

Microscopic India in the Booker Winning Indian English Novels

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Abstract

Indian English novel, one of the prominent genre has made its footprint all over the world due to its own way of delineation and uniqueness, and hence remained successful to claim many reputed prestigious awards. R.P Jhabvala, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Arvind Adiga are the winners of the Booker for their respective novels; all of these famous novels remarkably deal with India as far as renderings of realistic socio-political, religious, economical, spiritual and ethical culture.

Keywords: The Booker, socio-political, religious culture, Indianness

Indian Writing in English becomes a globally approved due to its uniqueness; and Indian English fiction, one of the major genre has brought out some significant changes and experimentation in themes and narration style instead of getting stuck to old and classical forms. Indian English writers emerged on the scene and won some international prestigious awards like Booker Prize and Commonwealth Writers Prize, and it has effected in great deal in accessing the attention of critics and readers towards their works. Indian English appreciated and accepted all over the world. The 'Booker Prize' was originally known as the 'Booker-McConnell Prize', but after the company Booker-McConnell began sponsoring the event in 1968; it became commonly known as the "Booker Prize" or simply "the Booker.", which is a literary prize awarded each year for the best original full length novel. The Booker winning Indian English novels are Heat and Dust (1975) by R.P Jhabvala, Midnight's Children (1981) by Salman Rushdie, The God Of Small Things (1997) by Arundhati Roy, The Inheritance of Loss 2006) by Kiran Desai and The White Tiger (2009) by Arvind Adiga; all these has brought glory, recognition and reputation and made a footprint in the Indian English Fiction.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala won the Man Booker Prize for Heat and Dust in 1975, which may be justified as a novel of social criticism due to its realistic delineation of social condition of contemporary India. While delineating the realistic socio-political and religious cultural India, the

novelist compared Indian culture with western, leading past and present stories run parallel by exposing the colonial and post-colonial India with its realistic social, political and religious cultural facets. Jhabvala narrates India through the eyes of western ideology sketching elaborately the narrator's visit to India, "I have not yet travelled on bus in India .. Especially dust, the sides of the bus are open with only bars across them so that the hot winds blow in freely, bearing desert sands to choke up ears and nostrils and set one's teeth on edge with grit". (13)

While delineating the religiousness of Indian culture, the novelist has elaborately sketched the rituals, traditions, religious beliefs etc. and tried to show how religion is the part of Indian society, by portraying many religious events of Miss Tietz, Inderlal's mother, the story of Baba Firadus, Maji's faith and her involvement in pilgrimage, the shrine outside of the town and various images of gods.

The novelist while focusing on the religious and spiritual aspects of Indian culture harshly criticized the evil social activities like 'sati tradition', as "There were crude figures scratched hairs thin into the stone. Presumably the husband with faithful wife who had burned herself with him" (56). Through the story of Maji, Jhabvala presented Indian society and religious conflicts in the novel.

Jhabvala remarkably delineated the Indian spirituality as a part of Indian culture presenting the character of Maji a spiritual character. Maji's vision impresses people and the narrator too. The novelist says, "She was so positive that I have begun to believe her. I assumed that she knew by some kind of second light - it always seems to me that she has powers that others don't." (138)

Spirituality and supernatural elements are a part of the Indian culture, which is presented by Jhabvala through the account of supernatural activities which are rooted in the masses since the ages. In this novel, two parts divides the story. The characters of first part arrive as rulers. They rule and observe the nation, people and culture through the eyes of a ruler. Through the story Jhabvala narrates India in her words. The second phase is also of the foreign characters that arrive in India as tourists, travellers and

researchers. They deeply involve with the Indian culture. The metaphor used in the title Heat and Dust relates to the weather of India and also speaks of heat and dust in the society, politics, culture, and in the lives of the Indians.

Another notable Booker winner Indian author Salman Rushdie, won the prize for his *Midnight's Children* in 1981, which deals with India's history from British colonialism to independence and the partition of India. It was also awarded the 'Booker of Bookers' Prize in 1993 and 2008 to celebrate the Booker Prize 25th and 40th anniversary. '*Midnight's Children*' recounts the history of India's transition from British colonialism to independence.

Midnight's Children is the story of postcolonial India where the narrator Saleem Sinai is presented as the microcosm of Independent India. The personal life of Saleem is paralleled with the national events which are done by the apt use of magical realism. Instead of giving a realistic depiction of India through realism, the novel mixes fantastic and real elements. The novel explains the problems of post-coloniality, the difficulties in searching one's own history and identity. The novelist has rendered the story of a postcolonial India not from the perspective of the colonizers but from the Indians unlike Jhabvala. The novel highlights different postcolonial issues which are described, interpreted by the magical realist technique. Representing Indian culture and society, Rushdie portrays the account of family system in form of Saleem's family and its account of three generations. Portraying family history of Saleem, Rushdie presents the historical, political culture of nation. Rushdie speaks of 'Purdah' system in which women are not allowed to show their faces to strangers. As a traditional woman one has to follow certain taboos forced by the society. The patriarchal restrictions on women are realistically portrayed in the novel by Rushdie. Rushdie also focuses on the condition of Muslim women. Muslim women have very little space in the society. They have to follow the rules laid for them strictly. She has to always wear Burkha, and to live within 'Purdah'. Saleem's grandfather is a foreign returned doctor and he visits his patients, some of them are Muslim ladies and this 'Purdah' system becomes the obstacle in examining the patient. Dr. Aziz visits Ghani, the land lord for examining his ill daughter. Then Aziz finds the 'Purdah' system prepared for her. Muslim women are restricted from showing their faces even to their doctors.

History plays an important role in shaping of the novel. Rushdie speaks of various events from the Independence struggle and its association with the lives of his characters. The historical event of Jallianwala Bagh massacres, presents the mind-set of British towards India and how

Indian society reacts to this massacre. General Dyer ordered, "They have fired a total of one thousand six hundred and fifty rounds in .. 'Good shooting', Dyer tells his men, 'we have done a jolly good thing'". (36)

Rushdie presents a kind of nostalgia in presenting the picture of the nation. The character Saleem is an allegoric character by Rushdie, who represents the status of the nation. Saleem stands as the nation; while other midnight's child Shiva represents the power of destruction, the power that divide the country politically, culturally and socially. He also portrayed Hindu society and their culture. In an attempt of describing the long nose of Dr. Aziz he gives example of Lord Ganesh, the Hindu God. Doctor Aziz's nose -'comparable only to the trunk of the elephant headed god Ganesh established incontrovertibly his right to be a patriarch'. (9)

The novelist realistically portrays India's multicultural and multilingualism. Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Buddhist constitute the society. Not only religions but also cultures based on languages exist in the society. Rushdie presents multi-ties of Indian society in the novel. Rushdie presented India before and after independence. Another social and traditional issue, 'dowry system' in the Indian marriages is elaborately discussed in the novel. Dr. Aziz gets a healthy amount of dowry from his father-in-law Ghani. The novelist writes, "With his hands, Doctor Aziz had passed a green tin trunk into the railway compartment where Ahmed Sinai awaited his bride. The dowry is neither..... Inside the green tin trunk: silver samovars, brocade saris, gold coins given to Doctor....". (85)

Rushdie in *Midnight's children* also gives details of city, urban and rural village life of India. The novelist deliberately delineates, "In the Muslim muhallas or neighborhood which clustered around Chandni Chowk, people were content to look inwards There was no greenery and the cows kept away... Bicycle bells rang constantly. And above their cacophony sounded the cries of itinerant fruit sellers: come all you greats - O, cat a few dates - O." (89)

Rushdie while representing both religions- Hindu and Muslim, depicts the contradictions between these two religions and also similarities in both the religions. As Saleem stands as a Muslim and his opponent Shiva as a Hindu. The story of *Midnight's Children* is an allegory in itself, reflecting a fragmented nation binding its ties with history. The cracked body of Saleem reflects the fragmented map of the nation. As the metaphor of nation, it depicts nation and recalls events from nation's history, the true history of nation, which recalls Gandhi's death, Nuclear test, emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi etc.

Another Indian English Booker Winning Novel- The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy is also dealing with Indian social, cultural and political situations. Her novel is closely related to her life, which shows woman in India and their condition, family structure and religious aspect. Her characters have an impact of her own life, as she says, "I grew up in Kerala and lot of the atmosphere of The God of small Things is based on my experiences of what it was ..a book about human beings." (Roy, interview). The novel begins with the deliberate depiction of a small village in Kerala. The social evil tradition of untouchability in the Indian society is criticised by Roy. This folly of Indian Society is exposed by Roy very realistically. Sexual relation with untouchable is a taboo for Indian society and this taboo resulted into the death of Velutha. The love between an untouchable and a higher-class person is being considered as a crime and this resulted into the murder of Velutha by the police.

Roy presents elaborately the various issues of Indian society, culture and critical condition of women realistically. Roy realistically noted the pathetic condition of women in the patriarchal Indian society and even in own house. Indian women suffer by the institution of marriage. Through the story of Mamma chi, Roy shows us the marital system and its follies in our society. Again, Roy speaks of religious taboos, the taboos of Christian religion.

Not only patriarchy and castism but also Roy focuses on the issue of Hybridity in Indian society. Inter-caste marriages are not permitted by the society and children from these inter-caste marriages are supposed as hybrid children. This issue of inter-caste marriages and Hybridity is discussed by Roy. This blatant criticism by Roy on the social, political, and economic situation surrounding the caste system in 1960s India reveals her view on the power conflict between those of from the upper caste and those of the lower castes.

Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss won the 2006 Man Booker Prize. The novel deals with the theme of migration, living between two worlds, and between past and present. The novel deals with India's rigid class system. Every aspect of the characters' lives is dictated by their social class. Desai exposes the harsh reality of power politics and materialistic power to subordinate the poor. Besides the caste system, the novel also elaborates the class of haves and have-nots. The main theme is migration. The novelist remarkably depicted the two worlds-past and present. The whole novel follows the journey of two characters Biju and Sai, and Biju an illegal immigrant who is trying to make new life. The novel shows the internal conflict in India between Muslim groups, and

Buddhist groups. It also shows a conflict between past and present. Kiran Desai explores colonial neurosis, multiculturalism, modernity, immigrant's bitter experiences, insurgency and the game of possession, gender bias, racial discrimination, changing human relations and impact of globalization on India. While portraying India, Indian culture and society, Desai describes insurgency period of India, Nepalese's movement and various political movements of ethnic groups.

Another notable Indian English novelist, Arvind Adiga won the 40th Man Booker Prize for his The White Tiger in 2009. The novel provides a darkly humorous perspective of India's class struggle in a globalized world. Throughout Balram's narrative, Arvind Adiga constantly exposes the prevalence of corruption throughout all of India's institutions. Schools, hospitals, police, elections, industries and every aspect of government are thoroughly corrupt, and bribery and fraud are entirely commonplace. The novel realistically portrays India as a developing country has many problems- poverty, illiteracy, slum life, labour problems etc. In The White Tiger, Adiga tries to reflect the real India through his pen, and for this the life of the Balram is his source. Adiga's conceptions about India in relation to social, cultural, religious, economic and political can be seen through the life of Balram. Balram represents the lives of poor in India while his masters reflect rich culture and their behavior with poor and servants.

To conclude, all the Booker winning Indian English novels are remarkable as far as realistic delineation of India in the perspectives of Indian social, cultural, religious, economical and religious during the period of pre and post-independence encompassing the East- West cultural transition.

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