

## CONCLUSION

The greatest paradox of freedom, perhaps, is that it often comes with a consciousness of power. To understand the meaning of freedom is therefore, to comprehend the witches' brew of potent complexities. The immediate question is whether man's obsession for freedom chiefly expresses fear or emancipates them from fear by giving them the illusion of power.

In fact, freedom provided a liberating mantra in the formative years of Indian writing in English. This fifty-eight anniversary of Indian Independence is therefore, an appropriate occasion to place that mantra in a broader historical context and to study its emancipating impact on creativity in English in India. To the Indian writers, initiating English into India's linguistic family was a cherished dream. The formal declaration of the assertion of independence from English literature was made by Raja Rao, way back in 1938, articulated in the "Author's Foreward" to *Kanthapura*. And as time passed, with various modifications and interpretations, the mantra for freedom acquired a momentum and resulted in what came to be called linguistic liberation and experimentation in the '80s.

In analyzing the unleashing of freedom in Indian English fiction, we have to rely on periods and movements, especially in order to get a much more clearer picture. The five chapters into which this study is divided, has attempted to closely examine the different perspectives regarding freedom by providing a time frame which separates the literature of one period from that of another. These are obviously not rigid categories into which writers can be individually slotted with perfect assurance. For instance, G.V.Desani chronologically belongs to a much earlier period, but linguistically, he belongs to a much later period. The effort, in fact, provides the notion of movement and is essential for recording change, although some phases might overlap. This is more so for the simple reason that the very nature of this movement may be quite different in, and even unique, to India in the pluralistic context of the nation.

In his revolutionary “Foreward” to *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao undermines the need for an Indian variety of English, which he hoped, would some day prove to be “as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American”. In *Kanthapura*, Raja Rao actually attempts to demonstrate how the “tempo of Indian life” could be “infused” into literary creativity after laying the foundation for a well-conceptualized beginning to linguistic liberation. While dealing with the characters, Raja Rao stresses on the conditions for winning political freedom. Moorthy in the novel understands that he must relinquish or at least curb his personal desires, and also free himself from the feelings of caste superiority. In the case of women like Ranganamma, the struggle for political freedom had to be preceded by a struggle for her individual freedom as woman. Through the character of Bhatta referred to as ‘The First Brahman’ in the novel, Raja Rao highlights the challenges that Hindu orthodoxy faced from the demands of the historical present and their inability to understand the real significance of freedom. Raja Rao also emphasizes the positive role of religion in the struggle for freedom. Even the significance of Independence is expressed in religious metaphor. In order to seek liberation, the Gandhian values of non-violence, passive resistance, love of mankind and abolition of untouchability are also stressed repeatedly in the novel. Despite all this, Raja Rao does not harbour any illusions regarding freedom. Towards the climax of the novel, a sense of frustration creeps in and doubts are expressed about what freedom would eventually bring.

Raja Rao published *Kanthapura* in 1938, a time when India was yet to gain Independence. He truthfully voices the hopes, fears and aspirations of people regarding freedom. Like *Kanthapura*, *All about H Hatterr* by G.V.Desani, published in 1948, also raises questions about the true nature of freedom. The novel deals with freedom in a mock-serious tone. Through Hatterr, who is the central character, Desani expresses the tensions within the concept of freedom. Hatterr considers it as a privilege to move about freely, to use and interpret experience in his own way. However, he found that freedom was somewhat more complex. He realises that other people exerted their influence upon him directly or indirectly, thereby limiting his freedom. He also understands that existence in the world was a matter of choice about being the exploiter or the exploited, the oppressor or the victim. The self-realised conclusion that Hatterr learns from life is that there is exploitation at all levels and therefore, a man cannot achieve absolute freedom.

A few years after Independence, the shock of self-recognition gave inspiration to socially relevant themes. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand became interested in the social purpose of writing. In *He who Rides a Tiger*, Bhattacharya explores the importance of freedom through the central character Kalo. Focusing attention on the Bengal famine of 1943, Bhattacharya points out that economic poverty denies to millions of people the basic freedom to survive, to carry on their hereditary trade, to stay in their hometown or even to enjoy a decent livelihood. Kalo understands that other people played significant roles in restricting his freedom. And sometimes, a man can destroy his own freedom, by resorting to lies. Towards the end of the novel, Bhattacharya stresses the fact that freedom can be attained only through the strength of conviction. Kalo realizes that both class and caste consciousness inhibit human freedom. The various aspects of women's freedom is dealt with by Bhattacharya through the life of Kalo's daughter Lekha. At one time, Lekha is kept in a brothel to please men, at another occasion, the people wished to deify her and install her as Mother of Sevenfold Bliss. The burden of complying to people's demands robs her of her freedom. What the writer stresses through the novel is the importance of basic elemental freedoms. He also links freedom and equality by asserting that the positive conditions of freedom should be equally distributed within the society.

The new generation of writers could not understand the sentimental concerns regarding freedom which writers like Raja Rao brought out in their novels. What is however evident is a feeling of repression and a sense of nostalgia in and for a lost world. The post-Independence novels of the 80s by Indian writers working in English thus gave voice to the harsh coldness of reality instead of idealism, hopes and dreams in the preceding period. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, published in 1980, tells of failed dreams and ideologies and idealism gone berserk. Sadly, all the midnight's children inherit linguistic, religious, caste, class and provincial rivalries. They mirror the fragmentation and multiplicity of Indian society and the confusion of social, religious, regional and parochial identities of the Indian people. The dream of freedom which many people visualized was about being self-assertive, independent and sovereign individuals. However, the reality of free India was that it was divided within itself-polarities arising between the rich and the poor, the north and south, the Hindu and the Muslim. Through the novel, Rushdie ascertains the fact that India was a nation of myths. He also makes the

revelation that even India's freedom was a myth and as time went by, people were forgetting the myth. Beneath the surface of a maturing India, pangs of self-doubt had begun to creep in. Saleem Sinai, the protagonist of the novel, realizes that the soaring hope and elation at the time of India's Independence was now replaced by cynicism and despair. The self-assertive notions of freedom, which was felt by the people, developed in divergent directions until, in the end, they came into direct conflict with each other. The nostalgic tone evident in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* seems to suggest a sense of alienation, a desire to go back to one's roots. The search for one's roots, as a result, prodded many writers to dwell deep into the intricacies of Indian philosophy and culture. Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*, published twelve years later, is a major effort in this direction. It offers authentic interpretations of Indian cultural values, music, art forms and ethos. Most of the stories in the novel are told on the banks of the river Narmada which is believed to provide freedom from the bondage of the soul. The common belief is that the river cleanses a human being of generations of sinful births and helps man to attain salvation. The novel raises many questions regarding the true nature of freedom. The Jain muni seeks liberation by renouncing the world. Although renunciation is one of the ways in which freedom can be attained, man is not totally freed unless he has conquered the limitations of the body. At the end of the novel, however, Gita Mehta upholds the view that doing one's duty is much more liberating than renunciation.

*The Thousand Faces of the Night* by Gita Hariharan, published around the same time as *The River Sutra*, also deals with the quest for freedom. The novel is an effort in bridging the distance between action and renunciation and throws light on the texture of women's lives. An important aspect of the novel is that all the women characters struggle, fight and aspire for freedom. The whole gamut of women's experience and social pressures on women related to female bodily functions like menstruation, sexual initiation, barrenness, miscarriage, pregnancy and childbirth are discussed in vivid detail. Hariharan also takes care to reveal the exploitation of women within the institution of marriage. The novel highlights the fact that freedom is a constant process of learning, of breaking old habits and forming new ones.

Another novel, *The God of Small Things*, published four years later, successfully challenged the patriarchal structure of Indian society. Significantly, the novel turns its attention to the subtler influences of culture, tradition and the general organization of the

society that constrain and limit women's freedom. The novel also expresses a sense of disillusionment with the consequences of political freedom. Selfishness, inefficiency and corruption are pointed out as being the main stumbling blocks on the road to total freedom.

When we turn to history for insights into freedom, we realize that the first major attempt for freedom was the Indian Revolt of 1857. The Revolt brought into the fore a new found self-awareness and self-confidence among the people. Not surprisingly, Indian English literature too, came of age after 1857, progressing gradually from a phase of imitation to assimilation and finally to individual creation.

A major challenge for the earlier Indian writers was to make their literary work acceptable to the majority of Indian readers. They had to carve out a distinct, identifiable Indian sensibility in a language that could be easily understood. Writers like Raja Rao made the English language conform to the intricacies of the Indian tongue by incorporating the idiom and rhythm of the local language. G.V.Desani shows how the English language could be moulded to bring about a complete interpretation of subject-matter, language and characterization.

It must be noted that the earlier Indian English writers were bilingual. To these writers therefore, thinking came naturally in their own native language. These unwritten thoughts or unwritten works had to be translated into English when they began writing. Thus, the process of writing itself was an act of translation for the bilingual writer. Perhaps this explains why writers living abroad and those who have lost touch with their native language are able to produce better works in English. The cross-cultural shifts as well as changes in the socio-economic environment becomes an advantage in many respects. For one, it delinks the artist from his mother tongue and brings about a complete fascination for a foreign tongue. Interestingly, Raja Rao in France and G.V.Desani in England represent this shift.

What sets apart the present Indian writers, especially the post-Rushdie writers, from their older counterparts is that for the new writers, English is their own language. Since they are not bilingual, their mother-tongue does not inhibit their freedom to express themselves in English. For many of these writers, English is the only language

they know. If we compare the earlier novelists with those of the 80s and 90s, a few significant shifts in emphasis are clearly evident. For instance, most of the novelists of the eighties like Rushdie, Tharoor and Nayantara Sehgal, both in their language and theme reflect a metropolitan and cosmopolitan background. However, the writers of the 30s and 40s, especially in their earlier novels, wrote on authentic rural themes such as in Narayan's Malgudi novels and Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*. It follows that those writers who were brought up in a rural or semi-rural milieu chose to deal with rural themes while those who share a cosmopolitan background chose to deal with issues they were more familiar with. The subject matter of Indian English fiction significantly shows a shift from the rural to the urban to the cosmopolitan.

New areas of life and experience continue to be explored by the writers of the nineties. These writers have ushered in the age of confidence and freed Indian English fiction from any possible crisis in identity. With their original and innovative ideas, they have taken liberties to produce a distinct genre of Indian English writing. What we understand is that the English language is being domesticated.

So this is, I suppose, what freedom in Indian English fiction is all about. The freedom to experiment, freedom from imitation, freedom to exploit the linguistic resources of the language, inventiveness, fermentation of ideas that are unique and at the same time maintaining high artistic standard. As Salman Rushdie puts it, in his collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands*:

What seems to be happening is that those people who were once colonized by the language are now remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it – assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers (70).

Freedom also means using the language with honesty, to remake the language and make it one's own, in presenting the truth and to express the unique Indian experience. All the seven writers – Raja Rao, G.V.Desani, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Salman Rushdie, Gita Mehta, Gita Hariharan and Arundhati Roy, are aware of the

importance of freedom. The conceptions of the seven writers are not however, in complete accord, yet they have common agreement as to the existence and non-existence of such freedoms as the political, social, economic and the religious. Their common aim as writers is to celebrate freedom earned through suffering and expressed through the anguish of responsibility. They raise their voices for the equality of all human beings. Also, they celebrate freedom's deep kinship with history, its participation in the making of a people's destiny, and their struggles with all the forces that oppress them and thwart their aspiration.

It could in all simplicity be said that such kind of forceful writing does not come out of fashions, trends or movements. It comes, when it does, out of convictions.

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