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## The Indian Literature in English: A Journey from Nationalism to the search of Nation

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The word nation came to English from the old French word *nacion*, which in turn originates from the Latin word *natio* literally meaning “that which has been born”.

(Harper, Douglas)

A nation may refer to a community of people who share a common language, culture, ethnicity, decent or history, it can also refer to people who share a common territory and govt.

Where Nationalism is a belief system, creed or political ideology that involves a strong identification of a group of individuals with a nation. Nationalism had two components in literature and the arts.

- (i) It helped writers seek a pre-colonial past that would help them define the nation.
- (ii) It projected a destiny, a future shared by common to all people within the space of that nation. (Nayar.P.P. 176).

Indianness lies more in the soul of the country than in its body and the soul of the country lies in its thoughts, aesthetics, philosophy, science, and technology, its way of living in entirety and totality, in a word its entire culture from the ancient times to the present day.

After establishing the East India Company, the British came to India to trade, by the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> Century, British felt the need for educating and civilizing the natives for various purposes. with an aim to promote only oriental education and to prepare human resource which could help them in administration, they established the private schools that imparted English education, which is succinctly articulated by the infamous ‘Minute on Indian Education’ (1835) by Thomas Macaulay.

The motif behind all these development was to dominate, control and spread the oriental authority in Asia.

Thus after reading, speaking and comprehending English, Indian soon started writing also. Simultaneously, Indian writing in English had to range from the most utilitarian prose to the most ambitious verse – epics. It emerged a new creative force of resistance. If resisted the injustice and cruelty of the colonizers.

The anti-colonial movement, in most cases, posited the idea of a nation with a continuous and common tradition.

“The uneven rebellion of 1857 involved the idea of a pre-British Hindustan”  
(Nayar P.P. 176)

Indian literature in English now has emerged as a major voice of the nation.

“The Indianess of Indian writing consists in the writers intense awareness of his entire culture”  
(Iyengar shrinvias P.8).

Appropriating the language and implanting it in the Indian soil and watering it with Indian words, phrases, tone, rhythm and images taken from regional languages and mostly from Hindi. The attempt to tame English was made much earlier than our post modern – looking age.

Many distinguished personalities had tried hard to bring Indian writing in English to its present eminence.

The pioneers are writers like Raja Rao, G.V. Desani, Khushwant Singh, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Manohar Malgaonkar, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul and Vikram Seth.

Raja Rao has attempted to evolve an English which is typically Indian and can be accepted both by writers and readers. He successfully introduces the tone, rhythm, and structure of Kannad into English and tries to naturalize it.

G.V. Desani experiments with all kinds English spoken by various sections of Indian society in his novel *All About H Hatter*. It is he who is responsible for the Indian English.

Vikram Seth in his Magnum opus *A Suitable Boy (ASB)* recreates an Indian in all its myriad coloured splendor and squalor. From the Nawabs and the business magnates to the tanners and rickshaw pullers, from the corrupt politicians to the academicians, from music soirees to Holi revelry, from college board meetings to amateur poetry sessions, from the old town of Brahmipur in Purva Pradesh to the cosmopolitan city of Calcutta – Seth takes all this and much more in his depiction of India.

The socio-political reality of twentieth-century India is presented in great detail. India is just into her fourth year of freedom hood and the young nation is shown to be grappling with a number of expected and unexpected problems. The communal divide that threatens to rear its ugly head time and again since partition is dealt with in the chapter – ‘Blood Soaks a lane and bullets Ricochet’. From the fiery, inflammatory speeches of an Imam to the confused bureaucrats, from all-knowing politicians to the helpless lower-line officials-the riot takes all of that into its vortex. The Home minister of Purva Pradesh Firmly reiterates his conviction.

“It was necessary to have an administrative service, no doubt, but it was equally necessary that it should learn that it no longer ruled the country” (ASB232).

Like the situation in Ayodhya, Hindus and Muslims battle over a site where a mosque and a temple claim equal right to exist. Doubts about communal allegiance prevailing over a sense of duty in a Muslim policeman being ordered to fire on Muslim protesters worries the DM. The entire novel is peppered with such everyday instances. Local politics, infighting among politicians, squabbles between various arms of Govt. machinery, questions hour in the legislative assembly – all these follow the firing incident in the chowk area. Seth has the artistic ability to blend all these various strands of everyday life into his fiction.

It is through his descriptive, evocative passages that Seth writes the nation best.

Seth has an easy flair for the language and excels in ‘nothing’s or ‘non-occurrences’. Throughout the novel, no great event takes place as he seems to be interested in only portraying the day-to-day lives of ordinary people of the 1950’s. Writing forty years later, he still manages to evoke that era-thus writing a kind of history. The novelist uses every opportunity for description – creating in the process a Brahmipur as vividly as Wessex or Yoknopatawha was created :

Winter had gone and the pythons in the zoo had emerged from hibernation. Rose has replaced narcissi, and had been replaced in their turn by the purple-wreath creeper, whose five – bladed flowers helicoptered gently to the ground in the breeze. The broad, siltybrown Ganga, flowing due east past the ugly chimneys of the tannery and the marble edifice of the Barasat Mahal, past old Brahmipur with its crowded bazaars and alleys, temples and mosques, past the bathing ghats and the cremation ghat and the Brahmipur fort, past the white washed pillars of the Subzipore club and the spacious estate of the university, had shrunken with the summer... (ASB. P. 32).

It is descriptions like these that make it obvious that Seth is not creating an imaginary homeland (like may expatriate writers) but keeps the novel deeply rooted in Indian society.

Seth's novel encompasses almost all classes and castes of the India of the 50's. He captures and smells vividly in his descriptions. It may be argued that in this foregrounding of national colours, Seth loses out on universals. The guests at Mahesh Kapoor's, Prem Nivas indicate the variety that is India today: rural relatives:

“a professor of literature...two influential members of the State Legislature...a judge, the very last Englishman to remain on the bench of the Brahmipur High Court after Independence; and his old friend the Nawab Sahib of Baitar, One of the largest landowners of the state” (ASB. P. 7).

We have Godmen like Ramjap Baba or Sanaki Baba at the Pul Mela where without any warning or cause more than a thousand people lay dead – trampled, stabbed or suffocated. Seth describes Ramjap Baba as a “thin man, as withered as a scarecrow, burned to the colour of dark tanned leather by the sun and the wind, gaunt, exhausted” with “a white bearded, matted black hair, and sunken eyes that started almost sightlessly across the sea of people, as if they were so many grains of sand or drops of water” (ASB. P.723). This incident and the description of communal violence have a journalistic tone, almost like a newspaper account.

In dealing with the majority, Seth does not ignore the marginalized or the minorities. Nawab Sahib's family and the traditional Muslim way of life is presented in great detail.

The Indian joint family system is the pivot on which the entire novel rests. Seth does not critique the system but presents it as it exists. Hence, fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, sons and daughters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, 'samdhans'- the whole gamut is present. And marriage is the fulcrum on which the whole novel rests. The novel begins with one marriage and ends with another.

A suitable Boy begins with “You too will marry a boy I choose” (ASB.P.3) and ends the day after that wedding.

Vikram Seth does not attempt to define or interrogate the concept of the India as a nation or Indianness as a concept. Instead, he presents the mosaic that is twentieth century India, thus allowing a nation space to emerge from this narration.

In this way Indian writers in English like Vikram Seth, Raja Rao, G.V.Desani, Khushwant Singh, Mulk Raj Anand, Vikram Seth successfully introduces the tone, rhythm, and structure of real India, that baffles foreigners and makes Indians at home.

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