

ANGLO-INDIAN FICTION AS STILL RELEVANT

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The British ruled India from 1800 to 1947. They ruled the entire Indian subcontinent and only the Mauryan emperor Ashok had ruled such a huge territorial area. Akbar ruled area on a third of Ashoka's. The rest of Indian dynasties ruled provincially. The British ruled one third of the globe. India was their great possession after America and South Africa. The British bequeathed upon us their English language and western education. The British helped us by uniting and modernizing India which none including Ashok did previously. English became as Rajaji tells goddess Saraswati's own gift to India. What Sanskrit could not do English accomplished. The Aryan language could not conquer India but a European language did! India became a developing country thanks to the British rule.

Prof M.K. Naik in his book *A History of Indian English Literature* (1985) tells us that Indian English literature was once called "Anglo-Indian literature. It was also called 'Indo-Anglian literature', Indian Writing in English and Indo-English lit." (Naik, 2). He writes further:

Secondly, the failure to make clear-cut distinctions has also often led to a confusion between categories such as 'Anglo-Indian literature', literature in the Indian languages translated into English and original composition in English by Indians. Thus, in his *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (1908), E.F. Oaten considers the poetry of Henry Derozio as part of 'Anglo-Indian literature'. The same critic, in his essay on Anglo-Indian literature in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (Vol. XIV, Ch. 10) includes Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and 'Aravindo [sic] Ghose' among 'Anglo-Indian' writers along with F.W. Bain and FA. Steel. Similarly, Bhupal Singh's *Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (1934) deals with both British and Indian writers on Indian subjects. V.K. Gokak, in his book, *English in India: Its Present and Future* (1964), interprets the term 'Indo-Anglian Literature' as comprising 'the work of Indian writers in English' and 'Indo-English literature' as consisting of 'translations by Indians from Indian literature into English' (Gokak 161). In his massive survey, *Indian Writing in English* (1962), K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar includes English translations of Tagore's novels and plays done by others in his history of Indian creative writing in English, while H.M. Williams excludes these from his *Indo-Anglian Literature 1800-1970: A Survey* (1976). John B. Alphonso Karkala (*Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century*) (1970) uses the term 'Indo-English literature' to mean 'literature produced by Indians in English.' (Naik2)

The present research article speaks of Anglo-Indian fiction, with reference to Bhupal Singh's *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (1930). Mr Bhupal Singh, a great Indologist speaks of related books, art and collectibles too. Oxford University Press brought the book out in 1934. Later this fine work was taken up by Michigan University for publication. In the introduction to the book, Bhupal Singh writes,

The phrase 'Anglo-Indian fiction' may be used in a broad or narrow sense. Broadly speaking it includes any novel dealing with India which is written in English. Strictly speaking it means fiction mainly describing the life of Englishmen in India. In a still narrower sense, it may be taken to mean novels dealing with the life of Eurasians, who now prefer to be called Anglo-Indians. A very large number of novels surveyed in this book are Anglo-Indian in the sense that they

describe the life of Englishmen and Englishwomen in India. But the survey does not exclude Indian novels written by men of nationalities other than the English. It also includes novels describing the life of Eurasians and of Indians. Anglo-Indian fiction covers a period of about a century and a half. It may be divided into three periods. (Singh 1)

The first period begins with the Governor-Generalship of Warren Hastings and ends with the Indian Mutiny; the second period ends with the death of Queen Victoria and the publication of Kipling's *Kim* in 1901; the third period begins with the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and may be said to be still in progress. The present survey, however, does not extend beyond the year 1930, which saw the publication of Edward Thompson's book *Farewell to India*.¹ Meadows Taylor and W. D. Arnold are the chief novelists of the first period; Sir Henry Cunningham and Kipling of the second; Edmund Candler, E. M. Forster, and Edward Thompson of the third. The novels of the first period are mainly romances of Indian history, or are descriptive sketches of English society in India; those of the second period are portraits of the official life of Anglo-India, mainly satirical; those of the third period show a vaster range in the choice of subjects and are a true reflex of the varied life and problems of India in transition.

The first period shows the great influence of Scott on Anglo-Indian fiction and a little of Thackeray; the second period prepares the way for and sees the rise of Kipling; the third period continues the traditions of Kipling and shows some reaction against them.

The Introduction itself resembles Edward Said's Introduction to his monumental work *Orientalism* (1978).

Its general features are,

1. Anglo-Indian fiction definition
2. Characteristic features
3. Early Anglo-Indian novels
4. Qui Hai the 19th century
5. Competition Wallahs
6. Later Anglo-Indians

This Anglo-Indian fiction covers such themes as Britishers' arrival in sea voyage, Indian mofussil towns, their rule, clubs, shooting parties, scandals and gossips, and happy marriages. The pervasive mood is yet negative. Bhupal Singh writes,

Some novels describe the beauty of Indian mountain scenery; the loneliness, silence, and spaciousness of our jungles; the splendour of our blue skies and starry nights; the sights and sounds of the bazaars; the scenes of sweating, shouting, brown humanity on a railway platform; and the picturesqueness, variety, and squalor of Indian life in towns and in villages.

The mood in which these novels are written is generally one of disgust, sorrow, or 'melancholy'. The sense of their being 'exiles' in a foreign land seldom deserts the English in India. (Singh 3)

A common theme of these novels is the unhappiness, misunderstandings, and complexities of married life in India.

Artistically Anglo-Indian fiction is a record of the ephemeral. Excepting Kipling, there are not more than a dozen novels which may find a place in the history of English literature. Most of the modern Anglo-Indian novels are written by women. Most of them show little sense of style, are poor in characterization and plot construction, and occasionally suffer from a propagandist tendency.

The earliest Anglo-Indians are known as 'nabobs' in English literature.

The early Anglo-Indians were called as nabobs, and they even married Indian women. This nabob represented the wealth, extravagance, luxury and vulgarity. They treated India as El Dorada. Lord Teignmouth and Sydney C. Grier's works speak in this vein:

We learn from Lord Teignmouth's (then Mr. Shore) biography that he had to tear himself from his wife twice because he could not expose her to the horrors of the deep and to the dangers of a savage country like India, that there were not two houses in Calcutta with Venetian blinds or glass windows, and that his salary as a writer in 1769 was eight rupees a month. The *Oriental Memoirs* of Forbes furnish the best picture of the cheerless life of a young English adventurer on his arrival in Bombay. (Singh 5)

Sydney C. Grier (Miss Hilda Gregg) has described the lives of her countrymen in India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or, as she herself puts it, during the earlier stages of what it is correct to call the expansion of England in *In Furthest Ind* (1894).

Although it lacks the intimate knowledge of a contemporary document, yet as a general picture of the time her account may be taken as correct. She tells us that the Company's servants went about in *palankeens*, dressed in white to avoid the heat of the sun; that 'meats' were served on plates of china 'that cracks when any poison touches it'; that behind each Englishman at the dinner table 'stood an Indian servant with a great fan of peacock feathers', and that royal ceremony was observed in bringing in and removing the dishes. (Singh 5)

Even Englishwomen succumbed to the eastern environment. They smoked hookahs, drank claret and beer, and left their children to the care of Indian servants. Expensive dinners and horse-racing involved young 'writers' in debts.

Later the Anglo-Indians were known as *Qui Hais* up to the Mutiny times. The novels of Edward Taylor, and W.D. Arnold, known as Romances, describe this kind of life. After the Mutiny and the institution of the Bengal Civil Service, the *Qui Hais* began to die out. In several books we find echoes of rivalry between *Qui Hais* or Anglo-Indians of the 'old school' and what the latter contemptuously styled 'Competition Wallahs'.

In this book the author explains the difficulties of English soldiers and civilians, with inadequate salaries and no private means, when they contemplated marriage in India. We learn that the railway did not exist beyond Cawnpore and the sahibs had to travel in *doolis* each carried by four *kabars*. Their luggage was brought in *banghis* escorted by native policemen.

Bhupala Singh writes,

In the last-twenty years of the nineteenth century the few *Quis Hais*, left behind in the onward march of British administration, finally disappeared, having been replaced by Competition Wallahs.

Kipling's Anglo-India is the India of Englishmen of the new regime. With the beginning of the twentieth century the Competition Wallahs begin to be referred to as 'heaven-born' by members of other services. Present-day Anglo-India is the India of the ICS.

The later Anglo-Indian novelists include G.H. Bell, G. Lowes Dickinson, Mrs. Barbara Wingfield, Mrs. Maud Diver, B.M. Croker, Alexander Wilson, Ed Thompson, Rudyard Kipling, Duff-Fyfe, Meadows Taylor and E.M. Forster, Kipling's *Kim*, Forster's *A Passage to India* and Scott's *Staying On* became best-sellers and classics.

Some women writers like Mrs. Maud Diver, Mrs. Alice Renin, and Mrs., J. H. Bell have attempted to show that the life of Englishwomen in India is not so frivolous as it appears on the surface, and that they also have played their part silently but heroically in making the British Empire what it was.

Works-cited:

1. Bhupal Singh. *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction*. OUP, 1934.
2. Gokak, V. K. *English in India*. Bombay, 1964.
3. Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*, Central Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 2018.