

The Concept of Social Realism in Global English Literature

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Abstract

Social realism is a term that derives from Russian inspired beliefs about the function of literature in a revolutionary socialist society. The international production of social realist fiction is characterized by a belief in the power of the word and in the writer's ability to portray in a satisfying documentary fashion the structure of social reality. It is inspired in various ways by the Russian revolution, Soviet communism, international Marxism, and the need to respond critically and in a denunciatory fashion to the various mechanisms of repression and the frustration of personal and collective aspirations. It is nothing but an acute observation of life as it is. It is a simple recording process from which any deviation is voluntary. Reality is that which human beings make common by work or language. Thus, in the very acts of perception and communication, this practical interaction of what is personally seen, interpreted and organized and what can be socially recognized known and formed is richly and subtly manifested.

Keywords: Social Realism, Portray, Aspirations, Acute Observation, Reality, Perception and Communication.

Introduction

In Realism, social reality is one aspect of the picture but it cannot be isolated as though it were an entity by itself. It cannot be taken out of the context of the general cultural pattern of a period. Even there have been honest attempts to recreate incidents from great literatures of the past ages. It is again due to a certain vulgarization on a different level. With all their immense resources of visual presentation, the makers of our soul of art. Yet that reality has been conveyed for hundreds of years by the art players of Bengal's countryside who work without a stage or scenic effects, almost without any kind of equipment, relying entirely on the simplest dramatic devices. They convey truth, the truth of emotion, which is the ultimate of realism. This aspect of realism is lacking in the works of some of the writers.

Realism began as a recognizable movement in art in the 18th century. By the mid -19th century, it was a principal art form. In past, realism has been an upheaval against classicism and romanticism – artistic movements characterized by works that idealize life. Some of the readers get confusion between ‘Naturalism’ and ‘Realism’ They are literary genres and interlinked and a few differences between one to other.

Realism and Naturalism have been at times used as interchangeable terms, sharing some deep-running similarities. They are both ‘basic’ views of life and humanity, stripping away the layers of romanticism to present a ‘natural’ or ‘real’ outlook of the work. They refuse to idealize or flatter the subject. They avoid artificial, fantasy, or supernatural elements. Both of these pessimistic views emerged in the 19th century, a period known for its trials and turmoil. God is absent from most of the writing in either category, with writers opting for a focus on the real world. But despite these similarities, these two literary movements are separate for a reason.

Literature emerges out of life and records our dreams and ideas, hopes and aspirations, failures and disappointments, motives and passions, and experiences and observations. Over the years, literature has reflected the prevailing social issues in many eminent works of literature under the shadow of realism.

According to Dictionary of Literary terms by Coles;

Realism, in literature, is a manner and method of picturing life as it really is, untouched by idealism or romanticism. As a manner of writing, realism relies on the use of specific details to interpret life faithfully and objectively.

In contrast to romance, this concerned with the bizarre and psychological in its approach to character, presenting the individual rather than the type. Often, fate plays a major role in the action. Realism became prominent in the English novel with such writers as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray.

Realism is nothing but an acute observation of life as it is. It is a simple recording process from which any deviation is voluntary. Now we know that we literally create the world we see-is necessarily dynamic and active. Reality is that which human beings make common by work or language. Thus, in the very acts of perception and communication, this practical interaction of what is personally seen, interpreted and organized and what can be socially recognized known and formed is richly and subtly manifested. Reality is continually established by common efforts and art is one of the highest forms of this process. Yet the tension can be great in the struggle to establish reality, and many kinds of failure and breakdown are possible. The recording of creative effort to explore such breakdowns is not always easy to distinguish from the simple exciting exploitation of breakdown. It is challenge for realist to establish the form without any characteristics of any other style of literature and yet to maintain the charm of realism. There are different obstacles in the path of realist to prove it as per expectations. It is very difficult to achieve this at the first attempt. Not only a great deal of hard work but also a serious moral effort is required for this.

These insightful, empathetic, reflective and poignant stories grew from an emotional consciousness of social reality and are actuated by a sense of social reformation. The troubles and

tribulations of the suppressed and the oppressed have always been a major concern of writers and intellectuals. They could not adopt an armchair approach to these problems and challenged them through the powerful tool of literature. Writers have started focusing on common reader and made common people as a hero in their work to feel their echo but they have moral purpose of their welfare. Realist has a moral purpose. He may denounce injustice and oppression; he may demand freedom for his people, he may plead for the universal brotherhood of man. In all such cases he is called tendentious. The creative writer can well afford to wear that label. The stern realist is addicted to ideals. He wants to make life better. He dreams of a great destiny for humankind, and not of its ignominious end under nuclear fission.

Tolstoy grows to be an influence in India and England along with Dostoevsky and Gorky. It is interesting to note that the foreign influence in the awakening of Indian consciousness has provided much more to the Indian society and the socially affected people. It is India or world at large but the basic interest behind social development is same as the emotion and feeling of mankind is same across the globe. This turning point in social development is mirrored in literature and considered one of the finest elements of realism.

The Indo-English Writer, like any creative writer, writes with a social consciousness born of the phenomena enacted around him. He is essentially a realist who moves around the society and experiences the crisis and tensions of the struggling classes. In the literature of an age, its conflict, tendencies, obsessions are uncovered and made manifest to a degree which is continually astonishing; good writers are, so to speak, mediumistic to the deeper stirrings of life of their time. While they are still unknown to, or at any rate unsuspected by, the public, politicians and current received opinion-contemporary novels are the mirror of the age, but a very special kind of mirror, a mirror that reflects not nervous system, coursing of its blood and the unconscious prompting and conflicts which sway it.

19th-century France, specifically with the French novelists Flaubert and Balzac, George Eliot introduced realism into England, and William Dean Howells introduced it into the United States. Realism has been chiefly concerned with the commonplaces of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where character is a product of social factors and environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications in literature, an approach that proceeds from an analysis of reality in terms of natural forces.

The word has also been used critically to denote excessive minuteness of detail or preoccupation with trivial, sordid, or squalid subjects. The twentieth century, prevailing models of literary criticism drew a line between realist and anti-realist literature, placing realist works on one side of the line and fantastic works on the opposite side. Despite this inherent questioning of the boundaries and construction of reality, the international literary scene has been largely uniform in its placement of magical realism in the anti-realist category, thereby opposing it to realist fiction. Thus, it is very much true what Mulk Raj Anand, a great realist in fiction accepts;

And I was confirmed in my hunch that, unlike Virginia Woolf, the novelist must confront the total reality, including its sordidness, if one was to survive in the world of tragic contrasts between the 'exalted and noble' vision of the blind bard Milton to encompass the eyes dimmed with tears of the many mute Miltons.

According to Galsworthy, "the word 'realist' characterizes that artist whose temperamental preoccupation is with revelation of the actual spirit of life, character and thought with a view to enlighten him and others". True realism depicts man and society as complete entities instead of showing merely one or the other of their aspects. It is not just an echo but the real sound of an individual or society or jointly voice of their being. Realism in literature is the theory or practice of fidelity to nature or to real life and to accurate representation without idealization of everyday life.

Conclusion

Social realism is concerned with dynamic interpretations of life with the purpose of changing the existing reality. In the 19th century England Dickens and George Eliot, Meredith and Thackeray endeavoured in this direction; in India, Saratchandra, Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand blazed the trail in Bengali, Hindi and Indian English Languages respectively faced political persecution, but were ultimately recognised. The concept ‘social realism’ in the strictly scientific and philosophic sense has come to us with the philosophy of Marxism.

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