Determining Identity of Indian English Fiction: Three-Dimensional Approach

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to locate in concrete terms the true identity of Indian English Fiction (IEF). Most studies conducted on this subject are focussed on the linguistic/formalistic aspects. Also, many novels belonging to IEF category represent Indian identity by virtue of representation of apparent cultural traits like attitudes, relationships, norms, practices, traditions, problems, etc., or socio-political problems. I argue that these two dimensions project the Indian identity only partially. There is the covert part at the base of the superstructure that is the most important element but has not been explored seriously by most writers due to ignorance or disinclination. This core is reflected in Indian philosophy, values and worldview. While explaining various ideas – both supportive as well as critical of Indianness, several novels have been cited to make the point clear which makes this study unique and promises to be helpful to future researchers.

Introduction

The issue of identity of Indian English fiction or of the overarching genre of Indian English Literature (also called Indian Writing in English) has been debated at many fora even though no consensus has been reached as to what constitutes Indianness or Indian ethos. At times, people have even wondered as to why this is necessary, considering we never discuss the Britishness of English literature or the Americanness of American literature."[1] Could it be diffidence that impels Indians to search for an identity of Indian English literature, they ask. The fact is that the plurality and complexity of Indian linguistic landscape where English happens to be second language for most people even as it is admittedly the language of the powerful elite with the upwardly mobile middle class in toe – both eager to adopt it as L1, at least for their offspring -- makes the issue of Indianness or identity of Indian English Literature rather significant.

Since the predominant form of Indian English Literature is fiction, the issue of identity has been studied in terms of Indian English Fiction (IEF) in this paper. The first issue to be sorted out with regard to the Indianness of Indian English Fiction centres around whom to include in this category. Whether it is the fiction produced by Indians living in India or elsewhere too? Whether to include only first generation writers living abroad or the subsequent generations too? What about translations into English from a regional language – also whether done by the writer him/herself or anyone else? What about literature produced by foreigners but relating to India? Conversely, shouldn't we include literature produced by Indians that deals with characters, situations or subjects related to some other country or society? Without discussing it in detail here, let us go by M.K. Naik's formula: "Strictly speaking, Indian English literature may be defined as literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality" (2010: 2).

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The origin of this literature can be traced to the early 19th century when C.V. Boriah's *The Account of the Jains*, a prose work, appeared in 1803 in English and writings in other genres followed at different points of time. The genre of fiction occupies the dominant position in our times and this genre is the subject of study here. There is no doubt that IEF has won acclaim for India at the international level as the most visible and vibrant literature coming from India and has been credited for being a link between India and the West. In this, the role of the diaspora is quite evident which adds another dimension to the problem at hand. Coming to the representation of Indianness in IEF, let us survey the prevalent modes and discuss their pros and cons.

Formalistic/Linguistic Aspects

While reviewing the literature already available in IEF category, one finds that most scholars align identity along the use of words from Indian languages and Indian narrative forms like reality-magic mix, circularity, diversions, story-within-story, orality, etc. The Indian literary narrative forms have been used by a few writers, while most Indian writers have stuck to western modes of style and narratology. Starting with the realist narrative to the stream of consciousness to magic realist mode – all these have been tried in IEF. At the same time, some novelists, starting with Raja Rao and culminating in Salman Rushdie have also used Indian mythical narrative modes of circularity and story-within-story, etc.

So far as the linguistic aspect is concerned, we find that the writers have increasingly used words from Hindi and some regional languages in English novels to bring about a touch of reality which shows growing confidence of the Indian writers. The premise here is that language is the gateway to culture. Therefore, more and more words of the native language ought to be introduced into IEF. It started with the great trio: Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan came out with their first fictional works in 1935, closely followed by Raja Rao in 1938, all of whom used words from native languages in translated as also transliterated forms. The trend caught on and is now an established marker of IEF. Authors use such words and some even append a glossary at the end of their works, like Shashi Tharoor has done in his *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), to help the foreign reader understand the meanings of words from Indian languages. Again, we find in many authors, Indianism in the form of literal translation: "May you have a hundred sons!" or "My professor will eat me up." Also, the Indian syntactical structure is superimposed on English: "He had two three houses in the city", etc. Braj B. Kachru did a pioneering work on the use of Indian words in English and also theorized it. Indianization of English, according to him, "has, gradually, made Indian English culture-bound in the socio-cultural setting of India. The phonological and grammatical deviations are only a part of this process of Indianization" (1965: 410).

In contemporary IEF, we find a division of sorts, with some writers brought up in foreign lands or in an Anglophile milieu choosing to write in colloquial British/American English, while others choosing to use English in a rather domesticated manner as was done by R.K. Narayan. The problem of language was put in proper perspective by Raja Rao, in the famous preface to his novel *Kanthapura*: "One has to convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own." (1938: 2). In an article, critic Makarand Paranjape rates the novels written by the great trio as the "most Indian texts" because of this vernacularization or nativization of English language which he equates to the "recovery of the self." This stance leads him to the conclusion in the same article: "Indian English novels are formalistic in their orientation, offering verbal virtuosity and

delight in place of the kind of social action" (2015: "Vernacularising").

There is a clear preference for form seen among some scholars. Novelist Ellen Rooney, for example, believes that "the work of formalism is to resist the application of 'theoretical themes' as master codes that reduce every text (whatever its provenance) to an illustration of theory itself" (2000: 31). While not aiming to defend the 'illustration of theory' at the cost of other features in a creative work, it must be admitted that form is important because it distinguishes a creative work from the subject-specific study. Similarly, Ulka Anjaria, in her introduction to the anthology *A History of the Indian Novel in English* states that "by reducing the literary history to study of different themes, we forget the genre, form and aesthetics, rather than reduce literary works to expressions of their age, something that the writers of other disciplines do better" (2015: 2). It must not be forgotten that form is like dress, and the human being donning it, his features, his personality and mind are certainly more important.

Clearly, for some critics, debate about the Indianness of English literature turns to the use of English as the medium of literature as done by Indian writers. Now, if this indeed be true, then the question arises as to how come the New Historicists or environmentalists give so much credence to fiction these days! But there is more to Indianness than language alone. One may write well in English – may be like or even better than the English writers but may only convey what is totally alien to India or Indian people. In an interesting piece about the Indianness based on language use, R.V. Dhongde uses the following parameters: (i) Are these the writers for whom English is L2? (ii) Are they resident in India or abroad? (iii) Are they writing for readers for whom English is L2? (iv) Or are they writing for non-Indians? and finally; (v) Are they writing about their own "region"? The study

concludes that these considerations do affect the point of view of the writer, but at the same time, "It's (sic) main use is imparting content to the world outside India" (1985: 70). In a way, the study disputes the significance of language as a marker of Indianness.

Overt Socio-Cultural Traits

Apart from the formalistic/ linguistic mode is the thematic mode that determines the Indian identity, and we find ample use of the Indian socio-cultural traits and problems which can be easily marked. These overt socio-cultural traits include descriptions of locale and ambience, attitudes and lifestyle, daily routine and household chores, relations and kinships, social structure and behaviour, customs and traditions, occasions of joy and sorrow, etc.

Now, the novel, per se, is a literary form riveted to problems. Without a problem, no novel gets written, exceptions like Amit Chaudhari's *A Strange and Sublime Address* (1991) notwithstanding. There is generally the introduction of the problem, the building-up of conflict to a climax and then the denouement. This Aristotelian structure laid down for tragedy guides most fiction even in our times. And if a novel takes up a problem related to India or Indian life, it fulfils the requirement of being an Indian novel to a certain extent. Take, for example, the family ties. The trait of respect for the elders is something that cannot be missed out on in Indian family structure. Most serious literature will reflect this aspect. Now, since the very texture of fiction is problem-based, there would be deviant characters who will not abide by the socio-cultural norm. However, the writer's depiction, guided by the prevalent social discourse, will not condone it. If in Shashi Deshpande's *Shadow Play* (2013), the head of the family returns after many years to the family which he left due to frustration, his daughters take time but do accept him in the family fold.

On the other hand, it is not merely the positive side of our culture, our negative traditions too will find reflection in fiction. Ours is a patriarchal set-up and the rights of women, despite the constitutional guarantees and favourable political measures like reservation in local administrative bodies, etc. remain a pipe-dream. Any number of novels, right from the pen of the first novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) to the novels by the great trio, to the contemporary award winners like Arundhati Roy can be cited to show coverage of this problem persisting in our society. Again, a singular trait of our community life is the caste factor. No fictional work probably gets written without reference to this inhuman trait that has done incalculable harm to the society at large. Writers from the beginning down to Aravind Adiga, Amitava Ghosh et al have included this in the portrayal of social life and rightly condemned it in their individual style.

The public nature of our community life is a feature that gets wide attention in literature, particularly because it is something exotic for the western reader where individual privacy is considered sacrosanct. Anglophile writer Nirad C. Chaudhary complained of it "In the buses of Delhi, all of us make use of one another for bodily comfort" (1998: 81), and so do a host of writers bred in English culture. For them, trying to poke your nose in other's affairs, howsoever innocently or well-intentioned, is an infringement of basic rights whereas in Indian society, this is taken as a humanitarian concern. Another feature of this effacement of the line of demarcation between public and private lives is the tendency of ordinary people to complain vocally about this or that problem. It seems a national pastime, but at the same time, after a bout of blaming, one provides solace to oneself by mouthing a simple phrase – "chalta hai" (This is how it goes!). In R.K.

Narayan's short story collection *Malgudi Days*, one finds a relaxed pace of life in this small town, but also there is the obnoxious scene of wife-beating which the passersby ignore with a "good humoured inertia and a casual tolerance," as Mukherjee (1972: 2608) comments. This is the *chalta hai* approach that makes light of the unseemly and the ugly in community life.

On the other hand, the hypocrisy writ large in our public conduct vis-à-vis private lives is best exemplified in our attitude towards sex. While treating sex as a taboo publicly, most Indians drool over it privately. This hypocrisy is hugely responsible for the high incidence of crime against women. The subject was hardly touched upon in olden times the way it is done now. Even women writers do not mind taking up sex-related issues and descriptions in fiction. Shobha De, for example, in her novel *Sethji* (2012), shows a politician whose daughter is infatuated towards him! Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* (2010) describes sex therapy performed on the male protagonist by a female therapist. Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (2010), Sushil Gupta's *The Fourth Monkey* (2007) and so many others have dealt with this theme. Similarly, the superstitious nature of ordinary Indians finds wide mention in contemporary IEF. Whether it is Ms Kutpitia's prescription to use lemon-chilli combine to ward off 'evil eye' or nails and lizard to cure the young girl Roshan in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* (1991: 63), or labelling the fear of ghosts in the story 'The Ghost of Firozsha Baag' in *Tales from Firozsha Baag* (1987), portrayal of Indian life without reference to this aspect si considered incomplete.

Of the many socio-political problems that have been taken up by novelists is the communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims. It has the historical connection from the oppressive regime of Aurangzeb down to the Partition holocaust. Truly, it

is politics that is to blame here and this fact is brought out in a number of novels like Attaia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975), Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* (2001), etc. Prayag Akbar's *Leila* (2017) presents a dystopian picture where each lane in a city is earmarked for a particular community. Dissatisfied partly with the present, an ordinary Indian is, understandably, nostalgic about past and so, he brags about the glorious past of India without comprehending his present ineligibility to inherit that glory. Our tendency to deify all elements of nature including land extends to create the image of 'Mother India' which is now expressed in literature as a political slogan only, thus shearing the term of its emotional content. Dinshawji, in Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* mocks this notion, frustrated as he is with his lot: "Laureate-baureate nothing, I am a son of Mother India; call me Kavi Kamaal, the Indian Tennyson" (1991: 47)!

There are numerous other issues like poverty, class prejudice, inadequate infrastructure, political problems, crime, corruption, etc. The portrayal of such issues does lend an Indian touch to fiction, but at the same time it may be submitted here that most of the aforesaid issues are also universal. For example, the hypocrisy regarding sex is a feature of orthodox societies across the world. Religious discrimination, class conflict and racial prejudices are also common in most societies. Literature worldwide is rightly focused on such issues. Being common in the world, such features cannot lend a unique identity to any literature claiming to represent a society, and so, these cannot bestow a distinct Indian identity on IEF too. What then would assign the unique 'Indian' tag to literature?

Covert Cultural Ethos

Portrayal of individual and social life with all its joys and miseries is at the root of fiction writing in any literature. However, behind what we like and feel pleased with or hate and feel pained by, lie our judgment, our ideals, and our value system that satisfy or disenchant us collectively -- as society -- because our lives are not led individually. These are the real markers applicable to any society that functions on the principle of a collective. IEF misses out on, or at least, fails to project effectively this covert cultural undercurrent, which is indeed what we can call Indianness or Indian ethos. Figuratively put, the linguistic/formalistic markers are the attire; overt socio-cultural markers the body, but the covert cultural values are the real ethos or essence of Indianness. This ethos includes Indian worldview and the Indian philosophy of life.

For want of space, it can be put here reductively that Indian cultural constructs are inspired by the seminal belief that the world has been created by divine forces and it is not chaotic but run according to a divine plan. That being the case, all creation is inter-linked and partakes of same divinity. The physical world including the human body is always in a state of flux but the divine centre is constant and eternal. Therefore, the concept of Dharma – is malleable in relation to time and space, but as a spiritual principle, it is fixed. Indian philosophy of life is that man is free to act but is bound to reap the fruit of his actions whether in this life or the next one. Similarly, the ultimate aim to have salvation can be achieved in one life or over several lives as the spiritual development continues from one life to the other.

The acceptance of change in worldly matters is what makes an Indian adaptable, liberal and pluralistic even as he believes in certain unchanging ideals and values that help in spiritual development. No doubt, the gap between ideals held aloft in a society and the practice at the grassroot level is there, and it is a universal trait of human imperfection, but the covert cultural ethos is what can be looked upon as a specificity of a particular

human society. Therefore, to reflect Indianness, the ideals or values revered in Indian society have to be in focus.

Once in a while, we come across a Raja Rao who makes this philosophical core the resting ground of fictional world in his novels *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) and *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965). Literary historian K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly remarks about the central problem of *The Serpent and the Rope*: "… the real problem is, not establishing harmony without, or with another, but within, with oneself. All problems are, in the final analysis, really spiritual problems. Yet it is true that the phenomenal world – the serpent – cannot be easily conjured away. We are caught in the interstices of Maya's net, samsara's bondage, one way or another, and time and again" (1985/1995: 403). This succinct remark encapsulates the Indian worldview. How beautifully does Raja Rao narrativise the philosophic movement from *karma* or action in *Kanthapura*, to *jnana* or knowledge in *The Serpent and the Rope*, to *bhakti* or devotion in *The Cat and Shakespeare* and completes the spiritual trajectory as laid down in our ancient books. On the other hand, Indian philosophy fails to free Arun Joshi's character Som in *The Last Labyrinth* (1981) from the existentialism angst even though he puts in efforts. Salman Rushdie has discussed many philosophical concepts as part of discussion among characters, briefly though, in his *The Golden House* (2017) like the problems of good and evil, self, society, morality (147), the Indian myths of Bramha and Shiva (102-3), mind-body equation (250-1) etc. The point sought to be underlined is that in order to earn the epithet 'Indian', literature should also discuss the deeper Indian philosophical concepts a la Goethe, Carlyle, Rousseau, Camus, Sartre, Voltaire, et al did with regard to the western philosophy.

In order to appreciate the Indian sensibility, it is imperative to understand the Indian worldview which considers creation a mix of beauty and horror; creation and destruction, pain and pleasure. Indologist Kapil Kapoor (2014) points out that the goddess Sakti – the signifier for nature – has both these forms, viz., Tripurasundari, i.e., extreme beauty as also Kali that has the most horrible form. Both forms are worshipped in India. There is no eternal conflict between God and Satan here. Both good and evil co-exist, for that is the built-in character of creation. Without this binary, the phenomenon (*leela* or divine play) of this world cannot go on.

Also the unity of all life is an integral part of the Indian worldview. As man is one of the 84 lakh *yonis* (8.4 million life forms) in the cycle of creation, it follows, therefore, that the different species are endowed with the same life force. Hence correspondence between animate, inanimate and divine is seen in the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as *varaah* (boar) – the animal considered one of the lowliest in hierarchy of life forms. (Kapoor 2014: 152). Such mythical stories command deep respect of Indians and make them considerate and compassionate toward animal world. This concern for life is seen in the worship of trees and minute acts like providing food and water to birds and insects. These should not be looked as an orthodox activity, as these are in sync with the current eco-friendly thinking. As the awareness about environment has improves, we find an increasing number of novelists taking up such themes. Leading novelist Amitav Ghosh banks upon local legends about forest deity in his novel *The Hungry Tide* (2013). Animal-human-superhuman correspondence also appears in the novels employing magic realism like in Salman Rushide's *Shame* (1983), *Two Years Eight Months & Twenty Eight Days* (2015), etc., but it misses out on the deeper philosophical message.

While Indian ethos is admittedly spiritual, most novels in our times project a distrust of ancient scriptures, spirituality and spiritual masters. At the

core of spirituality, lies the belief that soul is indestructible. In Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* (1963) Maya cites this message of Gita, but neurotic as she is, she mixes it with existential anxiety and kills her husband to thwart the astrologer's prediction that either of them was doomed to die soon. In this, she also shows her blind faith in the astrologer. The contemporary scenario with quite a few gurus behind the bars for heinous crimes lends support to such depiction. This is not something new. G.V. Desani in *All About H. Hatterr* (1970) too depicts such a world, even though, occasionally, he delves into mysticism: "This, all this, this contradiction, this merging of beauty with brutality, this non-separation between Evil and Good, this unity, this one-ness, this evidence made me feel, perhaps, there *is* no Good: there *is* no Evil!" (274), yet the overall treatment and a comic tone hold back any serious message, imparting only the incidents involving fake sages!

The same attitude is visible in treatment of hallowed ancient Indian *itihasa* (history) texts like Ramayana and Mahabharata, whose stories are twisted, upturned and disfigured to titillate the western readers. So, in place of reverence for the idealistic message like Rama's devotion to parents, or Krishna's philosophical outlook on life, writers like Ashok Banker, Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelkanthan, et al have presented these characters as cardboard heroes even as these writers are reportedly to be selling millions of books and raking in big money. Lord Shiva, for example, is portrayed as an ignorant tribal chief in Amish Tripathi's *Immortals of Meluha* (2012) who does not know the meaning of 'Om', Kauravas are shown as victims in Neelkantan's *Ajaya* series (2015, 2017) contravening the moralistic message of Mahabharata. This tendency, supposedly a fallout of the postmodern irreverence, is really anathema to Indian value system.

As pointed out before, the Indian worldview is holistic and one word that signifies the Indian approach to the cosmos is 'harmony' which means existence in a pleasant relationship between man and man; man and nature; man and divinity. Life must be lived in harmony with the inner self and the world around through the four-fold regime, called *purusartha* comprising *dharma, artha, kama, moksa*. Dharma is the entry point of all human activities aimed at achieving material goals and gaining happiness in this world, but the final goal is the redemption from the cycle of birth and death which, indeed, is an ideal – a deeply spiritual goal -- that only a few can hope to attain. The goal has always to be a lofty one in any idealistic scheme of things. The principle that Dharma must govern the relationship between the individual and society is infallible, but dharma can change with change in situation over time.

So, Dharma is an open-ended righteous approach and not a doctrinaire creed. Feminism thus is the dharma of our times and Indian feminism, as some scholars have outlined it, becomes the dharma for Indians as well. Now, if the litterateurs condemn the treatment by society of mythical women like Draupadi and Sita in novels like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) and *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) respectively, this is acceptable. But to say that Marxism too is a 'dharmic' view (Paranjape 2000) in our times is to misinterpret dharma, for in the *purusartha* scheme, dharma governs artha or material prosperity, not the other way round as is stipulated in the Marxist philosophy.

The Indian worldview is best explained in ancient Sanskrit literature. Aphorisms like *Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti* ("Reality is one though sages define it differently": Rig-Veda mantra I/164/46), *Vasudhaiv kutumbukam* ("The world is a family": Maha Upnishad VI, 71), *Sarva khalvidam brahma* ("This universe is suffused with the divine

spirit": Chhandogya Upnishad III, 14,1), etc. – parts of different verses, best capture the Indian thought towards fellow beings and the world around us. Indian society has welcomed other communities like the Parsis and he Jews into its fold and they continue to lead meaningful lives. The integration of Arab Muslims in Indian society has led to positive developments in music, poetic, architecture, besides giving birth to Urdu language and the Sufi spiritual cult in which the Hindus are equal partners. There is hardly any town where the Hindus don't worship a Muslim *pir's* tomb! A call for practicing spirituality in raging communal hatred *a la* Mahatma Gandhi has been made in Rajat Mitra's novel *The Infidel Next Door* (2017) which is the story of the neglected plight of the Kashmiri Pandits who were forced to leave the valley by the terrorists so that they have become refugee in their own country. On the other hand, there is Jaspreet Singh's *Helium* (2013), an account of brutality of goons from the majority community towards the minority Sikh community in Delhi in 1984. The novel is a surrogate confessional. Narratives like these truly reflect the innate Indian ideals of non-violence and forgiveness.

The end of literature has been described in Indian poetics as providing pleasure (*rasa*) alongside supporting *purusartha* in the interest of individual and society. The traditional literature "celebrates life and derives life lessons from any literary narrative" (Kapoor 2015). This moral end of literature – a dharmic view, as Paranjape says - is indeed Indian in essence and needs focus in IEF alongside the pleasure principle to earn it the perfect Indian identity. Madhusudan Rao rightly observes: "Quite unfortunately, an expression of the Indian mind in English is subjected to the Western literary standards variously different from those of ours. For instance, the British literature is justifiably understood and criticized by the compulsions and moral necessities of the British mind […]. But, unfortunately, a genuine appreciation of the Indian

creative mind in English is not based on our moral and ideological compulsions, but totally based on the Western and Continental value system." (1989: 36).

Comparison with Bhasha Literature

One may euphemize IEF as the 'twice-born fiction' (Mukherjee 1972), but it seems actually 'twice-removed' from Indian ethos. In comparison, literature in regional languages, now called Bhasha literature, is better rooted in Indian culture. Parnajape calls the latter 'desi' or the little, sub-national tradition even as he calls the IE fiction 'marga' – a term that has actually been used for the great Indain tradition established in Sanskrit literature[2], but Paranjape relocates this term while dubbing it as 'sub-imperial literature'. (2000: 90). There is no denying the fact that literature in regional languages is more authentic as the writers live here and write for the readers here, unlike the diasporic Indians who dominate the IEF and portray India as an exotic land. In their powerful castigation of this tendency, critics Lau and Dwivedi aver in their book *Re-Orientalism and Indian Writing in English*: "Caught up in re-Orientalist discourses, IWE [Indian Writing in English] can be charged not only with retaining but also heightening India's cultural subalternism through adhering to Eurocentric frames of references." The writers rue the "ever-growing tendencies to re-Orientalize, consciously and subconsciously, in myriad textual ways, ranging from subject matter, focus, and selected representations, to tone, form, style, insinuations, and textures" (2014: 124).

It is not only the felicity with mother tongue or regional language that these writers have, it is also because of genuine love of literature. The readership of Bhasha literature is limited to those who understand the particular regional language unlike the international readership available to IEF writers. Translations from regional languages into

English or other foreign languages are few and far between. No big awards await regional writers as these do the English language writers. So, it cannot be the lure of the lucre which motivates them to write. It is also the closeness with which the Bhasha authors are able to view life that enables them to write authentic stories about rural India.

An interesting comparison has been made by Meenakshi Mukherjee (1993). While pitting the locale in R.K. Narayan's Malgudi stories against Shivpalganj in Srilal Shukla's Hindi novel *Raag Darbari,* she underlines the complexity of power relations in this small town which gives a lie to the often taken-for-granted simple-innocent lifestyle at such places. So, how could Narayan's novel be representative of India? Mukherjee argues that each of these writers is concerned about readership: For a foreign reader, a simple image (and may we add, exotic) is more appealing, whereas for Shukla's Indian audience, a complex picture can carry more interest. (2608).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that though Indian English Fiction started with the urge to showcase Indian identity, delving deep into Indian philosophy, the trend was lost post-independence, due to focus on the contemporary socio-political and economic issues. The global literary trend to explore psychology and Marxism also impacted IEF. After Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* bagged the Booker in 1981, IEF came into global limelight. Within the country, the Chetan Bhagat success story, post-2004, led to a deluge of light fiction, mostly romantic and thriller types, appealing to the youth even though contemporary issues also creep into it superficially. (Batra 2015: 58).

Speaking of Indianness in IEF, we find that while words from Indian languages and the themes dealing with the overt culture (lifestyle, landscape, behavior, traditions, socio-political problems, etc.) have been used in IEF, what is lacking is the serious portrayal of Indian philosophy that acts covertly as the underlying consciousness. The fact that this more serious concern about identity of IEF has not been addressed satisfactorily is due to our colonial mindset as also of prevailing political discourse which has hitherto discounted the worth of spiritually-inclined ancient Indian literature and poetics. The term 'spiritually inclined' should not mean alienation from mundane concerns, since Indian poetics clearly values material accomplishments, aesthetic pleasure and stylistic caliber. The neglect of Indian ethos in our literature has also been due to the lack of acquaintance of writers brought up in an anglophile environment, particularly the diasporic ones, with Indian heritage. It has been seen that the Indian diasporic writers reflect what has been called "re-Orientalism" in their writings. Some of the postmodern tendencies, like irreverence and gamification are anathema to Indian ethos. On the positive side, when postmodernism accords some recognition to alternate epistemologies and marginalized literatures, there is all the more necessity to at least discuss seriously – regardless of final word – the essential Indianness, giving due recognition to differences undermining it. Besides, in the matter of appreciation of Indian literature, we need to balance our fascination for western literary yardstick with our own.

Notes

[1] Critic Harish Trivedi wondered at a seminar organized to discuss the Indianness of Indian literature as to why discussing it was necessary at all when nobody discussed "the Britishness of English literature or the Americanness of Amerian literature." (Satchidanandan 2000: 7)

[2] The term *desi* and *marga* have been used in Matanga's treatise on music *Brihaddesi,* written around 8th century. "These concepts are highly used

and discussed binaries in the Bhasha literary traditions of India. While Marga broadly refers to the Great Indian Tradition which found its expression solely in Sanskrit, Desi generally refers to the little traditions that are often sub-national and find their expression in the language of the region," comments H.S. Komalesha (2009: 202).

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