



Representation of History in Indian English Fiction: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This paper tries to critically analyze the theme of Historical Representation with a special reference to Indian context. Deriving a cue from Orwell's essay, "Why I write? ", the articulation of history through literature had been a special focus right from the period of the emergence of Indian literature. Taking this point as a point of departure, the pair tries to exemplify different texts of Indian English literature written by different writers in a way that they had tried to revisit, retell and recall the times by rewriting the history of the nation. The aspects that the paper tries to deal with include an analysis of the Indian texts that encapsulate history, different ways of representation through the lenses of a variety of frame works.

Key words: literature, representation, history.

Introduction

History becomes an integral part of Indian literature from the early 20th century as; in the pre- independent era Indian freedom struggle offered a lion share. The rains of historical representation in Indian literature, then began transcended to the post independent scenario as every important phase of historical importance in pre/post independent scenario appeared in Indian fiction.

This paper attempts to analyze such representation of a particular period in Indian history, The Emergency period (1975 -77), one of the controversial periods which was declared by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Like the Indian freedom struggle that became a major component in Indian English Literature, The Emergency period drew the focus of many Indian writers in encapsulating the tyrannical rule and the atrocities that took place during the period. The paper is divided into two parts: the

first part depicts the history of India from the scenario of pre- independence to the post – independence and to the aftermath with a special focus on the Emergency period declared by Indira Gandhi. In the second part the paper deals the way how Emergency period is represented in the narratives of Indian English literature.

India, A land of nearly 50 centuries ancient history, a family of culture, religion and traditions, the land of myths and legends and the birth place of Vedas and values became the target of British India, the very name, blurs the mind with ensemble images in culture, traditions, economy, prosperity, exotic architecture, lush beauty and more importantly science and arts. The prosperity of the country was, so much spellbound that it was caught into the clutches of the west, who entered the nation under the pretext of commerce, turned their attention to conquest. India which was like a golden bird, after the advent of British, became a bird in a golden cage with its beautiful feathers heading towards the foot of the British. Here I had mentioned the condition of Indians under British rule as a bird in a golden cage, which is intended to a perspective that I would deal in the next part of the paper. Britishers after they had attained a satisfactory colonizer out comes, turned Indian kingdom into Indian slave nation. With their colonizer brains, they wished Indians to be Indian in blood and western in color. With their strategies of western education, they made Indian clerical wheels to move their vehicle of British commerce and administration. The arrival of the political trio, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subash Chandra Bose on to the scene of freedom struggle catalyzed the movement which started from the sepoy revolt in 1857. With a number of historical movements like Dandi March, Salt Satyagraha, abolishment of foreign goods, Civil Disobedience movement and Quit India movement, Indian freedom fighters were successful in turning away the colonizers from the country by 1947, After the freedom there was a different kind of tug of war

and conflicts regarding the presidentship and prime minister powers that somehow fate had resolved the issues. With Babu Rajendra Prasad as the president and Nehru as the prime minister, Indian democracy came into action from Jan 26, 1950. This momentum of freedom is checked with the continuous conflicts with Pakistan and China. In the coming next twenty years, India has to fight a war with China followed by the death of Nehru. Within a small span of prime minister ship of Lalbahadur Sastri, he also left the political stage giving path to Indhira Gandhi. In the year 1966, Mrs. Gandhi becomes the prime minister and in 1971, India fights another war with Pakistan. After a great political unrest, Indhira Gandhi shocks the country with the declaration of Emergency in 1975, June 26 and lifting it on March 21, 1977. This dark metaphorical period of twenty-one month's remains a black mole in the history of India. This is followed by the failure of Indhira Gandhi in the general elections in 1977 and again raising to power. In the next twenty years, India loses her dearest children, Indhira Gandhi, Sanjay Gandhi and Rajeev Gandhi. This was the kind of political situation in the post independent era.

Emergency Period: Contexts and conditions

The word 'Emergency', implies the rule of the president in the country due to the internal disturbances in the country. In the history of India, Emergency is declared in 1962 during the Indo China war, in 1971 during the Indo Pak war. It could be clearly understood in the case of the Emergencies declared due to the war with China and Pakistan. The Emergency, for the third time is declared on June 25 1975 by Mrs. Indhira Gandhi. There is no war threat from any country or there is no evidence of financial crisis, still, The Emergency is declared. I would like to brief some of the reasons of the Emergency and its out comes in the country.

The period 1973 to 1975, in the history of India are the years of high political unrest against the government of Indhira Gandhi. This

is the time where many of the congress leaders who are against the then prime minister, Indhira Gandhi, wished to have a presidential rule until the election of a direct member. It is the same time that Jaya Prakash Narayan, the socialist leader called for 'Total Revolution' and asking support of students, peasants etc. The Railway union also declared strike all over the country which was crushed by the government. This was followed by the protests of Nav Nirman Yuvak Samithi to conduct fresh elections and hence elections are held on June 10, 1975. Indhira Gandhi government is defeated and she was also help responsible for electoral mal practices in the Allahabad high court. The court gave a verdict that Indhira Gandhi should be deposed from her power and banned her from elections for six years. The supreme court also up held the verdict of the high court, preventing her from enjoying the privileges of MP though she could continue as prime minister. This was followed by Jaya Prakash Narayan and Morarji Desai with some other leader's large rally in Delhi. All these blows, finally resulted in Indhira Gandhi's decision of declaration of internal Emergency as per the advice of Siddharth Sankar Ray with the approval of the then president Fakhruddin Ali Ahmadh, only fifteen minutes to 12'O clock in the mid night. of June 25, 1975 the fate of India, which blossomed on a mid-night on August 15th 1947 turned into a dark eclipse on another midnight. During the Emergency, the familiar programs that were seen all over the country are the twenty minute program by Indhira Gandhi to improve public services, agriculture, check poverty. The most popular word heard during the Emergency is 'Discipline' and hard work. It is this discipline that all trains run on time, black market and corruption is turned down, government officials appeared to offices on time Commenting on the sudden changes during the Emergency period, Mathur notes, the Emergency created a climate of satisfaction among the people, for they had no longer to bear the travails of strikes and agitations. Their daily lives became peaceful and somewhat less expensive, for the prices of

essential commodities showed a downward trend. Strict punctuality in offices, trains and buses became the order of the day. Tax- evasion and smuggling declined almost dramatically. Due to raids and subsequent arrests black-marketing also came down. (13)

This was one side of Emergency. The other side of Emergency lies in Sanjay Gandhi's five-minute program which includes the measures of family planning, city beautification, fight against casteism, dowry and to improve literacy rate.

Emergence of new laws in Emergency:

The so-called Emergency laws constitute, MISA - Maintenance of Internal Security Act, press sensor ship. Maintenance of Internal Security Act is intended to mute the opposition of Indhira Gandhi that includes many leaders like JP, Morarji Desai, L. K Advani, Vajpayee, etc. Some organizations like RSS, RSU, RWA were banned. The only organization that supported Emergency is CPI that was in favor with prime minister right from her decision of the nationalization of banks. None of these arrests were known to the world as press is heavily censored and the flow of electricity to press is stopped. Any kind of literature criticizing Emergency is not tolerated and if anyone had attempted to do, he is just arrested without proper reason and were subjected to untold torture. Many students who were suspected to have links with Naxals or any kind of socialists were targeted. Examples of these incidents are the Kerala Rajan case and the arrest of famous actress Sneha Latha Reddy. Educational institutions worked with utmost discipline. Commenting on the discipline of educational institutions, Naveen a teacher and one of the writers of my study opined that, All the months during Emergency created a sort of tension among the people and no one dared to comment on this. An important aspect is that education institutions worked with at most discipline. There were no agitations or strikes among the students.

In south India, only these measures left a black mark on the government but the other measures, forced sterilization and city beautification are not seen in these places. This is why Indira Gandhi could regain her votes in South India. As Naveen, a writer of Telangana remarks, 'There are no such instances of Sanjay Gandhi's program of forced sterilization or city beautification seen in south. These measures happened only in the Northern part of India'.

The bitter experiences of Emergency are seen in the measures of forced sterilization and city beautification that almost landed many people in turmoil. Family planning, a measure that comes under population control became a curse to many people. Many people who are not qualified to undergo these operations like young men and women, old people, unmarried people were forcibly dragged into the sterilization camps and were operated. To many people there were complaints of infections and side effects. In order to attract people some incentives like money, a transistor is offered in the initial days. During Emergency, government officials were not promoted until their quarter of sterilizations were completed. Even their monthly income also suffered due to their incapability to produce satisfactory results. On the whole, the people almost moved around places with a certificate mentioning that they had undergone their family planning operations. To talk about the measure of city beautification, many people who live on meagre incomes in slums were dragged out of their homes and were relocated to faraway places. A city is said to be beautiful if its inhabitants prosper with all basic needs, but how could a city be beautiful if the human beings are deprived of their meagre basics? The most painful incident that reflect the atrocious laws of forced sterilization and city beautification is the 'Turk man gate incident' that happened in Delhi. It is almost four decades that Emergency is lifted, but the memories of these drastic measures appear as night mares to the people in Delhi. Mistry's novel, *A Fine Balance* gives a

realistic depiction of these measures in a detail way.

Narratives of History and Emergency:

History is a record of events that happened in the past. Which turn subjective or objective according to the writer. Sometimes these histories turn as stories of past. George Orwell in his influential essay "Why I Write" puts forward a notion that a historian is triggered to write either by the period he lives or by sheer ego. When looked against the notion of Orwell it may be either the writers' empirical experience or the time span, he is obliged to write. Contemporary writers of English literature, especially the Postcolonial writers at present are mainly engrossed in looking back at their past (cultural/ communal) in thought. These writers try to re-visit history. Some of the historiographers like Mitchel Foucault, Hayden White had remarked 'history is made by the historian' (Salat 125) and is therefore necessarily a political act. What the historian suppresses or emphasizes or the order which he arranges the historical material is determined by the historian. (Salat 125)

In Indian English literature 'history' becomes recurrent theme from the very emergence of the Indian novel. To be more precise it is from the year 1930, with the appearance of the literary trio, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. History being the integral part of works is evident. This pre-occupation of history traverses through the decades and by the year 1980, Indian literature opened door with a fresh approach in writing history. Contemporary novels from 1980s for instance *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie, *Raj* by Gita Mehta, *such a Long Journey* and *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry are focused on Indian history. This pre occupation of pre visiting history also happened in other literatures like for example Nigerian (Chinua Achebe), Caribbean (V.S. Naipaul). The writers' i.e. Postcolonial writers tend to re write history rather than representing the events. It is here

interesting to note the reason why Postcolonial writers need to re-write history. The main core in Postcolonial writings lies in turning down the conventional notion that history is created by the winners. And the losers do not have a history? Or should possess the history that reflects the otherness are the barbaric once by the winners. One example could be considered by the 1857 Sepoy revolt which the colonizers considered it to be a 'Mutiny' rather referring it to be a revolt. Until the Britishers left India, all the movements that took place for Indian independence are given a western perspective to the world. It is this task of writing back to the center; post-colonial writers of India tend to reflect through their works.

In literature, writers provoked by the outcomes of political strategies cannot directly beat the situation in the novels. Instead, these writers had to pen their indignation with a great care by employing different literary strategies. Emergency period is a period that tasted Indians with the 'totalitarian power' and to satirize this period is definitely a creative task which encapsulated righteous anger of the novelist fused with literary techniques. Mathur identifies three modes of writing that avoid the writers of historically controversial times from the web of criticism and political pressures. the first mode of writing. Constitutes the use of similar or exaggerated events but give imaginary names to the characters that makes a realistic novel, the second one being, a novel that narrates roughly parallel but imaginary events and create different characters from the human or animal world, making an allegorical representation and the third mode of writing is to create a similar or exaggerated intellectual or emotional atmosphere (Mathur 1). Of the three modes of writing, Mathur is convincing in pointing that, 'A large number of novelists satirizing political systems or figures' choose the allegorical mode which, like the use of myth, has become a favorite narrative strategy of the modern political novelist. By both concealing and revealing, thus keeping the writer safe from the

windy side of law, it provokes the reader's cerebration and gives him the pleasure of discovering the hidden meaning himself. Mathur's views when applied to the writings of historically controversial times like the freedom struggle or the partition provides us the evidence of the writer's literary strategies employed in creating a story out of history. Moreover, when looked at the narratives on the topic of my present study, the Emergency period declared by Mrs. Indhira Gandhi, different techniques are used by the writers who condemn the totalitarian rule in the country.

In this context, I would like to name some of the writers who tried to condemn the Emergency with their respective strategies. Salman Rushdie, in his novel *Midnight's Children* criticized Emergency as a mid-night of silence and violence in darkness. Raj Gill had narrated the dictator rule of the prime minister in his *The Torch Bearers*. In the novel *Rich Like Us*, Nayantara Sahgal attempted to analyze the dark corridors of power and the period a hay day for the so-called entrepreneurs. Manohar Malgonkar's *the Garland Keepers* depicts the tyrannical midnight and its effects in the people. In *The Great Indian Novel*, Shashi Tharoor experimented with myth to project an allegorical representation of Emergency. *The city and the River* by Arun Joshi criticizes Emergency with Arkie typed myths of cosmos and Rohinton Mistry had given a realistic portrayal of the Emergency through the novel *A Fine Balance*.

In the regional languages, an attempt is made to depict the atrocious laws which made many lives of people to confront untold torture. In Telugu, Ampasayya Naveen tried to depict the blackness of the period through the novel *The Dark Days*. Another Telugu writer Tadigiri Pothuraju had written a collection of short stories entitled *Kettle (Emergency Stories)* in 2009. In Malayalam, Mukandhan tried to depict the cruelty of the forced sterilizations and city beautification measures through his novel *Delhi Gadaigal (Stories of Delhi)*. Kuldip Nayer's

Judgement – the inside story of Emergency, Sneha Latha Reddy's prison Dairy, Mary Taylor's My prison days in India are some of the prison narratives into which they had detailed their experiences in the dark prisons.

Conclusion

Thus, history can be written and re-written from time to time depending on the complexity of the historical event that occur. However more important is the way it is depicted in literature. That is for example, in this paper, I had attempted to detail the way, Emergency becomes the main focus in literature by Indian, diasporic and regional writers.

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