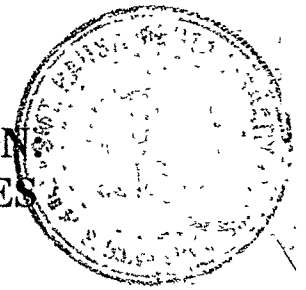


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# FREEDOM IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION A STUDY OF CHANGING PERSPECTIVES



## SUMMARY

Freedom is a subject of supreme importance and as a result, there are different perceptions regarding freedom. The complexity of views regarding freedom is revealed in Indian English writing of every age and period. The Indian thought places *moksha* or spiritual freedom at the apex of the hierarchy of values. Man demands freedom in his entire life- activity for the pursuit of values ranging from physical and economic freedom at one end and spiritual freedom at the other.

The primary historical source of restrictions on freedom in India has been political power, which ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. The demand for *purna swaraj* or complete independence was raised by the Congress Working Committee in the Lahore pledge. The demand gradually grew into a nation wide movement. It demanded freedom as a right and urged to be provided with the full opportunities for growth. Many factors contributed to the final attainment of freedom. Introduction of English education created a new educated elite who could express what they wanted in a way that was intelligible to others. Also, they started the provision of an honest and straight forward supply of news. Rammohan Roy. wrote textbooks and published weekly newspapers in Bengali, English and Persian. Aurobindo directly attacked the British through his writings. His articles in the *Indu Prakash* were bold and direct. They were aimed to achieve two major objectives- one, to strengthen the anti-British sentiment in the country and second, to break the myth of British superiority. Ambedkar's message to the people for obtaining freedom from social oppression was to organize, educate and agitate. While Aurobindo drew inspiration from the spiritual strength of India, Ambedkar, on the other hand, felt himself battling against the age old caste system in India. Freedom also meant equal justice for all. Political freedom was not enough. Basic socio- political rights of citizens was also important. Social freedom for women also gained a greater degree of acceptance. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who felt that bondage and freedom are in the mind, felt that Indian people could be united by the strength of Indian culture and tradition. He revived Hindu nationalism Subhash Chandra Bose demanded complete independence in every sphere of life. Bal Gangadhar Tilak created in his countrymen the urge to freedom, he made it vocal and demanded freedom as a birthright. The word *Swaraj* as used by Gandhi meant self-rule or self-control. Freedom lies not in merely liberating ourselves from foreign rule, but from controlling the passions. Gandhi not only stressed on the political but also the cultural and spiritual freedom of India. He believed that political freedom could be attained by passive resistance.

The novel *Kanthapura*, in its own individual way, is an expression of the confidence that Indian English writers attained during the 1930s. It was also an assertion of freedom and showed how the English language could be used and molded by the Indian writer for his own purposes. It portrays the freedom movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s to liberate India from foreign rule. In the novel, this quest

for freedom is mainly revealed in three different ways- firstly in the bold use of language, secondly in the thematic probe about freedom and thirdly, in realizing the potential of each individual to stand for freedom against all odds. Whatever the consequences, the novelist conveys the fact that it is the struggle that is more important. Raja Rao frees himself from the western narrative modes of writing by conducting new experiments with respect to the presentation of theme. The Indian form of writing is the puranic form, which is a blend of narration, description, philosophical reflection and religious teaching. *Kanthapura* is written in the traditional Indian narrative technique of the puranas. The mythical quality of the novel gives full play to fantasy and imagination. The central myth of *Kanthapura* is that of Rama and Ravana, which has associations with good and evil forces. Another liberating feature of the narrative structure is the entirely new dialect used in the novel. By maintaining the musical rhythm of the native habit of articulation, Raja Rao frees Indian English Language from all trace of foreign acquisition.

The novel *All About H. Hatterr* raises important questions regarding the relevance of freedom in an India, which is ever changing. This self-conscious assertion of freedom is mainly revealed in the novel in three different ways-firstly in the peculiar experimentation in language and technique of the novel. Secondly, in the characterization of the central character Hatterr and thirdly, in respect of the general theme of the novel. By using an individual mode of expression solely suited to the character of Hatterr, G.V. Desani heralds the beginning of a truly distinctive style. The complexity and novelty of expression makes it a novel beyond classification. Thematic peculiarity and technical novelty are important features of the novel. *All About H. Hatterr*, published in 1948, deals with freedom in a mock-serious tone, there by raising questions about the true nature of freedom. Through the character of Hatterr, the novelist in fact expresses the tensions within the concept of freedom. In terms of formal experimentation, *All about H. Hatterr* is a ground-breaking work. The novel is a remarkable experiment in terms of fictional form and style. Written in the autobiographical tone, the novel relates Hatterr's adventures in a half-tragic and half-comic manner. The language used is Hatterr's own and is a strange mix of colloquialisms, philosophical terms, oratorical idioms and archaism as well as French and Latin. The novel is a triumphant experiment in blending western and Indian narrative forms. It borrows some of the western narrative forms such as autobiography, picaresque and the Shakespearean plays. The two main narrative models used in the novel are autobiography and the Upanishads.

*He who Rides a Tiger* explores the need and importance of freedom in many different ways. Firstly, it raises issues like social and economic freedom as well as inequalities prevalent in Indian society. Secondly, the writer chooses to make the central character a unique symbol of freedom. Thirdly, it seeks to deal with women's issues and the political struggle for freedom. And finally, the writer also explores the suitability of adopting the English language to Indian needs and tries to overcome the problem of linguistic alienation. The novel emphasizes that social and economic equality is only a starting point in the way towards achieving complete freedom. Bhattacharya experiments with the language freely, he uses various devices such as literal translation of Indian words and idioms, changes in syntax and also a judicious use of Indian imagery. His experimentation with dialogue and form makes his Indian readers feel more at home

while reading his works. Bhattacharya succeeds in communicating aspects of personal appearance and manners, social qualities, intellectual endowment and cultivation.

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* traces the journey of India's march towards freedom. The novel contains sixty two years of twentieth century Indian history, almost three generations of pre and post-colonial India. The dream of freedom, which many people visualized, was about being self-assertive, independent and sovereign individuals. The reality of free India was that it was divided within itself - polarities arising between the rich and the poor, the north and the 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. Undoubtedly, *Midnight's Children* cleverly captures the comedy and tragedy of India as an Independent nation. There is also the feeling that the legacy of the freedom struggle had been squandered. Rushdie's experimentation with language is one of his most remarkable achievements. He uses different language for characters belonging to different social class and background. He also tries to inculcate vernacular language habits into English. In its narrative structure, *Midnight's Children* follows the ancient narrative structure of the panchatantra tales. It tells a tale which contains stories within stories within stories. Rushdie combines the advantages of symbolism and realism so that historical accounts gather new meaning. *Midnight's Children* thus fuses the world of the real and the world of the fantastic. He makes use of myth, memory and prophecy but retains the historical setting, by fixing a particular time and place of the narrative. *Midnight's Children* is a significant effort by Rushdie to recreate his homeland India by mixing memory and desire, fact and fantasy, reality and vision, time and time-less ness.

*A River Sutra* attempts to discover the truth behind freedom and salvation as evident in Indian philosophy. The river Narmada is believed to provide freedom from the bondage of soul, which is also termed as *moksha*. There is the belief that *moksha* or liberation can be attained by a mere glimpse of the Narmada's waters. It cleanses a human being of generations of sinful births and helps him to attain salvation. The monk upholds salvation as the ultimate freedom, which anyone can hope to attain. Abstinence, love, music etc is identified in the novel as the ways of attaining liberation. In narrating the story of *A River Sutra*, Gita Mehta makes use of the ancient Indian tradition of story telling. The novel is highly rich in associations and is valuable for the complexity of its structure. There is a lot of philosophical content revealing the intricacies of Hinduism which helps to bring out the different layers of meaning contained in it. Gita Mehta has totally avoided the commonplace myths and adopted the rarely widespread myths centering around the river Narmada. The songs and popular beliefs surrounding the river Narmada are used as structural devices in the novel. The language used in the novel is highly evocative. There is an erotic undertone, which is expressed powerfully through the use of adequate images. The novelist has offered authentic interpretations of Indian cultural values, music, art forms and ethos.

Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of the Night* deals with women's struggle for self-realisation and self-definition, women's quest for her identity, her rebellion and protest against oppression at every level as well as her pursuit of freedom and equality. In *The Thousand Faces of the Night*, the novelist points out that there is very little self-satisfaction, freedom or victory that a woman can aspire for in a male dominated world.

The self-assertive and intelligent women characterized in the novel differ from our traditional conception of women. Through the novel, Hariharan succeeds in giving an insider's account of the whole gamut of women's experience including female bodily functions like menstruation, sexual initiation, barrenness, miscarriage, pregnancy and childbirth. The women characters appear as victims and sexual, maternal and social conflicts achieve a new dimension. Hariharan also take care to reveal the exploitation of women within the institution of marriage. In spite of all this, the novel upholds the undying spirit of women. In keeping with the general theme of the novel, the language used by Hariharan is specifically confined to family and the discourse is rigorously private. The writer has made abundant use of Sanskrit quotations. The correlation of individual psychology to the landscape and atmosphere heightens the symbolic effect of her imagery.

*The God of Small Things* challenges the patriarchal structure of Indian society and opposes women's subordination to man in the family and society. The novel turns its attention to the subtler influences of culture, tradition and the general organization of the societies that constrain and limit women's freedom. Social stratification also remains a major issue restricting freedom of the individual. The novel lays emphasis on women's problems arising from cross-cultural marriages and relationships. The women characters involved in such relationships face cultural challenges both from their own families and the new families into which they are married as well as from society. *The God of Small Things* has achieved an important place in world fiction mainly because of its linguistic inventiveness, richness of language and verbal exuberance. The novelist uses Indian English idioms, collocations, vocabulary items, syntax and pronunciation. Apart from the language, the most interesting thing about the novel is its structure. Instead of a straightforward narration of events in their chronological order, Roy employs a circuitous narrative. With her unique experiments in language and structure, the novel transcends all cultural, linguistic and social barriers. Regardless of nationality, it has appealed to people all over the world.

Thus, Indian English fiction which started off with an idealization of history and romance was gradually replaced by the nationalist cause and its implications in the 1920's and 1930's. After 1947, the assertion of cultural independence began to replace the fight for political independence. Freedom had been attained but social injustice was still prevalent. Realistic and contemporary themes were brought into sharp focus in the 1960s and 70s. Experimentation acquired momentum especially after 1980s, by writers who excelled in the field of language with a new confidence, with an altogether new freedom. Indian English fiction has thus progressed from being merely a tool to rouse to nation and for protest into a creative choice, into a rich literature.

  
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