom Moraes and Vijay Misra among others who are writing from the UK, the Caribbean, Canada, America, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and Fiji.

ACTIVITY F

How does Diasporic Writing offer a different perspective?

DISCUSSION

Writing by people (and their descendants) of Indian origin who have migrated to other countries for various reasons reveals a confluence as well as a conflict of cultures and values. It articulates the sentiments of those who feel the pull of both their motherland (often accessed second hand through grandparents) and the adopted land.

1.6 Summing up

Moving away from the first phase of imitation or a narration of history, Indian writers in English discovered – or rather, re-discovered - who they were and constructed a platform of writing which, while avoiding simple imitation, would justify the use of a foreign language and resources to articulate native concerns. In this process, there was a much telling and retelling of narratives, sometimes from a completely new and fresh perspective.

Indian literature in English does show the stylistic influence of the regional languages as evidenced by the use of local idioms and certain sentence constructions. However, this can also be viewed as the ‘nativisation’ of English and a successful adaptation of the language to suit the Indian context.

Writers today are no longer fettered by the canonical restraint of earlier writing. They are creating their own paradigms and feel free to set down their markers and definitions. Conscious of the fact that Indian Writing in English tells multiple stories from varied viewpoints, these writers revel in the hybridity of the form and refuse to accept the limitations of being viewed from a single perspective. They have also shifted from the platform of fixed social contexts to an inner reflexiveness that is more representative of the modern day context. The shift in aesthetic emphasis has also meant that the pressure of articulating an ideological position is no longer as overbearing as it used to be.

There is some opposition by Indian English writers to being classified rather simplistically as ‘post-colonial writers’ and recent writing shows a marked movement away from the ways in which Indians earlier used English for creative writing. Writers have dealt positively with concepts of difference and dispersion, focusing with great empathy and insight on the modern world with all its curses and blessings. Indian Writing in English over the years has seen a lot of experimentation and innovation where theme and form are concerned. By exploring history, religion, myths and folklore and relating them to contemporary socio-political contexts, this form has come to be regarded not merely as an off-shoot of another but a tradition in its own right.

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Unit 2

Introduction to Indian Writing in English-II

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Unit 2

Introduction to Indian Writing in English-II

2.0 Objectives

In this unit, we shall look at the different genres that Indian Writing in English has diversified into, beginning from the earliest writing in non-fictional prose to what is being written today. By the end of this unit you should be able to identify major writers and the genres that they are associated with.

2.1 Introduction

Indian Writing in English has found expression in a variety of genres and garnered global recognition as evidenced by the number of literary awards that have regularly been bestowed on Indian writers in recent years. While English was primarily used for functional purposes in early colonial India, Indian users of the language soon started utilizing it to good advantage to reform, to reach out across the country and sway their audiences with speeches and writings imbued with nationalistic fervour. Non-fictional prose in the form of speeches, letters, articles, memoirs, travelogues, biographies and autobiographies was soon followed by creative writing in poetry, short stories, drama and novels.

Indian Writing in English is a vibrant body of writing today that is increasingly attracting study and research. It is seen as a significant and substantial contribution to world literature, combining as it does the Indian ethos with a modern, contemporary articulation.

In this unit, we will focus more on the pioneers, the trendsetters, the carvers of paths in the different genres than on the ones who followed. While there can be no hierarchy or categorization about the relative merits of the first practitioners and the ones who came later, it is perhaps more important to look at the achievements of the first few who laid the foundations on which each succeeding generation raised its own magnificent structures.

2.2 Genres

Based on a loose set of stylistic criteria, genres are useful to categorize various sorts or types of writing. Broad genres could be prose and verse but they could further be divided into fiction or non-fiction, poetry or verse-drama etc. We shall now look at the development of Indian Writing in English as it matured through various genres.

2.2.1 Non-fictional prose

Raja Rammohan Roy (1792-1833) was a well-known reformer and polyglot who wrote in Bengali, Persian and Sanskrit apart from English, and his essay, *A Defence of Hindu Theism* (1872) has been hailed as the first original publication of significance in Indian English literature. Roy's

articles on sati and his ‘Address to Lord William Bentinck’ (1830) on the subject were instrumental to a great extent in paving the way for the legislation that ultimately banned the barbaric custom. Ram Mohan Roy had excellent command of the English language and was a lucid and logical thinker – as evidenced by his writings. His ‘Letter on English Education’ (1823) addressed to the Governor-General, Lord Amherst, reveals how much importance he attached to the necessity of Indians learning English as well as his views on modernising India. He may be said to be the first of a distinguished line of writers who used their pen for educational and social reform.

Another social reformer who wrote essays in the style of Addison and Steele was Behramji Malabari (1853-1912). His essays, full of wit and humour, were published in two volumes: *Gujarat and Gujaratis* (1882) and *The Indian Eye on English Life* (1895). Malabari was also a poet but is best known as one of the pioneers of Indian journalism in English. One of Malabari’s contemporaries was Nagesh Vishwanath Bai (1860-1920) who was also well-known for his prose writing. His *Stray Sketches from Chakmakpore* (1894) is a collection of character sketches based on people from different strata of society and in them one can catch glimpses of R K Narayan’s later vignettes of his imaginary town, Malgudi.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) wrote several essays in English while the speeches of Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925), one of the founding members of the Indian National Congress and a gifted orator, were published in 1890.

Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) published the *Economic History of India* in two volumes (1902 and 1904), a travelogue, *Three Years in Europe 1869-1871* (1872) and a literary history, *The Literature of Bengal* (1879). Other writers were Krishim Mohan Banerji (1813-85) and Ram Gopal Ghose (1815-68) who were both students of one of our earliest poets, Henry Derozio.

The *Complete Works* of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), of which the first volume appeared in 1907, comprised speeches and lectures. They dealt with the spiritual ideals of India and Hinduism, rued the setting in of degeneration in the minds and values of Indians of that time and spoke about possible causes and solutions. Vivekananda uses a fresh idiom with imagery drawn from everyday life which makes his prose seem amazingly modern.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the most celebrated Indian writer of his time. His prose writings were mainly in the form of lectures though his letter to Mahatma Gandhi, ‘The Great Sentinel’ has been hailed as a composition of outstanding merit which spoke of the values of humanism in the midst of political turmoil. His first prose work in English, *Sadhana* (1913), was based on lectures that he delivered at Harvard University on Indian philosophy and one of his collections of lectures, *Nationalism* (1917), is relevant even today.

The seer and poet, Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) published many volumes of prose on philosophical, cultural, social and religious issues. C.D. Narasimhaiah, the eminent critic, has called him "the inaugurator of modern Indian criticism." *The Life Divine* (1939-40), *Heraclitus* (1947), which made a comparative study of Vedantic thought and Greek philosophy, and *The Synthesis of Yoga* (1948) are his most famous writings in the field of religion and spirituality. Some of his other writings include *The Renaissance in India* (1920) and *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1953). Aurobindo's critical approach combines the best of the Sanskrit and Western traditions of aesthetics.

Another writer known for his work on Indian philosophy and aesthetics was M. Hiriyanna (1871-1950) as is Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975) who wrote extensively on Indian philosophy and religion and later became the President of the nation. His works include *Indian Philosophy* (in two volumes, 1923, 1927), *The Hindu View of Life* (1926) and *The Principal Upanishads* (1953).

As Indians grew more and more engaged with the freedom struggle, one could see the emergence of leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mahadev Govind Ranade who were great orators and used English very effectively in their public speeches. V S Srinivasa Sastri (1869-1946), a leader of the Moderates, who was known as "the silver-tongued orator of the Empire", wrote a number of biographies, including *Life and Times of Sir Pherozeshah Mehta* (1945) and *My Master Gokhale* (1946). The nightingale of India, Sarojini Naidu, was also an eloquent orator in English. C. Rajagopalachari's versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are masterpieces of simple English prose. Mahatma Gandhi was one of the great thinkers of the times while Nehru is acknowledged to be one of the most powerful speakers and writers of that era. Both Gandhi's and Nehru's autobiographies have earned worldwide recognition as has the latter's *Discovery of India* (1946).

After Independence, scholars, no longer under the pressure of having to work for a nationalist cause, also turned towards lighter writing in addition to writing in the fields of economics, history, religion and philosophy. Literary criticism was also an area in which erudite minds of the likes of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, C. D. Narasimhaiah and Meenakshi Mukherjee found expression. The most popular forms of non-fictional writing were biographies, autobiographies, travelogues, social and literary criticism, historical and culture studies. A prolific writer who wrote in all these forms was Nirad C Chaudhari (1897-1999) and his famous works include *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951), *A Passage to England* (1959), *The Continent of Circe* (1966), *The Intellectual in India* (1967), *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life of Max Müller* (1974), *Clive of India* (1975), *Hinduism: A Religion to Live By* (1979), *Three Horsemen of the New Apocalypse* (1997), and *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* (1987).

Other writers in this field are Rajmohan Gandhi and Ved Mehta while writers who are primarily known for their fiction like RK Narayan, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgaonkar, Nayantara Sahgal, Ruskin Bond,

Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Seth and Amitav Ghosh have also written non fiction.

ACTIVITY A

What do you think are the differences in non-fictional writing of the pre-Independence and post-Independence eras?

DISCUSSION

The pre-Independence era saw the rise of Indian Writing in English used mainly for functional purposes. The struggle for freedom meant that English was used to reach out and spread the message in as wide ranging a way as possible and was thus more imbued with the nationalistic flavour. After Independence, writers could focus on other issues but which were just as important and relevant to the average Indian. There was also a shift of focus to lighter writing.

2.2.2 Poetry

Sir William Jones (1746-1794) a judge at the Supreme Court in Calcutta, a great scholar and poet, was passionate about the Orientalist cause and research in Indian literatures. He founded the Asiatic Society in 1784 and, by publishing a series of hymns to the gods and goddesses of Hinduism and translating Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* (1789), showed that the English language could aptly be used for Indian themes. These poems may hence be considered to be the precursors to Indian English poetry.

It is interesting to find that a quarter of a century before the start of formal English education or the setting up of Indian Universities, there were already some Indians who were writing poetry in English. The earliest Indian English poetry came, perhaps naturally, from Bengal as that was the first British foothold in India. As the literary activity remained concentrated in Calcutta, later spreading to Madras and Bombay, it became an urban phenomenon, a characteristic it has retained in large measure to this day. Also, the knowledge of English was largely confined to the upper strata of society, which played a major role in the choice of themes as well.

The first Indian to pen verse in English is regarded to be Henry Derozio (1809-31) whose collection, *Poems*, was published in 1827 in Calcutta. His poems reveal a love for Indian mythology, imagery and themes articulated through a remarkable command of the language and a felicity of expression. He was followed by Kasiprasad Ghose (1809-73), a master of English prosody whose poetry, like Derozio's, was largely conventional and derivative. Ghose's *Shair and Other Poems* appeared in 1830. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-73), considered to be more gifted than his predecessors, is notable for his heavily Latinised diction and a style imitative of Milton in his *Satan*. Hur Chunder Dutt published *Fugitive Pieces* (1815), later reprinted as *Lotus Leaves*, on themes drawn from Indian history.

The year 1870 saw the publication of the *Dutt Family Album* that had poems by Hur Chunder Dutt, Greece Chunder Dutt, Govin Chunder Dutt and Omesh Chunder Dutt. The anthology contained poems ranging from the didactic to narratives drawn from Christian scriptures and Indian legends. One of the daughters of Govin Chunder Dutt was Toru Dutt (1856-77) whose work, along with that of Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), and Manmohun Ghose (1869-1924), is considered as among the most significant landmarks in the landscape of Indian-English poetry. The work of these poets - lyrical and also reflecting Christian sentiments to some degree - reveals an idealistic strand of romanticism running through it.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, three other writers rose on the poetic horizon and soon eclipsed the ones who had come before. These were Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), and Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949).

Makarand Paranjpe, in his *Indian Poetry in English* (1993) observes that

Before Indians could write poetry in English, two related preconditions had to be met. First, the English language had to be sufficiently Indianized to be able to express the reality of the Indian situation; secondly, Indians had to be sufficiently Anglicized to use the English language to express themselves.

However, we can see that the earliest Indian English poets found no schism or contradiction in their Indian and Europeanised identities. Toru Dutt, for instance, continued to write in and translate from French even as she took a fresh look at Indian myths in her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (published posthumously in 1882). Similarly, Derozio combined his fervent nationalism with his love for the English romantics. They may therefore be justifiably called mediators between the East and the West.

The early phase of Indian poetry in English was one of imitation and the motifs and models of the western poets were followed by both male and female poets of that era but some poets like Tagore and Aurobindo did develop a strong, distinctive voice of their own who used the English language very effectively to articulate Indian thought and sentiment. Similarly, Shahid Suhrawardy (1890-1965) wrote modernist poetry in as early as 1937 (*Essays in Verse*).

Inevitably and gradually, the poetry grew more 'Indianised', the result of the change in attitudes and perspectives which had come into Indian society and which was reflected in the literary expression. Such a change had been felt over the years and can be seen significantly in the poetry of Kamala Das and Pritish Nandy and more subtly in Keki N Daruwalla while Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra and Ramanujan articulate this Indianness with a nuanced irony. Although the mid-twentieth century poets like Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Dom Moraes, P. Lal, Daruwalla, Gieve Patel, Eunice D'Souza were greatly influenced by the literary movements of the West, they freely used Indian phrases and words and tried to create a melding of Indian and Western cultures in their work.

In the 60's, while Das and Ezekiel focused on the realities of personal and family life, the latter part of the decade saw the emergence of the experimental poetry of writers like Mehrotra, Kolatkar, Nandy, Chitre and Mahapatra. One of the most important strands that can be perceived in modern Indian English poetry is the focus on communal and family heritage with a biting satirical yet compassionate undertone.

With every passing decade, one can see an increased awareness of the immediacy of the Indian experience reflected in the poetry and it is possible to see the new directions that this verse took and to categorize them into broad periods. The first phase that started with Derozio and went up to the end of the 19th century, corresponded with that period in Indian history in which the nationalist sentiment was gathering force and may be called the proto-nationalist phase. The second phase that went up to the middle of the 20th century was the nationalist period in which poets like Tagore, Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu raised their poetic voice against the evils of colonialism. The third phase of post-nationalism that corresponded with the one of literary modernism from the 60's, saw the emergence of poets like Ezekiel and marks the shift away from blind nationalistic sentiment to a more questioning stance and also a change of focus from broad societal concerns to more personal ones. In the later years of the Post-nationalism phase – from 1980 onwards – that began with Vikram Seth's brilliant verse novel, *The Golden Gate* (1986), there is the presence of a new diasporic consciousness permeating Indian poetry in English.

ACTIVITY B

Why do you think early writers of Indian English Literature copied English models?

DISCUSSION

Early writers could not draw upon indigenous models and fit what was native into a foreign medium of expression. Since they had been educated in English and had studied the great masters of English literature, to copy them would have been the obvious thing for them to do in the initial phase.

2.2.3 Short Fiction

Although a late arrival on the Indian-English literary scene, the short story has grown and developed rapidly, exhibiting a myriad themes and range of techniques. In the early stages, there can be perceived a strong influence of Western fiction writers on the writing in Indian English as well as in the Indian languages.

The Indian English short story may be said to begin at the close of the nineteenth century with the publication of Kamala Sathianadan's *Stories from Indian Christian Life* (1898). This was followed by the sensitive, realistic but humorous K.S. Venkataramani's *Paper Boats* (1921) and *Jatadharan and Other Stories* (1937), A Madhaviah Kushitka's focus on

marriage reforms in his *Short Stories* (1924) and K. Nagarajan's realistic yet engrossing *Cold Rice* (1945). The short fiction of S.K. Chettur and G.K. Chettur was notable for its supernatural element that induced awe in the reader while Mohammed Habib's *Desecrated Bones and Other Stories* (1925) evoked horror. Another writer was A.S.P. Ayyar who, through his *Sense in Sex and Other Stories of Indian Women* (1929) spoke about the problems that Indian women had to deal with at that time. One of his contemporaries was Shankar Ram who published *Children of the Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All Show* (1932). Many of these writers wrote with a moral purpose and were imbued with a reformist zeal that was aimed at drawing the attention of the educated class towards the perceived social evils of the day. Most of the first short stories were pretty much formulaic, descriptive and did not delve deep into the characters' psyche or thought processes.

The nineteen forties and onwards was a time when the Indian-English short story really took wings. Mulk Raj Anand's *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934) which dealt with loss, abandonment and suffering, has been called the first artistic writing in this genre. Anand's writing is characterised by the tragic intensity that he brings to bear on the theme of social injustice.

Manjeri S. Isvaran, in his ten collections of short stories some of which are *Naked Shingles* (1941), *Shivratri* (1943), *Angry Dust* (1944), *A Madras Admiral* (1959), deals primarily with the lower and middle classes of the erstwhile state of Madras and also reveals his empathy with the feminine consciousness. His stories have a wide range of themes that are inspired by what he sees around him and he reveals a quintessentially Indian perspective in his treatment of them.

A writer who, with only two collections brought out years apart - *The Cow of the Barricades and Other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978) - is yet known for his short stories, is Raja Rao. He concerns himself with Indian thought and tradition, focussing on social and political themes but from a philosophical perspective. R. K. Narayan presents a cross-section of life and his delightful sense of humour and satirical wit make stories like those contained in *Malgudi Days* (1942) and *The Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), to name only two collections, truly memorable. Khushwant Singh, writing after Independence, revealed a new consciousness in his *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories* (1950) wherein he speaks scathingly of superstitions and the contradictions that we so blithely embrace.

Other notable writers who have contributed significantly to the development of this genre are K. A. Abbas, G.D. Khosla, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Bunny Reuben, Shiv K. Kumar, Upamanyu Chatterjee, K.N. Daruwalla, BalaKrishnan, Ruskin Bond, Arun Joshi and Manoj Das. They display a strong sense of social commitment, incisive observation and delight in the simple things of life. Among the women who are known for their insights into human motives and emotions in their writing are Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Dina Mehta, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande, Raji Narsimhan,

Subhadra Sengupta and Geeta Hariharan. All these writers are significant enough to merit a unit of their own and certainly do not deserve to be just mentioned in one paragraph!

The trinity of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, stalwarts of the very first phase of the Indian short story written in English, articulated their nationalistic consciousness in their own ways. While Anand, ever the social activist, painted his vision of Indian life, Narayan chose to explore the nature of life and reality and Rao experimented with form. The writers who came next answered to some degree, the doubts raised by critics and academics as to whether English was the appropriate medium through which to address and express the Indian sensibility. The “detached involvement” of Ruth Praver Jhabvala and the studied casualness and easy accessibility of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s stories suggest that English could indeed be used to express quintessentially Indian issues.

From the 1970’s onwards, one can see more experimentation and openness of form, multiple points of view and the shifting of focal interest. Themes, modes and techniques of narration too have been vastly varied with a marked influence of Russian and American narrative modes. The impact of feminism can also be perceived in the treatment and delineation of man-woman relationships, the alienation and angst of modern life and the altering perspectives of reality. Covering almost every aspect of Indian life, short fiction has today emerged as a popular literary form and is considered, in many ways, to be a truer reflection of Indian society than its longer cousin, the novel.

ACTIVITY C

Look at the texts prescribed for you in this course. Categorize them according to their main theme and see if they fall into a chronological pattern. What were the factors that may have influenced them at that time?

2.2.4 Novel

Although there were English translations of novels from Indian languages, the novel as a literary form in Indian-English writing first flowered in 1864 when *Rajmohan’s Wife*, a book that advocated the virtue of renunciation over self-love by Bankim Chander Chatterjee (1838-94) was published. Toru Dutt, known more for her poetry, wrote what is considered to be the first English novel by an Indian woman writer - *Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden* - full of romance and passion, posthumously published in 1878. B. R. Rajan’s *Vasudev Shastri*, which offered an ideal picture of a hero and had an undercurrent of Vedanta running throughout, was first serialized (1896-98) before it was brought out in the form of a book. *Padmini* (1909), a historical romance, and *The Dive for Death* (1911), a novel about superstitions prevalent in South Indian society, were written by T Ramakrishna.

P.A. Madhaviah, Shankar Ram and A. Subramanyam were other writers from the South along with Sir Joginder Singh and Miss Sorabji from Punjab who were actively publishing in this genre during the later half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. These novels were characterized by a didactic element which was manifested in the concern with social issues; they did not have well-etched characters or interesting, textured plots. Also, by trying to write like the English, the Indian writers faltered severely and so, by the 1930's, the Indian novel in English was in a pretty bad shape.

It was at this point that the triumvirate of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan emerged on the literary scene and infused vital energy into the Indian English novel. They were instrumental in bringing it onto the world stage where it has gained recognition as a writing of merit. It is no wonder that they were called the 'The Big Three' by William Walsh.

Anand has about sixteen novels to his credit of which some of the most acclaimed are *Untouchable* (1935), *Coolie* (1936), *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937), *Across the Black Waters* (1940). While touching upon social evils and the social, economic and political oppression of individuals, Anand chose to focus upon the lowly, the homeless, the beyond-the-pale-of-caste waifs and underdogs of society. He also talks about unemployment and the inefficacy of the education system as well as the plight of vulnerable Hindu women.

Narayan sets his stories and characters in the fictional town of Malgudi and engages the reader with simple, humorous and subtly ironical tales of ordinary people intent on living ordinary lives. Although there are no intensely tragic dimensions to his stories as with Anand, for instance, Narayan holds the reader with his wit and sense of fun. Some of his most famous novels are *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961).

Raja Rao wrote his first novel *Kanthapura* in 1938 and after a long gap, during which he underwent a spiritual churning, he published *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960). This was followed by *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965), *Comrade Kirillov* (1976) and *The Chessmaster and his Moves* (1988). Although his literary output was far less than the two other writers that he is bracketed with, Rao is remarkable for the social, political, religious and philosophical nuances that he brings to bear upon his narratives.

Writing about the contribution of these three writers, William Walsh says that they

Defined the area in which the Indian novel was to operate. They established its assumptions, they sketched its main themes, freed the first models of its characters and elaborated its peculiar logic. Each of them used an easy, natural idiom which was unaffected by the opacity of a British inheritance. Their language has been freed of the foggy taste of Britain and transferred to a wholly new setting of brutal heat and brilliant light.

Bhabhani Bhattacharya, who followed these three masters, also dealt with the social, economic and political problems of the country in most of his novels such as *So Many Hungers* (1947), *Music for Mohini* (1952), *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1954), *A Goddess Named Gold* (1960), *Shadow from Ladakh* (1966) and *A Dream in Hawaii* (1978). The clash between old and new values and the triumph of the human spirit over the existentialist angst of realities are striking characteristics of his writing.

Post-Independence writers like Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgaonkar, while dealing with aspects of Indian society and history, are yet very different in their treatment of the themes.

Among the women writers, (although noted writer Shashi Deshpande would rather be known only as a writer without the appendage of ‘woman’ before that title), Kamala Markandeya (1924-2004) has shown great mastery over the form with her output of ten novels that deal with a variety of themes and showcase the complexity and ingenuity of her creative imagination. Ruth Praver Jhabvala, with her double exposure to European and Indian cultures writes, perhaps inevitably, of the meeting and consequent effects of these cultures on each other. Other writers like Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Attia Hossain and Shashi Deshpande reveal an awareness of social values and milieu with all the attendant pulls and pressures on the individual – specially a woman – and delve into the psychological aspects of these conflicts with great artistry. These writers have not shied away from touching upon political and social issues and have woven these themes into their narratives as well.

The eighties and nineties saw the publication of novels by writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Allan Seally, Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Chandra, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Amit Chaudhary, Farrukh Dhondy, Firdaus Kanga and Rohinton Mistry who gave a whole new dimension and direction to the Indian English novel. These writers redefined and re-etched the contours of the genre with their contemporary, men-of-the-world edginess. Their success and experimental technique was followed up with even greater acclaim by Arundhati Roy. Other contemporary writers who have achieved literary fame and public popularity - including those of the Indian Diaspora scattered around the world -are Bharati Mukherjee, Aravind Adiga, Kiran Desai, Shobha De, Chetan Bhagat, Vassanji and Jhumpa Lahiri.

In the quarter of a century that followed the publication of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981), the Indian Novel in English changed dramatically in all aspects – characterization, narrative structure and technique, style and ideology. The fiction generated by the later writers reveals an amazing vitality and vibrancy in linguistic styles. It has also creatively rewritten the tired clichés of India in an imaginatively fashioned rendering that speaks in contemporary terms. Furthermore, this fiction has had an almost visible impact on cultures that impinge on and radiate away from the native one, resulting in a cross-fertilization of cultures that has yielded its own rich artistic crop.

ACTIVITY D

Does women's writing differ from that of men in any way? Do you think it would be possible to read a literary piece and guess whether the author was a man or a woman?

DISCUSSION

Many women writers object to their being referred to as such, arguing that writers should be called just that. While many women raise women-centric issues, there are others who write on socio-political concerns and the opposite is true of men as well. So it would be fallacious to assume that one can pick up a literary piece and guess, on the strength of its theme, whether it has been written by a man or a woman.

2.2.5 Drama

Modern drama in India had its beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century in Kolkata under British influence and showed a marked departure from the performance tradition that dated back to the dialogue-hymns of the *Rig Veda*. The first Indian English drama *The Persecuted* (1813) was written by Krishna Mohan Banerjee but the genre blossomed in 1871 with Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Is This Called Civilisation?* although there was a creative lull for a couple of decades after this in this particular field till Ram Kinoo Dutt's *Manipur Tragedy* (1893), C. S. Nazir's *The First Parsi Baronet* (1866) and D M Wadiya's *The Indian Heroine* (1877) came out.

Initially, the first plays borrowed themes from Indian mythology and the great epics. Major playwrights like Aurobindo, Kailasam, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai banked on such themes. Vasudeva's *Nala Damayanti* (1920) and T. P. Kailasam's *Karna: The Brahmin's Curse* (1940), both written in blank verse, are two examples. There were also plays based on historical events and legends like K. A. Abbas's *Invitation to Immortality* (1944), K. Nagarajan's *Chidambaram: A Chronicle Play* (1955), Harindranath Chattopadhyay's *Siddhartha: Man of Peace* (1956), M Mujeeb's *Ordeal* (1957), Lakhan Deb's *Tiger Claw* (1967) and Gurcharan Das's *Larins Sahib* (1971).

Aurobindo's plays speak eloquently of his deep knowledge of both Eastern and Western thought. His plays, *Perseus the Deliverer* (1942), *Vasavadutta* (1957), *Rodogune* (1958), *The Viziers of Bassora* (1959), and *Eric the King of Norway* (1960) followed the Elizabethan model – with Sanskrit undertones - and were not so much fitted for stage performances as to be read.

T. P. Kailasam also had an inclination towards Elizabethan theatre but lesser so than Aurobindo and his plays deal with romance and epic themes. It is said that, like Bernard Shaw, Kailasam was the first Indian playwright who drew more attention than the actors!

Chattopadhyaya wrote plays with social themes as well. His *Five Plays* (1937) for example, reveal a socialistic approach as he takes up in each play, the subject of textile workers of Mumbai, bondage of social customs, the evils of imperialism, the breaking up of a family with middle class values and a poetic hope of a new dawn of realism. The messages that his writing was imbued with are a classic example of the Progressive Writers Movement of the time.

Bharati Sarabhai was one of the earliest dramatists and, in *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952), she attempted to bring together the practical, social, realistic elements of Indian society and the mystical, religious elements that are also to be found running unceasingly through the same people and society at large.

Other playwrights of the pre-Independence phase include V V Srinivasa Ayyangar (*Blessed in a Wife*, 1911; *A Point of View*, 1915), A. C. Krishnaswami (*The Twice-Born*, 1914), Niranjan Pal (*The Goddess*, 1924), Svarnakumari Devi Ghosal (*Princess Kalyani*, 1930), M. S. Gopal (*The Eastern Farce*, 1931), Annayya (*The Bride of God*, 1931), V. Narayan (*Where God is Not and Other Playlets*, 1933), D. M. Borgaonkar (*Image-Breakers*, 1938), K. S. Ramaswami Shastri (*Droupadi*, 1939), A. S. P. Ayyar (*A Mother's Sacrifice*, 1941), Balwant Gargi (*The Vulture and Other Plays*, 1941), Khwaja Ahmed Abbas (*Invitation to Immortality*, 1944), J. M. Lobo Prabhu (*Mother of New India*, 1944), P. A. Krishnaswami (*Kailash*, 1944), Mrinalini Sarabhai (*Captive Soil*, 1945), Ajoy Chunder Dutt (*Milly*, 1945), Purushottam Tricumdas (*Sauce for the Goose*, 1946), T.K.N. Trivikram (*Zero BC or Christopinashad*, 1947), N. R. Deobhankar (*The Absconders*, 1947) and Rangnath (*A Star is Born*, 1947).

Critics are of the opinion that although the plays written before Independence cannot be faulted for their inherent poetic appeal, use of symbolism and imagery, variety of themes, deep engagement with social and moral concerns and technical soundness, they were, by and large, not really suitable for stage production and so remained 'closet plays'.

After Independence, when some writers like Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, Habib Tanvir, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad felt the need to evolve a distinctively Indian drama, the practitioners of what came to be known as the 'Theatre of Roots' movement took up the study of traditional Indian performing arts like Kathakali, Yakshagana and Chhau in an attempt to create a new Indian modern drama with an underpinning of traditional forms. In Karnad's words the challenge was

... not to find and reuse forms that had worked successfully in some other cultural context. The hope, rather, was to discover whether there was a structure of expectations - and conventions - about entertainment underlying these forms from which one could learn.

Plays like Manjeri Isvaran's *Yama and Yami* (1948) and G V Desani's *Hali* (1950), bear out the fact that, although post-independence playwrights wrote differently, their engagement with the poetic-drama tradition for which

Tagore, Aurobindo and Kailasam were known, still continued though in a different way. Playwrights who wrote in prose were greater in number than those who wrote in verse but some of the important signposts in the vista of verse-drama written after Independence would be: P.A. Krishnaswami's *The Flute of Krishna* (1950), M. Krishnamurti's *The Cloth Of Gold* (1951), Satya Dev Jaggi's *The Point Of Light* (1967), Pritish Nandy's *Rites for a Plebian Salute* (1969), Hushmat Sozerekashme's *Vikramjeet* (1970), Sree Devi Singh's *The Purple Braided People* (1970), P.S. Vasudev's *The Sunflower* (1972), Lakhan Dev's *Vivekananda* (1972), *Tiger Claw* (1976) and *Murder At The Prayer Meeting* (1976), and S. Raman's *Karme* (1979).

Probably the most prolific playwright of the years after Independence, publishing from 1959 onwards is Asif Currimbhoy with over thirty plays to his credit. His plays are considered to be eminently suited for the stage and he is recognised as a writer with a flair for drama. A playwright who has not been positively received by audiences in India is Pratap Sharma whose plays (*A Touch of Brightness*, 1968; *The Professor has a War Cry*, 1970) have however, been successful outside the country.

Nissim Ezekiel is one writer who is known for his poetry as well as drama. His plays like *Nalini*, *Marriage Poem* and *The Sleepwalkers* (1969) are noted for their poetic sensibility and are shot through with a subtle irony as he makes his incisive observations of life around us. He has been described as a writer who is closest in spirit to some of the best social satirists of English theatre.

Girish Karnad is a towering figure on the landscape of Indian English drama and a writer who has substantially enriched and innovated in this genre. Showing a marked influence of *Yakshagana* and the itinerant drama troupes of the time, Karnad draws his themes and plots from history (*Tuglaq*, 1962), mythology and legends (*Yayati*, 1961; *Hayavadana*, 1970; *Nagamandala*, 1972) but re-interprets them in the light of the contemporary social and political milieu.

Another formidable name in this field is that of Badal Sircar who can be said to represent the New Theatrical Movement and who has brought into being a truly people's theatre, a theatre that is supported and sourced by and is for ordinary people. Most of his writing like *Evan Inderjit*, (1962), *That Other History* (1964) and *There is no End* (1971) as well as other plays deal with the social, psychological and existential pressures of modern life through which runs the theme of Sircar's vision of an egalitarian society that is not based upon exploitative greed.

Among those writing today, Manjula Padmanbhan who wrote plays like *Lights Out!* (1984), *The Artist's Model* (1995) and went on to win international acclaim with her play *Harvest* (1996), is a multi-faceted writer. With stories that reveal a wry sense of humour, her plays are characterized by the themes of alienation and marginalization and the exploitative relationship between the developed and undeveloped/developing countries.

Mahesh Dattani is another modern voice in Indian English theatre and one who is determined to present the Indian sensibility in this globalized world. His plays are well-suited for the stage and can be called eminently 'performable'. Some of his plays that have earned him acclaim as one of the best playwrights that India has produced are, *Where there is a Will* (1986), *Dance Like a Man* (1989) and *Final Solutions* (1993). Gieve Patel, Cyrus Dastur and Ramu Ramanathan are other playwrights who have imparted a unique sensibility to this genre and, while exploring themes and issues from contemporary life, have also experimented and innovated with style and technique.

ACTIVITY E

Make a chart of each genre with the writers associated with it in chronological order along with a brief note on the elements that characterize their writing.

2.3 Summing up

In this unit we looked at the wide range of genres in which Indian English Writing has found expression. Starting from imitating English models, Indian Writing has evolved and found maturity with its own distinctive voice, style, technique, themes, concerns and use of the English language. It is no longer a poor cousin of English literature but a well-defined body of writing in its own right and authors in the field have achieved national and international recognition for their creative endeavours. It is not possible to go into great detail about every writer in the various genres that we have discussed. As stated earlier, we have focussed mainly on the pioneers and only a mention has been made of the modern/contemporary writers so as to make you familiar with their names and you can go on to read about them as well as their work in greater detail on your own.

2.4 References and Suggested Reading

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