RESTORATION AND ERADICATION: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY IN THE WRITINGS OF R.K.NARAYAN AND KIRAN DESAI

KAMALJEET SINHA
Assistant Lecturer, Department of English, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, India

ABSTRACT

Indian literature in English holds a prominent place among English and other literatures of the world. Fiction, being the most distinctive and effective form of literary expression today, has undeniably obtained a vital and significant position in Indo-English Literature. But during the colonial period the people were forced by the foreign people and the natives were kept meek and subjugated and the colonizing states adopted dishonest methods whereas the postcolonial writers signify difference in their representations of place, in nomenclature, and through the deployment of themes. As a by product of both Indian and Western traditions the writers like R.K.Narayan and Kiran Desai have presented the distinctive literary form and has achieved maturity and unique identity. They seem to have found a true and legitimate vehicle for the manifestation of their natural genius and eloquent sensibility and have form a large variety representing varied sections of the pluralistic Indian society, its ethos and glorious heritage. Though the postcolonial writers have expressed their objections to a colonial language in terms of the way it has been used, represented, and what it has stood for an institution of power, but they defines the language as the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place.

KEYWORDS: Colonial, Discourse, Postcolonial, Myth, Diaspora, Modernism

INTRODUCTION

Fiction transmutes the facts and reality of life. It embodies a comprehensive perception of the changing features of life and features of life and reality. As a work of art, fiction mirrors the image of a specific historical milieu and the history of the life of the period. The relation between the society and fiction is interchangeable. George Watson has rightly observed: “If society influences fiction, so does fiction influences society” (p. 184) Novelists like Raja Rao, MulkRaj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Anita Desai, Kamla Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai etc. have thoroughly imbibe the history of mankind for their fictional sphere. They tend to aim that the novel should endeavour to depict “all varities of human experience, and not merely those suited to one particular literary perspective.” (Ian Watt, p. 11)

Colonial writers as a historical phenomenon throve on several unscrupulous and unethical deeds. In order to establish their political, social, economical and cultural sovereignty over less powerful countries, the colonizing states adopted dishonest methods. Since the primary aim of colonization is “to subdue, conquer and possess” (Moin Shakir, p. 260) foreign territories they went about doing things consistently and systematically with the intention of achieving their target. Once a foreign territory is occupied the colonizer through crooked methods tried to bring about changes in the traditional system of education, judicial system and administration.

With such drastic changes introduced by the alien rulers, the natives could be kept meek and subjugated, whereas the postcolonial writers signify difference in their representations of place, in nomenclature, and through the deployment of themes. Within the syncretism reality of a postcolonial society it is impossible to return to an idealized pure colonial cultural condition. The work of Indian novelist R.K.Narayan and Kiran Desai presents the same.
R.K.Narayan, now popularly known by Graham Greene’s sobriquet R.K.Narayan, is a noted luminary of the “Big Three’ among Indian novelists in English. Narayan enjoys Indian popularity for his remarkable gift of story telling, extraordinary genial humour and above all, penetrating portrayal of social reality with its rootedness in religion and myths. Kiran Desai the daughter of the writer, Anita Desai made her debut with the publication of her novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, and won Man Booker Award for her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, her acquaintance with Indian life is as authentic as her understanding of the Englishmen and her Indian character.

Narayan gave rise to tradition of Indian English novel. Special about Narayan is that he is an indigenous and intensely regional novelist. He has chosen Malgudi as the background of his fiction. Malgudi is a small town of south India. It has a railway station, a college, a cinema hall and was situated on the bank of river Sarayu. He has deliberately created a town for the locale of all his novels, partly because a semi-urban locale has the qualities of both urban and the rural India and partly because R.K.Narayan did not belong to the rural culture. He is essentially a writer of semi-urban sensibilities. Malgudi is a place where people are not heroic. There is no control over the events but it seems as if they control everything. They are utterly helpless creatures torn by desire and tossed this way or that way by the caprice of fate.

Chandran of *The Bachelor of Arts* who intensely loved a girl Malathi at lasts ran away from home. Mr. Sampath is impelled by fortune and at last leave the village forever. *The English teacher* finds the happiness in the world of spirits after the death of his wife. *The Guide* dies as a ruined man not because he wants to embrace death but circumstances conspire and he finds no alternative except becoming a willing martyr. It proves that the people of Malgudi are puppets in the hands of fate for their happiness and unhappiness. If things are not favourable they run away and sometimes they prefer to become Sanyasis. Narayan has also given solutions for the evils of life, that is if you’re defeated, run away and loneliness is the only truth of life.

The novels of R.K.Narayan are a unique mix of myth and reality. Both have been so deftly fused together that they seem to be real. His realism, unlike the stark and naked realism of the French realists and naturalists, is psychological and sociological. By the use of myths and fables, Narayan penetrates the core of Indian mind and reveals it with all its bewildering contradictions, superstitions and traditions. He weaves his themes around Hindu myths and legends. His *Swami an Friends* also alludes to fables and myths. Swami, for instance, believes in myth that God can turn even sand into gold. *The Guide* is based on the age old Hindu belief that gods can be propitiated and rains brought about through piety, penance, fasting and prayer. *The English Teacher* echoes the fundamental belief of Indian philosophy of the immorality of soul. *Waiting for Mahatama* depicts the Gandhian myth of freedom struggle where Ghandhi symbolizes Indian ideals of truth and non-violence for the liberation of humanity.

His novels show that success and happiness in life lie in resignation to and acceptance of the Shastra or the traditional values. Human life is suggested as a journey in quest of self identity or emancipation from the miseries of life. But influenced by the man’s modernism, ego and karma and governed by fate and chance, human life moves in a zig-zag way and at last comes to the same state from which it starts but with man’s self realization of his puny stature and the truths of life in the tradition – bound social set-up. In the novels of Narayan’s “there is generally a flight,” observes Iyengar, “an uprooting a disturbance of order followed by a return, a renewal, a restoration of normalcy.” (p.360) As we can see in *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran, Savitri in *The Dark Room* and Mali in *The Vendor of Sweets* run away in protest against their family traditions, suffer a lot and later on came back willingly or unwillingly for a better or worse life.

Narayan’s *My Dateless Dairy* reflects the cultural differences and also the diasporic elements. The picture Narayan paints of American life from the intellectuals down to the thugs is fascinating. *My Dateless Dairy* is an autobiographical work of Narayan. The travelogue begins with his days in New York. He refers ton the life of an Indian
friend by the pseudonym Govind because it is a note on his private life. He belongs to the Brahmin family. When moved to America he entered a land of comfort, gadget and beefsteak. After a few years Govind fell in love with a European girl and married her much to the disgust of his parents. Govind took all his calmly and settled with his wife. But he still remains vegetarian and this created domestic complexities and he finally took to American food. Beef had an unexpected effect on him, he not only enjoyed eating it but also became convinced that beef eating should be the national duty of countries like India, as it will solve the food problem. But after six years he wanted to return back to the homeland. But he was unable to return back as his wife was not willing to settle in India. It is said that when one is in a foreign country, one’s homeland has a unique charm and an irresistible attraction.

Kiran Desai is a conscious craftman and very carefully builds up her plots. She has also the ability to tell a story skillfully. The characters of her novel belong to the middle class or the upper middle class. The characters of *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* belong to the middle class and the peoples of *The Inheritance of Loss* belong to the middle and the upper middle class. The introvert characters and the probing of love relationships do not occur in the work of Kiran as she is an extrovert and her book displays the spectacle of life with a crowded gallery of characters. Shahkot, the setting of *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* has been compared to R.K. Narayan’s malgudi which formed the pivot around which diverse tales revolved. What Desai was looking for however, was for some place to set down Sampath. Kalimpong (*The Inheritance of Loss*) and Shahkot is a small town with its close knit ties where every neighbour is aware of the other’s doing, is a place where news travel fast. It is this constant involvement of others in the lives of the characters that increases the sense of restrictions and suffocation that makes Gyan and Sampath to yearn for freedom.

Kiran tries to sensitise the society to the cruelty of some of its traditions and dehumanizing taboos. She shows how the women and the aliens are treated as impersonal and subjugate objects in this social structure; how things are decided for both by the patriarchal ideology which also cultivates the pervasive snobbery of the people. Kulfi mother of Sampath in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* had certain peculiarities like obsession for food and sleep walking was ignored by he parents and she was married to Mr. Chawla, and in her in laws house also she was unable to fulfill her obsession for food, finally she was ignored by her husband and only it was through Sampath she relates to the outside world for in him she sees a reflection of herself. She remains usually wrapped up in herself and thus is the sole character that has no necessity of relating to the larger picture. The theme of transformation of evolution which is suggested by Sampath climbing the tree and the Siman-human link is thwarted by Kulfi. Nimi, (wife of retired judge Jemubhai Patel), was only 12 years old when she was married to Jemubhai Patel. Soon after the marriage her name was changed to Nimi Patel, which reflects the loss of her own identity. Jemubhai Patel moved to England for higher education and was ill treated in the abroad. On returning home he vented his anger and frustration on his young wife, and never knew the daughter she bore him; Nimi, the wife of Jemubhai, did not accompany her husband on tour, unlike the other wives, who went along on horseback or elephant back or camel back, or in palkis upheld by porters.

In the novels of Kiran Desai also we find the unique mix of myth and reality. The Monkey Baba or Sampath, is an eccentric lad who at the wedding of his boss’s daughter “with a style particular to himself, one by one he let the saris and dupattas draped about him fall.” (Desai, p.41). In the full glare of light and guests, he could disrobe imagining that he had provided an evenings entertainment. Sandwiched between the nagging demands of an ambitious father and an insane mother, Sampath climbs up a tree in a whimsical mood.

“Before him he saw a tree, an ancient tree, silence hell between its branches like a prayer. He reached its base and feverishly, without pausing he began to climb. He clawed his way from branch to branch. Hoisting himself up, he disturbed dead leaves and insect carcasses and all the bits of dried up derbies that collect in a true.” (Desai, p.49)
And once he had ensconced himself comfortably on the branches of the guava tree, Sampath felt “he was in the right place at last. Tiredness rolled over him like a wave and, closing his eyes, he fell into a deep slumber, lodged in a fork in the guava tree.” (p.51). It is not the inhabitants of the Shahkot who proclaimed him as Baba, but the hard sell attitude of the father Mr. Chawla, that is responsible for the series of events that lead to his being hailed as Baba. Hullabaloo enter the Guava Orchard as a crowds flock to seek the new Guru. Some come out of curiosity and others to see enlightenment or redresses of their problems. Here, Sampath's father is able to perceive the business opportunities that have arisen from Sampath's increased popularity in the aftermath of the tree climbing incident.

“Sampath might make his family’s fortune. They could be rich! How many hermits were secretly wealthy? What an opportunity had arisen out of nowhere!”(p. 68). And from that moment of realization, Mr. Chawla plans out each detail of the process of making a ‘Baba’ of his son. The Monkey-Baba himself does not assist in his process and exhibits no predilection for executing his father’s plans. He just wants to be left alone but begins to enjoy all the attention that the family was now showering on him. “Nowhere was he waving at them as if he were a Raja wishing to be left alone.” (p.71) gradually, he grows in a self esteem and thus “ensconced in his Orchard bows, still not quite able to believe, the serendipitous way things had turned out. Sampath gave what came to be known as “The Sermon on the Guava Tree.” In The Inheritance of Loss, Nandu the cook of the retired judge Jemubhai Patel gave food to the poor because he had a belief that if he will feed the poor people the dog Muttu will return back home.

Kiran has gained an intimate understanding of the ideas, ideals and various life styles of Indians. She highlights to comic proportions, blending of Eastern and Western modes of life and writes about the on going social battles in present day in India. She had a collision between tradition and modernity or East and West. Her interaction between East and West has transformed her personal experience into her writings. She has centered her stories on the Hindi speaking section of Indian society, has taken care to show Indians in her stories speak Hindi that is influenced by vernacularisms in vocabulary, tone and syntax. Not only this Biju in The Inheritance of Loss whose life was a long battlement with an alien environment with which he has tried to identify himself came to an end, when he was ill treated in the foreign land and was forced to eat beef but he denied as for him the cow was the holy animal.

Ever since he landed in the foreign land, he tried to adjust in the city of adaptation but the English community has never absorbed him into its mainstream. His presence was always been viewed with suspicion and anger even by the owner of the Restaurant where he used to work Miss Desai has represent millions of men who for some reasons or other leave their own roots and fails to strike roots in the alien soil, and die as rootless and restless individual. But the return of Biju back to India presents the desire of Kiran Desai to come back home. She also Like R.K.Narayan believes that home is the place where we get peace. Through Biju’s character she has touched the human urge to gain something better in life, but ultimately his return shows that ‘peace is the home where his roots are’.

As an autobiographical novel, we can say that it is also an utterly feminine novel that deals with novelists own concerns. Even the heroine 'Sai' has been created from Kiran’s Surname, Desai. The story of Sai touches our heart and we feel sympathetic towards her, and also comparing it with her own Indian culture, and trying to seek what is common between the two cultures, and nation i.e. (East and West) towards peace; tolerance; reconciliation. She just remains adamant, like her protagonist Sai. She does not make an ethnic reflection, but goes on and on with a jaundiced view, till the bitter end. At last we can say that, Kiran Desai belongs to the period of change and we know that the great women/man are judged by the way they treat the unprivileged and downtrodden; and Miss Desai has done justice with her characters; feelings and emotions.
CONCLUSIONS

Thus, we can say that the writings of both Kiran Desai and R.K. Narayan have some similarities and contrasts and both have undeniably obtained a vital and significant position in Indo-English Literature. As the distinctive literary form they have achieved maturity and unique identity. The real maturity of the fiction can be seen both in quantity and quality. Not only this even in the writings, of the postcolonial writers though they have expressed their objections to a colonial language in terms of the way it has been used, the way it has been represented, and what it has stood for an institution of power, but the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that postcolonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place.

R. K. Narayan and Kiran Desai

REFERENCES
