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One Day National Conference

On
Humanism in Indian English Literature

24th February 2018

Principal
G.S.Meshram

Chief Editor
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In Collaboration With

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01

Humanitarian Perspectives in Indian English Novels

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Abstract

When the parameters of humanism are coming under increasing strain in an assertively multicultural world, its supposedly self-evident universalist inclusiveness should be quite an enigma. The many novels on humanism treat humanism as a pure ideal, uncontaminated by practice. They do not acknowledge the complicity, bordering sometimes on identity, between patriarchy and humanism. Literature is a distinctly human artifact: this is as true as any cliché can be. But does this imply that whenever you talk about human relationships in a literary work, it naturally means you are talking about humanism? The distinction or the convergence, whichever the case may be, needs to be rigorously worked out. Humanism is basically a philosophical outlook centered on the authority of human being as a dignified, rational being. Humanism's final court of appeal is human reason rather than any external authority. Its spirit is secular, liberal and tolerant. The humanists through their scholarship and learning registered their protest against socio-political and religious establishments. The emulation of the ancient writers is no longer a dominant force in literature but humanistic ideals are still influential in modern thought.

Keywords : Assertively multicultural world, universalist, artefact, socio-political, humanistic ideals, emulation, influential, modern thought

Introduction

Humanism is a realistic philosophy. Humanism is the philosophy for those in love with life. Humanists take responsibility for their own lives and relish the adventure of being part of new discoveries seeking new knowledge and exploring new options. He is a pragmatist who gives supreme priority to equal opportunity, justice, welfare, and progress for all without discrimination and prejudice.^[1] The Oxford English Dictionary defines Humanism as "A rationalist outlook or system of thought attaching prime importance to human rather than divine or supernatural matters."^[1] Humanism is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence over established doctrine or faith. The meaning of the term humanism has fluctuated, according to the successive intellectual movements which have identified with it. Although humanism lost its significance a long time ago, a certain naivety about its natural and obvious connotations, complicated by anthropological hubris, lingers on. The tendency consequently is to compulsively and exclusively read humaneness, universal compassion and glory into humanism. The depiction of humanism in Indian English novels begin with Mulk Raj Anand "The Untouchable". Mulk Raj Anand occupies one of the topmost position in Indo-Anglican literature. He belongs to a period in the history of India when the nation was struggling hard to shake off the burden of slavery. He is a novelist with a missionary zeal. He frankly declares that art is a means towards social reforms and upliftment. Anand's all novels like *Untouchable*, *Coolie*, *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *Across the Black Waters*, *The Sword and the Sickle* embrace human experiences and convey a sense of life and character like a coloured glass. He has literally immersed into the flowing, vibrant core of humanity and he feels its grief to the very

marrow of his bones. Being a humanist, Anand has skillfully depicted the Indian society which is hostile and callous to the lots of the low-born. Before Mulk Raj Anand Rabindra Nath Tagore also paved the way to humanitarian approach in his writings. Tagore's humanism is mainly expressed through his concept of inter-personal relationship. protest against the cruelty meted out to his fellow- beings. He is a multi-dimensional personality and the underlying theme of his creations is love for man. Besides Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand's work is based on the philosophy of humanism. He makes an untouchable the hero of his novel. Tagore wrote primarily in Bengali and translated many of his poems and plays into English. To his credit, there is a long list of poems and plays, both in Bengali and English which had made his place among the world's greatest writers..^{[1][2][3]}

Humanism

The word "Humanism" has a number of meanings and because authors and speakers do not clarify which meaning, they intend. There are different types of Humanism — Literary Humanism, Renaissance Humanism, Cultural Humanism, Philosophical Humanism, Christian Humanism, Modern Humanism, Secular Humanism, Religious Humanism etc.

Humanism is one of those philosophies for people who think for themselves. There is no area of thought that a humanist is afraid to challenge and explore. It's a philosophy focused upon human means for comprehending reality. It's a philosophy of reason and science in pursuit of knowledge. Therefore when it comes to the question of the most valid means for acquiring knowledge of the world. Humanists reject arbitrary faith, authority, revelation and altered state of consciousness. It is regarded as a philosophy of imagination, compassion etc.

Humanism is a realistic philosophy. Humanism is the philosophy for those in love with life. Humanists take responsibility for their own lives and relish the adventure of being part

of new discoveries seeking new knowledge and exploring new options.

Humanism is a way of looking at the world by emphasizing the importance of human beings- their nature and place in the universe. Humanism means love of man with all his weaknesses, instincts and impulses. It may be defined as system of thought in which human interest, values and dignity are held dominant. Humanism teaches that every person has dignity and worth and therefore should command the respect of every other person. Finally, in its most general application humanism may mean any philosophical or ethical system centered on the concept of dignity and freedom of man.

Humanitarian perspective in Novels of Indian English Novelist

Mulk Raj Anand's

His first novel, Untouchable is an account of a day in the life of its protagonist- Bakha, an untouchable sweeper boy. It delineates the feelings, aspirations and problems of this sweeper boy who undergoes a lot of hardship being a low-caste within Indian society. To comment on Bakha, who is the pariah protagonist of the novel, namely "They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt" sums up Anand's understanding of the grim realities of India's social life.

The evil of untouchability in India has an ancient history. It roots from the four groups of Hindu castes- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya, and Sudras. The Sudras represents the lowest of all in the social hierarchy. Untouchable is the story of this prolonged indignity and humiliation of this class of society. The opening of the novel strikes the keynote of the theme of the novel: "The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside boundaries and separate from them."

Raja Rao's

Raja Rao, belongs to the older

generation of the novelists. The foundation of his creativity rests on the themes of social reality, tradition-modernity clash, historicity of facts, concern for the common man, Indianess, and humanism.

Raja Rao's (1908-2006) celebrated novel "Kanthapura" (1938) too fails to elicit much as far as the authentic portrayal of untouchables is concerned. The novel dwindles in to valorization of Gandhian charisma. Moorthy, an upper caste spokesman of Mahatma Gandhi defeats his own anti-caste speeches when he dithers for a while to drink a glass of milk from the pariah woman in her house.

Bhabani Bhattacharya's (1906-1988)

Bhabani Bhattacharya's (1906-1988) "He who rides the Tiger" (1977) is another famous example of an Upper caste author appropriating low caste humanistic approach in his work. 'He who rides a Tiger' is an attack on both who profited on people's misery during the famine and those who exploited them as caste tyrants. This novel is based on an ancient saying "He who rides a tiger cannot dismount." A humble village blacksmith, named Kalo takes his revenge on a rigid, caste-ridden society and makes a living for him-self and his daughter by faking a miracle-a miracle that begins as a fraud and ends as a legend-and passing himself off as a Brahmin priest. A staunch humanist in Bhattacharya is at work throughout his novels. His approach to the problems of life is always positive. There is always an affirmation of life amidst suffering.

For his futuristic vision, humanistic outlook, historical perspective of the Indian social reality, and his well-defined theory of the craft of fiction, Bhattacharya can rightly be called the doyen of the Indian-English novel in modern India.

Rohinton Mistry's(1952-)

Rohinton Mistry expressed humanity in his work by depicting the picture of brutality on the dalits which seems to be multiplied in Rohinton Mistry's(1952-) "The Fine Balance"

(1995). Mistry is a Neustadt International Prize for Literature laureate (2012). The Indian born Mistry practices Zoroastrianism and belongs to the Parsi community. Om and Ishwar, the key characters from the novel, venture to break the inhuman unwritten caste rules by discarding their baseborn leather work and adopt a tailoring work with the help of a Muslim friend. However, the novel takes a stereotypically pessimistic turn at the end.

Arundhati Roy(1961)

Arundhati Roy(1961-) in his "The God of Small Things" (1997) portrays Velutha, a paravan, as a protagonist. The novel brings her an immense fame but it is also criticized for romanticizing the untouchable hero Velutha. He is shown to be voiceless, inactive, and irresolute. Roy's ideology, her narrative technique and use of language also have come under readers' scanner.

Some other novels by Indian English authors in which low caste characters feature for human justice are Kiran Desai's(1971-) "Inheritance of the Loss" (2006), Amitav Ghosh's(1956) "The Hungry Tide" (2005) and "The Sea of Poppies" (2008), Vikas Swarup's "Q&A" (2008), Arvind Adiga's "The White Tiger" (2008). A very recent example of the novel written by a non-dalit author in which he natively portrays the dalit character is "Serious Men" (2010) by Manu Joseph. Ayyan Mani, a principal character from the novel, is shown to be manipulative, sly and scheming dalit-Buddhist. His angry nature is attributed to his being dalit due to which he is receiving inhuman treatment.

Conclusion

Indian English Literature is an honest enterprise to demonstrate the ever rare gems of Indian Writing in English. From being a singular and exceptional, rather gradual native flare-up of geniuses, Indian Writing has turned out to be a new form of Indian culture and voice in which India converses regularly. Indian Writers - poets, novelists, essayists, and

dramatists have been making momentous and considerable contributions to world literature since pre-Independence era, the past few years have witnessed a gigantic prospering and thriving of Indian English Writing in the global market.

Indian English literature continues to reflect Indian culture, tradition, social values and even Indian history through the depiction of life of Indians living.. Indian English novels has been trying to give expression to the humanitarian perspective. These novelist appears to pick up their plots from the very social , human and personal milieu from which they have grown up and so they easily strike a bond of familiarity with the readers.

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02

Meena Kandasamy's Touch : The protest against oppression

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Introduction

Born in 1984, 'Kandasamy published her debut poetry collection Touch in August 2006. Her second collection of poetry Ms Militancy was published in December 2010, To his credit. There are two novels i.e. The Gypsy goddess (2014) and When I Hit you. Or 'A Portrait of the writer as a young wife (2017). Apart from creative writing, Kandasamy has translated the essays of the political leader of the Dalit Panthers : Thol. Thirumavalavan in Talisman : Extreme Emotions of Dalit Liberation (2003) and his speeches in Uproot Hindutva : The Fiery Voice of Liberation Panthers (2004). She has translated works of Kasi Anandan, a poet Laureate of Tamil Eelam and Essays of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy. Kandasamy has written many essays on the drudgery of casteism and its consequences. Of all her works, her poetry speaks the loudest and is filled with fire as it brings out the anger in the hearts of the downtrodden communities.

Although Kandasamy advocates for the Dalits, her poetry does not stop there but includes love poems, poems championing the social rights of women and even those that depict daily occurrences with a power to evoke the emotions the poet demands. She depicts both the subjugation by caste and gender – a double bondage that the dalit women are forced to face. In an interview with Ujjwal Jana of the