



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English Literature

MAJOR TRIO OF TWENTIETH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The arrival of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao on the scene of Indian Writing in English is considered to be the most significant event. These pioneer novelists embarked upon their writing around the nineteen thirties. The writings of these novelists led the Indian English novel into the right direction. Their writing created an entirely new world and the Indian novel owes much to their effort for gaining solid ground and achieving an identity of its own. They were instrumental in making the Indian Novel popular. They shaped the concept of character and the nature of the themes which were to give the Indian Novel its particular distinctiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Struggle for Independence was such an epic struggle that it covered almost half of the century. The unarmed, superstitious and poverty stricken Indians had to shake off their inaction and lethargy of centuries. Before Indian nation could march ahead on the road of progress and freedom, it was necessary for it to discard its casteism, provincialism, communalism and other divisive forces. And this was to be achieved under the dynamic leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who was the sole synonym of the whole Indian National Freedom movement. The impact of Mahatma Gandhi's personality and his versatile programs during this period as well as its literature was so rich, that it is quite apt to call it as a Gandhian Age.

The Independence Movement in India was not merely a political struggle but an all pervasive emotional experience for Indian people. All the contemporary Indian writers attempted to voice this upsurge in their works. Many of the English novels written in India in this century, for example *Inqilab* by K. A. Abbas, *Waiting For The Mahatma* by R. K. Narayan and *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao fill with this national experience either directly as theme or indirectly as significant public background to a personal narrative. The experience itself was particularly national in character.

The major fiction writers, the trio, the trinity, **Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao**, belong to this period of Indian history. These three luminaries of the galaxy of Indian English Fiction wrote their principal novels in the transitional period of pre and post-Independence era. Some of their early works truly reflect the conditions and the problems that characterized the early decades of the twentieth century India. Being the real spokesmen of the literary sky, these three bright stars voiced the vivid emotions of their age. They created among Indians the awareness about prevailing situations, trends and movements through various literary forms. K.R. Srinivasan Iyengar regards Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao to be the three major, pioneer writers of the Indian English Fiction.

MULK RAJ ANAND

Mulk Raj Anand (1905) is a prolific, veteran writer. He went to England in 1924 to do research in philosophy and came back as a committed socialist. He even took part in the Spanish Civil War. His other interest than fiction has been art criticism. His *Untouchable* (1935) is about a downcast sweeper boy Bakha, *Coolie* (1936) and *Two Leaves and a Bud* (1937) are about the laborers. *Coolie* depicts the lives of displaced laborers who are exploited by all kinds of economic forces including colonialism. *Two Leaves and a Bud* exposes the conditions of plantation life in British India. The trilogy; *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), and *The Sword and the*

Sickle (1942) on the Punjabi peasant followed next. The trilogy follows *The Life of Lal Singh* who rebels against his village mores. He fights in the First World War in Flanders, is taken prisoner by the Germans, becomes a communist and ends up in prison again in India. In his last novel before Indian Independence, Mulk Raj Anand depicts one day in the life of a coppersmith. *The Big Heart* (1945) debates the virtue of the machine and modernity. Later appeared an autobiographical novel, *Seven Summers*; the Story of an Indian Childhood (1951).

The *Untouchable* realizes that Anand is quite passionate about his causes. He displays what M. K. Naik calls "ruthless realism" (p. 160). For the style, period and themes of Anand's novels, he is regarded as a pioneer of the Indian novel in English. Apart from fiction, he has written autobiography, works on art, criticism and philosophy. Despite the wide range of his literary activity, there is a unity to all his work. His novels identify with the outcasts and the oppressed while he attempts to affirm the true values of life and faith in the moral order. Anand is a 'committed' writer who, long ago, made the break from the literary and historical image of a passive India to a literature that reflects the new national awareness. By critically examining the traditions of Indian culture, he represents a new order. In spite of the tension between propaganda and literary realism, he maintains the balance in his works. His characters are victims, oppressors, virtuous social workers, and enlightened politicians, who must all together help to create a just social and economic order.

R. K. NARAYAN

R. K. Narayan (1906) is a very different writer from Mulk Raj Anand. Narayan is one of the few Indian English writers of the earlier generation, or even any generation, who has been a full time writer. All his works have Malgudi as their setting, and he polishes and carves this one inch of ivory to perfection. His is the middle class world of the small town-modernity has impinged on this society but not whole sale westernization. *Swami and Friends* (1935) is a delightful tale about the escapades of a schoolboy. *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) is about the goings on in the life of a bachelor, Chandran, who rebelling against the idea of an arranged marriage even becomes a sanyasi for some time. He, of course, returns to a traditional arranged marriage! *The Dark Room* (1938) is Narayan's attempt at something different - a story about the suffering and abortive rebellion of a housewife. Narayan never attempted such serious fiction again though *The English Teacher* (1946), which was written after the tragic death of his wife, is a poignant novel about loss and reconciliation. This novel explores the world of the supernatural, again a subject that Narayan does not deal with seriously ever again. R. K. Narayan achieved greater fame and fortune after Independence. He started off with *Mr. Sampath*

(1949), a novel about the world of films, and then wrote *The Financial Expert* (1952), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man Eater of Malgudi* (1962), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of Signs* (1976), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), and *The Talkative Man* (1986), *The World of Nagaraj* (1990), and *The Grandmother's Tale* (1993). *The Guide*, which won the Sahitya Academy Award, is perhaps his most famous book and did very well in a movie version.

While Mulk Raj Anand is a reformer and Raja Rao a philosopher, R. K. Narayan is a moral analyst. For his novels and short stories, he has created a special geographical identity. The imaginary town of Malgudi, which is the location of all his fiction, represents South Indian small town provincialism and culture. Its busy markets are full of the hustle and bustle of life; the river is a place of sanctity, tragedy and recreation; the Memphi Hills with their forests and cave-temples attract hunters, archeologists and religious recluses. In fact Malgudi is a microcosm of India and its fixed setting allows Narayan to analyze the complex elements of the vast country. Narayan's multiple themes are nationalism, modernization, the impact of education, Family planning, the attraction of going abroad and the rebellion of the young against the old. But Malgudi shapes the gentle humor and irony that sets him apart from Anand and Rao. Though comedy is not a major form in the Indian novel in English, Malgudi provides a locale where humor becomes possible.

RAJA RAO

Raja Rao (1908) who completes the trinity is as different from the other two as possible. *Kanthapura* (1938) is the only major novel written by Raja Rao before Independence and this too shows a writer contemplating and depicting the changes that were taking place in the making of the modern nation. The foreword to *Kanthapura* is one of the most important documents in Indian English literature. Raja Rao has written more than he has been able to publish and his second book *Serpent and the Rope* (1960), which won him his Sahitya Akademi Award, showed him in very different light from *Kanthapura*. This novel, autobiographical in tone, is about the travels of a young man abroad and his life and loves till he understands that he needs to search for the true Guru for an understanding of life. This philosophical novel, in which, as M. K. Naik puts it, "the philosophy is not in the story; the philosophy is the story", signals the arrival of the philosopher novelist. Rao's *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) is a metaphysical comedy. Rao tries a different kind of novel in *Comrade Kirilov* (1976) where he looks at the life of an Indian intellectual, Padmanabha Iyer in the 1930s and 1940s in England. His next work is the voluminous *The Chess master and His Moves* (1988). His attempt overall is to espouse an Indian philosophical point of view in the novel.

Raja Rao is generally regarded as one of the most important Indian novelists. The reasons for his pre-eminence are both historical because his first novel *Kanthapura* was published during the decade of the 1930s when Indian English fiction began to gain recognition. Artistically, Rao is important because of his unique formal and thematic accomplishments. Although his five novels seem modest in comparison to Anand's or Narayan's more prolific output, Rao's achievement is probably more impressive.

CONCLUSION

Mulk Raj Anand hails from the North West Frontier Province of the undivided India, while R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao both are south Indians. In their education, experience and outlook on life these three novelists differ widely from one another. Their aim and purpose of writing their novels is also not the same. Yet these "three such different hearts and minds who present many contrasts" are grouped together for study because they are contemporaneous and their reactions to the same conditions and problems of our country are certain to be

found recorded in their novels, though in their own different ways. Thus, a modest attempt has been done to throw some light in the midst of their diverse literary outlook and personal approach, on the contemporary events, conditions, various movements and the problems of our country.

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