



The various aspects of science fiction in Indian English Literature: An overview

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Abstract

Science fiction writing in Indian English literature is a rapidly developing subgenre that has contributed significantly to the success of Indian writing in English. Indian science fiction written in English faced stiff competition with more well-known and widely read works written in regional languages. Many well-known science fiction authors who have garnered a global following did so by penning their works in a language other than English. However, it is only in recent years that Indian science fiction published in English has emerged as a viable alternative to the more common translated works. The likes of Samit Basu, Anil Menon, Vandana Singh, and countless more have helped pave the way, and now is the time for Science Fiction in Indian English Literature to flourish.

Keywords: science fiction, Indian english literature, regional science fiction, regional literature

Introduction

The early days of Indian Writing in English was fraught with difficulties as the language was alien to the natives and only a handful of people could understand it and knowing English became a mark of authority and competency as well as privilege. One of the main reasons behind the expansion of Indian writing in English was the British rule that saw India being acquainted with western education. A large number of Indians took to the British style of education, that of course became mandatory, to get better opportunities. But many Indians with a grasp on the language used it to write stories so that the tales of Indians getting brutalized under a repressive regime reached audience far and wide. This can be attributed as one of the main reasons on why Indian Writing in English was developed and as India got independence and more writers came and joined this budding movement and now as we look at Indian Writing in English it has developed in to a full-fledged genre. And among it, one particular theme has captured international attention, apart from the regular ones and it is science fiction.

Science Fiction in Indian English Literature

The Idea behind Colonialism and Post colonialism in Indian Science Fiction in English Another important aspect of Science Fiction in Indian English is how it deals with the problems of colonialism and post colonialism. While general books written in Indian English Writing writes linearly about the problems of colonialism and post colonialism, science fiction in Indian English Writing utilizes various allegories and metaphors to deal with a complex subject that deserves to have a sort of oppositional views. The use of allegories and metaphors helps in criticizing the policies of the erstwhile empires in a more resolved manner. For example, take Amitav Ghosh's Calcutta Chromosome that is a peculiar science fiction take yet deeply evolved regarding the problems of colonialism in a country that is yet to get out of its ill effects. Calcutta Chromosome tells its story in an extremely non-linear method focusing on the city of Calcutta as well as the

several important characters over several timelines mixing history with science fiction with the character of Ronald Ross playing a pivotal role.

Future Cities and Future State in Indian Science Fiction in English Many science fiction authors from India writing in English focus on another important theme while writing their stories. The future of India as such and how it will develop into a modern heterotopia. With writers like Ruchir Joshi, Samit Basu, Rimi B. Chatterjee and many others, they try to deduce what it will be like to think of an India of the future where cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai will finally become hi-tech with all the possible technological advancement that will make lives of people comfortable. If we look at Ian McDonald's collection of short stories Cyberabad Days or his novel River of Gods, we will find out how wonderfully he creates an alternative India though this India is now Balkanized into several countries and have become enemies of each other.

Feminism and Oppression of Women in Indian Science Fiction in English There are so many authors in India, namely female authors who have wrote a lot about the oppression and suppression that Indian women face in this patriarchal state. Authors like Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Shashi Deshpande and so many other female authors have written stories targeting the abuse of women in a staunchly patriarchal state. But science fiction once again expands these idea. They predict what might happen to the women of the future. They try to understand what will become the condition of women in a world that is so technologically advanced, a world where progress will be measure through the help of science but yet there will be no real progress since the socio-political scenario will be such where women will be downgraded to thirdgrade citizens. SF writers in India like Vandana Singh, Manjula Padmanabhan as well as Rimi B. Chatterjee qualify as such writers who have focused on the condition of women.

1. Samit Basu

Samit Basu can be regarded as the foremost science fiction writer in India and his writings have been both a mix of

science fiction as well as fantasy. He started out with the fantasy series *Gameworld* which has been dubbed by many the first authentic English fantasy series to come out from India and it received a lot of international acclaim. Post-*Gameworld*, Samit Basu started working on *Turbulence*, a science fiction book about Indian superheroes again a first of its kind for Indian science fiction writing in English that was a postmodernist take on various tropes of superhero genre. A sequel, *Resistance* is awaited eagerly by his fans. The *Gameworld* series is a fascinating tale that more or less absorbs ideas from different mythologies all across the world along with numerous pop culture references that is the trademark style of Samit Basu. Apart from these, Basu's *Turbulence* too picks up a lot of ideas from the comic book genre fusing it with science fictional ideas. Alan Moore's seminal classic *Watchmen* along with comic book stories featuring Justice League of America and The Avengers all inspired him to weave up this tale of Indian superheroes.

2. Anil Menon

Anil Menon, is another leading author of speculative fiction in India and many of his short stories have been published in a number of international magazines. Anil Menon's science fiction stories mainly point out on the relationship between technology and the nation along with a focus on climate change and how dangerous it is for the environment. His *The Beast with Nine Billion Feet* focuses on various themes such as right wing politics, caste system, bio-diversity as well as genetics which again is a first for an Indian science fiction novel. And set in the city of Pune, *The Beast with Nine Billion Feet* weaves a complex tale of a nation that is undergoing a change in many ways it can be compare to Amitava Ghosh's *Calcutta Chromosome*. Also, Anil Menon's short stories are widely appreciated for its brilliant SF premise.

3. Vandana Singh

Vandana Singh's short story *Delhi*, a part of several prestigious magazines as well as the compilation *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* is a fascinating tale of colonial hangover as the lead protagonist gets lost in a time-space continuum that makes him experience the entire history of Delhi, the old and new, the past and present, the pre-Mughal era as well as the Mughal era along with the British timeline. Vandana Singh specializes in writing hard SF and several of her stories can qualify as Hard SF. Her *The Woman Who Thought She Was A Planet* and other stories as well as *Love and Other Monsters* are worth reading where she writes using varied SF themes but with a distinct Indian flavour or once again trying to understand how Indian will perform in future that gives them all a terrific speculative grip.

4. Manjula Padmanabhan

Manjula Padmanabhan is a not a full time SF writer but some of her works are essentially SF in nature and have enriched the genre significantly. She is a playwright, poet as well as author and her play *Harvest*, is about futuristic Mumbai where organ selling is rampant and focuses on a protagonist who has agreed to sell his organs but how loses control of his self as well as his family as everything he does is monitored. The idea behind this play was to focus on the incessant capitalist ideals that are destroying India and how Indians have become the victims of materialistic values

that they are even ready to sell their own body organs. Apart from *Harvest*, Manjula Padmanabhan's *The Island of Lost Girls*, is another SF tale of a country (implied India) that has massacred its entire female population and there is only one safe haven for girls, an island which is as dangerous as the country that killed its female population. In both her SF works Manjula Padmanabhan tries chart up a course for India as nation with feminist ideals along with the problems of the subalterns who are pressured into submission. Though *Harvest* reveals the identity of the nation as India, *The Island of Lost Girls* only implies it.

5. Rimi B. Chatterjee

Rimi B Chatterjee an academic by profession is also a writer but again not a regular SF writer like Vandana Singh or Anil Menon. But her work *Signal Red* does boast of a Sf premise and a dark bleak future where India is ruled by a right wing government that has made India a complete secretive state. *Signal Red* is extremely political as well as uses several SF tropes rather wonderfully but its main target was to churn up an India which has become authoritarian, an Indian version of the Orwellian. Suparno Banerjee in his essay, *Alternative Dystopia: Science, Power, and Fundamentalism* in Rimi B. Chatterjee's *Signal Red* says that it employs an sf framework to challenge such essentialism in the context of rising Hindu fundamentalism in India and unlike postcolonial fictions written in more naturalistic modes, the Sf framework allows *Signal Red* access to more critical devices such as futuristic extrapolations and literalizing metaphors and along with critiquing the fundamentalist trend, these devices let the novel indicate the deeply hybrid nature of the Indian nation and of Indian Sf through a double dialectic between the West and the East and between hybridity and indigenism.

Conclusion

Indian Science Fiction has with all its problems have finally reached a placed where critics and readers have finally accepted that it has become a genre to reckon with. Writers like Samit Basu to Anil Menon and many more have finally done what many Indian writers have tried for ages. Indian SF is finally a genre that has international attention and with the current situation where SF is trying to break free of American and British hegemony and welcoming new writers from across the world. SF has become not only popular around the entire world but many works are being translated so that the readers have a variety of options. Recently, Cixin Liu became the first Asian to win the prestigious Hugo awards and this gives us the understanding that Science Fiction from different parts of the world can really do well. There is a chance, an opportunity that has to be grabbed and with Indian SF writers already creating a niche for themselves it is only time that SF in India will become even more popular.

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