



Theme of Nonconformity in Indian English Novels

Dr. Swati B. Singh

Assistant Professor, SVKT College, Deolali Camp

Introduction

Literature is necessary for human society precisely because it strengthens the human values, which define the human in man. A great writer cannot totally ignore the social conventions and public prejudices; he pulls out pretexts through which he can't decry cruelty and injustice and asserts human values. This is a vital function of literature. The aim of this paper is to draw attention towards the theme of ever changing cultural values and social control and the place of non-conformity that has been dealt with in the Indian English novels.

The objective of this paper includes how nonconformity as a yardstick can be applied to assess the progress Indian English fiction has achieved in recent years. As a tool of criticism, it analyses the tendency of Indian English fiction to express its dissent from the colonial, social, linguistic and epistemological influences. In literary history nonconformity has a special place. It makes various literary movements possible. Conformity to the same literary rules and thought-patterns would not have created the diverse literary movements and rich literary products seen today. Instead, there would have been a whole body of vain repetitions. A great dissatisfaction with the previous literary movement causes the birth of a new one, possibly a better one. Thus terms like disagreement, protest, resistance, etc. become key terms in literary history pointing towards the ever-continuing literary phenomenon marked by the term nonconformity. The whole literature seen today would have become defunct, if a nonconformist attitude had not inspired the writers and critics. There wouldn't have been Renaissance, Romanticism, the age of Verisimilitude, Modernism and Postmodernism without nonconformity. World literature wouldn't have had

great writers like Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe, James Joyce, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky et al without the same concept. Every new literary period replaces or modifies the previous one because it becomes sterile. Thus, for example, in English literature, the Romantic revival took place in the 18th century, which replaced Neoclassicism because Romanticism could not conform to the strong traditionalism of Neoclassicism. Therefore the birth of a new literary era. In various ways the writers, too, may be considered as nonconformists either with regard to the literary form they use or the subject they choose or both of them. Shakespeare is considered a great genius in drama not only because he skillfully makes use of the subjects he borrowed from various sources but also because he radically renews the methods of characterization and stage devices of the Elizabethan period, and thus, resists and rejects the old. The writers' nonconformity to various aspects of Life includes, among other things, nonconformity to social aspects, political philosophy, linguistic features, gender relations and ethical views. It is the basis of social activism and subalternity. In short, it pervades almost all aspects of human culture and one of the prime principles of progress.

Cultural values are assumptions shared by the members of a society. Societies develop norms or rules for social living. The less important rules are called 'folkways'. The essential rules that govern matters are called 'mores'. Failure to abide by norms is called 'non-conformity'. Non-conformity to folkways is called 'eccentricity' and non-conformity to mores is called 'deviant behaviour' which is not ignored by society. To function effectively, every society enforces conformity as a system of social control. Rewarding or punishing people achieve social control through the application of 'sanctions'

The Indian Society and Cultural Values

The Indians were exposed to western lifestyles, modes of thinking and attitudes through long contacts with the British. As a result, our society is in a bewildered state due to Western culture. The social conflicts appeared as the contrasting traits such as intellectual vis spiritual, individual v/s organized or family, freedom-oriented vis controlled. The reformists expected change; change in society is observed in terms of cultural values and so values need to be

redefined in Indian society. The mixture of the West and the East produced heterogeneity of the middle class Indians. The society is ramified into two divisions- 'conformed' and 'non-conformed. The conventionalists try to be 'conformists'; while the reformists find to be 'non-conformists'. Obviously, the non-conformists do not follow the socio-cultural norms/ restraints that confine individualities. In brief, social control is lost and the question of morality becomes severe. Against this background, the Indian writers have tried to look into the socio-cultural conditions and the psychological behaviours. However, very few writers have saved them from the common sale of confusion and turmoil. Thus, the main thrust of argument ties in deciding the place of non-conformity

Nativism and Conformity

Though Indian writing in English has its marginalized status, English has been a cultural, written, formal means of communication like Sanskrit. It has no socio-cultural conversational mode of operation. But now it is the time to consider and reconsider the status of English in this global scenario of multiculturalism. The writers in English in India have attempted from all corners of the nation to reflect the Indian social reality. The narratives of the Indian writers indicate the features of the Indian literary tradition of continuous process of nativization or Indianization at the hands of the 'conformists. By exploiting English, the narrative writers have converted and absorbed all external influences into a native system. They are successful in narrating the socio-cultural aspects of Indian society

Dichotomous Projection

To create new literary values, the writers have to produce the culture which has its manifestations through the behavioural patterns both explicit and implicit ways. Both the rural and the urban patterns are brought out by the writers' observations and depictions in the literary texts. The point is that the urbanization goes with the westernized or anti-traditional ideals or values and the rural life still has been lingering around the age-old values of the native social reality. Therefore, Indian writing in English has become the nativized product representing the dichotomy between conformity and "nonconformity". The Indian literary critical thinking has to acknowledge that Indian culture is an

accumulation of various alien literary and cultural traits, so that the social conflicts have the characteristics of the dichotomous projection. The old and new, native and non-native, rational and emotional, rural and urban, educated and uneducated etc. are the issues to struggle at and naturally the 'anti-traditional' or 'non-conformist' approach has its survival in this race. But the old Indian religious or spiritual tradition has its impact on the native mind. All these features could aptly be subsumed in 'nativism' in which non-conformist approach has no place of honour. The theme of Social Disagreement

Indian English novels exemplify that the process of nativization or Indianization is the in-built capacity of culture, and therefore, Indians have not whole-heartedly accepted the non-conformity. The conflicts we come across in the novels are severe where the conservative attitude of the people is stronger and the protagonists are over sensitive. These conflicts become mild where the protagonists have some support to buck up to establish in the changing scenario. It is the theme of disagreement in Indian novels. Some specimen novels are here dealt with

For ex- in *Inside the Haveli* Rama Mehta has created Geeta, a protagonist, her approach to life becomes step by step nativistic, she changes herself and others too to reach at the indefinite destination; and finally she seems to be gratified with her socio religio-cultural status and position as the mistress of the haveli. She realizes what every young woman of modern India should, while nativizing the external influences as suitable features for modifying the life set-up for betterment. She strives to change the narrowed centralized views of the rich aristocratic traditions and infuse the new humanistic ideas into the social life of the suppressed obscured multitudes. 'Ethnocentrism is among the haveli inhabitants; while Geeta's education makes her understand the reasons for cultural diversity. She doesn't condemn the unfamiliar norms. Folkways' and 'mores' trouble her and so her attempts are to revise and restore the sufferers from those of 'mores. As a deviant, she matters very much to the haveli and a clash of values continues. She accepts and applies some 'sanctions' and doesn't to be purely non-conformist. Eventually, she becomes the mistress that indicates

the impact of conformity or social control still prevails in India. She accepts the conformity with positive and negative sanctions of the haveli people.

In "Temporary Answers Jai Nimbkar has penned the Maharashtra middle class social experiences for conveying the message of the necessity of socio-cultural, attitudinal changes for measuring the qualities of human happiness and safety. Vineeta, a protagonist can't shape the cultural context for her as she is not able to recognize the traditional spiritual values to boost her changed attitude towards life-pleasure, safety and security; her concept of love is impractical and rather much different from her friend Kishori or sister Madhuri and the society around her. Permanent answers to her questions are beyond consideration to her parents, friends, relatives, and all. Her frustration and sense of emptiness are due to her own alien or unacceptable views of love, marriage, and succour. Thus, the novel ends in indefiniteness. Vineeta dislikes everyone's marriage life, she does not accept traditional, religious ceremonies or mannerisms. These rebellious thoughts that she derived are from the western, educated, sophisticated mentality. This mentality doesn't seem nativized as her views are unacceptable and non-appealing to an Indian mind. Here lack of spiritual and socio cultural consideration in any activity or in view of life makes her feel the feeling of frustration, baffled and emptiness. Vineeta's parents are ethnocentric, her education brings awareness to her. Marriage and love are 'more than that she wants to break them off as they are temporary answers. Like Geeta, Vineeta is a deviant and poses a more formidable problem. She appears to be a criminal and doesn't secure conformity through any sanctions.

Anita Desai's protagonists have the common features of characters "oversensitive" and "reactive"; and therefore, they are non-realistic or non-conformists in their approach to life. In "Where Shall We Go This Summer?" Sita is unable to realize the social reality as relative truths; she thinks life-conditions as static affairs without spatio temporality of human characters and their behaviours. Sita herself is ethnocentric; she loves her rural island culture even after twenty years; her experience teaches the truth, and so she breaks down as she is not prepared to cultural changes. "Child raising' and "material progress' are as

'mores' in the modern society, and she wants to escape the urban civilization and child birth by retreating to the island. She is not aware of cultural dynamicity and cultural change. Even the dichotomies like the rural and the urban zones, relationships before and after marriage, the roles and the expectations or responsibilities etc. she is not aware of. Her rebellious aggressive behaviour seems mad and careless; and her expectations are quite unreasonable. Here, her illusion and shelter with the age-old impact of black magic define her eccentricity that leads to her madness and frustrations.

In Shashi Deshpande's novels, homecoming provides the necessary conditions for the heroines to begin a new cycle. Family houses are the centres in their lives and anthropologically, unavoidable choice to them. They are a tool for introducing a change or starting a new phase. This is the conformity that family houses represent and the recreation needs it as a centre. Deshpande's protagonists gain an inner balance through the conformity of family life and declare their independence to stake out their identity. For instance, in 'Roots and Shadows' house demolition is a terrible blow to Kaka and Old Uncle is lucky not to have witnessed it. This is the conformists attitude to have shelter in the house, and their sense of identity, safety, and confidence is linked to its walls. Within the relationship house, a symbol of conformity or control keeps the situation under control. On the contrary, Indu accepts the demolition of the ancestral house and gets free herself from suffocation. However, houses symbolize an intricate web of different emotions. They trap the protagonists emotionally, house becomes intensely intimate to women and so a new phase appears to be a challenge to them as in 'Small Remedies and The Dark Holds no Terrors Her message in all novels is that relationships within the family need to be built on human values of understanding and trust rather than on the prescribed rules of disciplines. Here, conformity with the positive sanctions is preferred and non conformity at the cost of morality is disliked. Gita Hariharan's presentation of protest against the negative sanctions of Brahmanical realism in *The Remains of the Feast* is an ample example of the strong non-conformist approach. She has created a new international consciousness by discarding the

binding native culture of caste-system and having the dignity of customs and beliefs.

The Some Ardent Conformists

R.K.Narayan has successfully used his novel as medium and revealed the cultural restraints of a period. He made very serious efforts to depict social realism in his much acclaimed novels 'The Guide', 'The Financial; Expert', or 'Mr. Sampath'. The undercurrents of the narrative reveal the socio-cultural fabric of Indian society. Through his characters such as Margayya, Raju or Sampath who are the embodiments of negative values he tears the curtains over our eye, removes our illusion and convinces the importance of value-based life for lasting peace and contentment. He asserts his deep faith in values, culture and tradition i.e. the conformity.

Vikram Seth's "A Suitable Boy" is a skillful portrayal of life and manners of a particular class, social group or place as a glorious and most eventful period of Indian history. The social and cultural conditions of the early sixties are explained and commented on in the novel. To express his view, he has used musicians to represent a kaleidoscopic view of the social and cultural life of the period under study.

As a conformist, Rohinton Mistry's fiction records the ethnic pull; he is very sensitive to the threats to his society. The fate of his characters is very much dependent on the fate of his community. His novel is an interaction between the past and the present of the Parsi community and anticipates the flow of events to follow through his characters. His "A Fine Balance" or "Tales From Firozsha Bang" are the stories full of praise of the Parsi Community. In other words, he is a conformist who admires not only folkways like the highest divorce rate, but also sanctions like -Parsi and poverty are a contradictory pair. In short, the Parsis sense of religious superiority complex is exposed as a common belief among the rigid Parsi traditionalists. Mistry offers a glimpse of a culture constituted with the values shared by the members of a society.

Similarly, Kamala Markandaya, a sociological writer, treats the theme of alienation at the sociological level, and this sociological alienation of her characters is a spiritual loss as if one's roots are pulled out. In 'Nectar in Sieve'

she portrays how people become alien to the new surrounding i.e. the city after they get uprooted from the native soil. In 'The Nowhere Man' she depicts how people feel alienated when they migrate from India. All this indicates that she dislikes the notion of those who leave their roots mentally and spiritually and start living in the new and alien world. This is the impact of conformity.

Conclusion

Though Indian writings in English have gathered a rich momentum, in the efforts of weaving tales on the Indian soil a very few writers could save themselves from becoming the conformists in their views on life. The reformists have been more or less involved in the Indian socio-cultural phenomena to escape alienation and retain the Indianness or indigenous elements. In brief, the process of decolonization was an effort of removing non-conformity; but now it is possible to dismantle the formal colonial structures by the nationalist struggles. The changing norms and the rules accordingly are not to be called 'non-conformities'.

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