

Aspects of Indian Culture in English Literature

Mrs. Pranali Kalamdhar

Research Scholar, Devi Ahilya University
Indore (M.P.)

HHH

Abstract

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

Keywords: *tradition, Indianness, mythology, multicultural*

Culture is a way of life. The food you eat, the clothes you wear, the language you speak in and the God you worship all are aspects of culture. In very simple terms, we can say that culture is the embodiment of the way in which we think and do things. All the achievements of human beings as members of social groups can be called culture. Art, music, literature, architecture, sculpture, philosophy, religion and science can be seen as aspects of culture. However, culture also includes the customs, traditions, festivals, ways of living and one's outlook on various issues of life. Culture thus refers to a human-made environment which includes all the material and nonmaterial products of group life that are transmitted from one generation to the next. There is a general agreement among social scientists that culture consists of explicit and implicit patterns of behavior acquired by human beings. These may be transmitted through symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment as artifacts. The essential core of culture thus lies in those finer ideas which are transmitted within a group-both historically derived as well as selected with their attached value. More recently, culture denotes historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and express their attitudes toward life.

Culture is the expression of our nature in our modes of living and thinking. It may be seen in our literature, in religious practices, in recreation and enjoyment. Culture

has two distinctive components, namely, material and non-material. Material culture consists of objects that are related to the material aspect of our life such as our dress, food, and household goods. Non-material culture refers to ideas, ideals, thoughts and belief. Culture varies from place to place and country to country. Its development is based on the historical process operating in a local, regional or national context. For example, we differ in our ways of greeting others, our clothing, food habits, social and religious customs and practices from the West. In other words, the people of any country are characterised by their distinctive cultural traditions.

Indian culture and tradition are rich and unique in their own way. In our country there are many communities and sub-communities, each of them has their own culture, tradition, religion, language and literature. Literature plays a very important role in the establishment and growth of the society. Plots depicted in the fictional writings are inspired by the reality. So we should not treat the stories just as stories, but as the reflection of the reality. In our country there are many great authors who wrote about their land and people, for e.g. Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayana, the founding fathers of Indian English literature were mainly concerned with the downtrodden of the society, Indian middle-class life and the expression of the traditional and cultural ethos of India. The Indian authors have touched each and every aspect of Indian life. They have portrayed the beautiful picture of India through their writings and because of it the culture, tradition and values of our country got such a high recognition in the world context. The famous American writer Mark Twain wrote about India that- "India is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of human speech, the mother of history, the grandmother of legend and the great-grandmother of tradition."¹

Indian authors have influenced an entire generation with their writings. Most of the writers are multilingual. Kalidas, Kabir, Guru Nanak, etc each composed their songs and poems in more than one language. Translation is the bridge between the literature of the past and the present generation. Ideas and concepts like Indian philosophy, Indian literature, and Indian culture would

have been impossible in the absence of translation. Our rich mythologies, epics e.g. The Ramayana and The Mahabharata have been translated into many languages and it helped the outsiders to understand the Indian culture in a better way. At present no one is there who don't know the story of Ramayana, Mahabharata or Bhagvatgeeta. It's a translation only which gave our epics such a wide recognition in the world. Max Muller said about Upanishad that- "there is no book in the world that is so thrilling, stirring and inspiring as the Upanishad".

Literature always acted as a mirror to society. Ancient authors had portrayed the picture of an ancient India through their writings. For e.g. Munshi Premchandra showed the actual Indian society and the conditions that existed that time. The time when India was almost completely a rural place. He showed the true pain and agony of the farmer and the poor. In Kafan, the poor farmer family had no money to cremate the body of a dead woman. They asked for money from the zamindar and other members of the society. However, they used the money to satisfy their hunger. This story presents the grim reality of that time. He always tried to show what he observed and lived in those days of India. We can read Munshi Premchand works to know how India was long time ago.

One of the important themes of our great Indian authors is the portrayal of Indian common man and woman. The era of Indian modern literature began in the late nineteenth century. In modern times Swami Vivekananda, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Rabindranath Tagore, Premchand rank among the world's best literary personalities. The most famous Bengali writer is Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore who received the Nobel Prize in 1913 for Literature. His 'Gora' is considered to be a very outstanding novel in Indian Literature. The portrayal of the image of women by Indian authors is not uniform. It differs from time to time, from novel to novel, and writer to writer. Overall three aspects of women's have been depicted by the authors. Firstly, of that time when they were exploited and forced to obey the traditions and cultures of their society. The best example of it we can see in the writings of Rabindra Nath Tagore. He wrote broadly on women. Some of the famous female protagonists of his stories are Bimla, Binodini, Chandalika, Shyama etc. secondly, when their identity is transforming, they began to raise their voice for their rights. Like in the poems of Kamla Das, we always see a rebellion against male-dominated society. Through her works, she advocated for the equal rights and liberty for women. Lastly through the writings of Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee we see a new avatar of a new woman

who is confident and makes her own decisions.

There is a well known saying that, if you want to study the culture and tradition of any period, you should go through its literature. Another thing which catches the eyes of our great authors is our Indian philosophy. It's our Indian philosophy only that inspired the aliens to come and study our culture and values. Shri Aurobindo explored the concept of Indian philosophy and made it popular in the world. In the last century several Indian writers have distinguished themselves not only in traditional Indian Languages but also in English. VS Naipaul, a Diaspora Indian novelist, other Indian themes are R.K.Narayan, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Anita Desai. The role of cultural diplomats was important in contributing to the better socio-cultural understanding and building relationship between people of different faiths, sects & region.

The other well-known writers are Mulk Raj Anand, Dom Moraes, Nlissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, A.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar and R. Parthasarathy, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Raja Rao, G.V. Desani, M. Ananthanarayanan, Bhadani Bhattacharya, Monohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, Khushwant Singh, Nayantara Sahgal, O.V. Vijayan, K.R. Sreenivasan Iyengar, C.D. Narasimhaiah and M.K. Naik. Among the latest are Vikram Seth (A Suitable Boy), Allan Sealy (The Trotter-Nama), Sashi Tharoor (Show Business), Amitav Ghosh (Circle of Reason, Shadow Lines), Upamanyu Chatterjee (English August) and Vikram Chandra (Red Earth and Pouring Rain). In the recent past, a whole new genre has started with the popular writings of women authors like Arundhati Roy, Booker Prize Winner for 'God of Small Things', Jhumpa Lahiri, 2000 Pulitzer Prize winner in Fiction, Shobha De, etc.

Aspects of Indianness in English Literature-

The English language in India is treated as a superior language in comparison with Indian languages. The Indian writer likes to claim it as his own Indian language, at the same time they writes for the readership belonging to that social class. The multicultural context of Indian literature in English produces the following four predictable styles of writing: Style in which internationalism and nationalism meet and collaborate,

1. Where the alien cultural features work together with the marga cultural feature. In fiction the ideal example is Raja Rao, who combines an International sort of existentialism with national sort of sentimentality.
2. Style in which nationalism or the Marga cultural features merge with the local or the discultural features.

In fiction, a good example is Prathap Sarma's novel on Punjab, "The day of the Turban".

3. Styles in which the International cultural features conflict with the national or the marga features were irony and sentimentality constantly thwart each other. Mulk Raj Anand's usual style belongs to this type.

4. Style in which the national and the regional, the marga and the desi cultural features are at cross purposes. R.K. Narayan at times seems to be facing this problem. In poetry, A.K. Ramanujan, Jayantha Mahapatra, Sri Aurobindo and R. Partha Sarathy exemplify the four types respectively.

Following this line of argument, one could mention that in India it is not possible to have a truly autonomous Indian English style. The style varieties of Indian English literature are linked to the multicultural context of it.

Literature becomes a great literature when it develops from a language that is rooted in the soil that grows organically from people's experiences piled together for generations. The English language was grafted onto India's linguistic banyan tree. Thus, literature plays a vital role in preserving knowledge to be passed down through generations. There is a saying-"if language is a plant literature is its flower" our country has a vast literature. The literature of our country always spread the fragrance of our rich culture and traditions. It teaches us, inspire us and make us feel proud always.

Works Cited

- 1 *Luniano, W.(1996), " Like being Mugged by a Metaphor : Multiculturalism and state Narratives".*
- 2 *M. Rajagopalachary , K. Damodar Rao, "Multiculturalism in Indian tradition and literature."*