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Role of Literature in Age of Globalization

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Abstract

My effort in this paper is to understand the impact of recent world-wide economic and technical trends such as globalization, privatization, e-commercialization, e-communication and e-socialization on the cultural and ideological production of the world, especially postcolonial societies such as India in postmodern era. How have these trends impinged upon culture in general and literature in particular? To what extent can our study of literature benefit from some of the currents taking place in the domain of economics and technology? Further, in the postmodern context, what sort of explanatory models might be developed to account for certain literary tendencies and practices that are widely discernable? In a sense, then, this paper is concerned not with the analysis of specific texts and their meanings but with what makes these texts visible, marketable, and meaningful in the larger context of our times. I am also interested in the role that economic and technological forces play in the process of bringing popular culture in literary texts in place of 'high seriousness' in postcolonial societies and how it can survive in long run of time with conserving traditions and without hurting innovations in postmodern human society where "men sit and hear each other groan; where but to think is to be full of sorrow; where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes; and new love pine at them beyond tomorrow" (Keats 1832, p.132).

Keywords: Literature, Technology, Globalization, Postcolonial studies

Introduction

After being caught in the labyrinth of economic and technological forces the post-colonial society like India has gone into tremendous change in regarding to social, cultural and ideological traditions and especially literature in general and Indian English literature in particular. Globalization has worked on society as double edged sword in its impact. Relaxation in the political barriers across the globe to facilitate the trade and effective interaction in various spheres among nations may be called as globalization (Paliwal 2010, p. 20). With it the world, as a whole, has become a social space. It basically emphasizes on efficiency in social, political, cultural, economic and psychological ambiance of human beings but in course of this impact, it brings rat race competition and desire to get maximum at any cost, even, at the cost of strongly human values. The world has changed into a barren ideological entity whose picture has been created by W. B. Yeats, a modern English poet aptly in his poem *The Second Coming*:

Turning and turning in widening gyre,

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The falcon can not hear the falconer,
Things fall apart. The centre can not hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is full, and everywhere,
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack the conviction while the worst,
Are full of passionate intensity. (p.140)

T. S. Eliot, the most influential poet, dramatist and critic of the modern English literature has begun his epoch making poem *The Waste Land* with a mythological allusion to convey his picture of modern man's self-destruction. According to this Greek myth, Sybil at Cumae, a woman of prophetic vision was granted immortality by pleased Apollo on her plea but she forgot to ask for perpetual youthfulness; consequently she became fragile and decayed as much as enough to be changed into a thing of captivity in a cage by children. On asking, "What do you want Sybil at Cumae? What do you want? (Elliot 1922, p. 202)" by them she answered, "I want to die. I aspire for death" (Elliot 1922, p. 202). Like Sybil at Cumae modern man have been facilitated with "immortality" by magic of science, 'the modern Apollo' but in this process we have forgot our natural existence and spiritual interactions with Nature. "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers, / Little we see in Nature that is ours; / We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!" (Wordsworth 1798, p. 239) We are caught into a narrow lane of 'living death', boredom, emptiness, hollowness and claustrophobia- an extreme fear of being in a small enclosed place. The human society in general and English literature in particular both in its content and form is being affected by the globalization and technology tremendously.

One Gospel says, "What is a man advantaged, if he gains the whole world and loses himself, forfeit himself?" (Book of Gospels 2005, p.230) A great philosopher Spinoza unfolds the mystery of human life by saying, "Man's happiness consists in his being able to preserve his own essence (Spinoza 1798, p. 95)." India's most inspiring religious book *Shree Mad Bhagwad Gita* observes- शदुखेस्वनुगद्विमनाः सुखेषुविगतस्प्रिहः/वीतरागभयक्राधाः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते। which means that he who does not become anxious on arrival of grief; who does not involved deeply in joy; who has won desire, fear and anger is called constant mind. These ideas talk about the balance, harmony and coherence in human life which we lack in postmodern era being completely dependent on science. As in ancient time complete dependence on religion had made us orthodox and narrow minded, being bewitched by science in present we have lost natural peace and eternal bliss of our existence and become the prey of our own greed and nihilism. To understand the impact of globalisation and technology on culture and literature we should deep-delve to find out inter- relationship of culture and capital.

Clash Between Culture And Capital

Traditionally, culture and capital are thought to occupy different realms. Capital, supposedly belongs to the base, while culture, to the superstructure (Paranjapey 1998, p. 1). According to Karl Marx, "With the change of economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed" (p.504). Forces of capital do indeed influence culture and literature. In a traditional society like India, certainly, much of the culture that is a part of the daily lives of people is almost unaffected by

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the forces of global capital but technology has intruded into those fields also presented in many literary works of present time.

With globalisation and technological development especially in telecommunication and mechanical fields, more and more areas of our culture are directly entering the market (Paranjapey 1998, p. 2). Take, for example, food. Except for a few large cities, Indian towns and villages do not boast of restaurants until a few years ago. The culture of eating out was by and large restricted to wayside eateries catering to travellers or to small restaurants in places of pilgrimage. In any case, global capital did not enter the food business until very recently. Food, then, was very much a matter of local tastes and traditions, and even the restaurant business was controlled by local entrepreneurs. But with the influx of Macdonald's, Pizza Hut, Domino's Pizza, Wimpy's and so on, all this has changed. Gradually, the eating habits of metropolitan Indians have been affected by mass-produced fast food and imported cuisine. Similarly, several dishes which used to be made only at home, that is dishes which had no large-scale commercial production, are now made largely outside the home, either by professionals or even by large companies, because their preparation is too difficult and cumbersome. A good example is pappad which were made at home before globalisation, but now no one would dream of doing so. Another example would be pickles and preserves, which used to be made at home, but now are almost always bought from outside.

Another area of culture which has registered a dramatic growth after the influx of global capital and technology is trend of celebrating special days like Valentine's Day, Father's Day, Mother's Day, and so on. Valentine's Day came and went almost unmarked in the Indian calendar, which is already so full of all kinds of festivals and feasts. Now, it has become a very big ritual in many Indian cities, with cinema theatres, restaurants, greeting card and music companies all colluding to promote teenage spending (Paranjapey 1998, p.2).

Forces of capital, then, are not only penetrating even the most insulated aspects of culture, but creating new patterns of behaviour, supplanting older value-systems with habits of thought and consumption. The whole production and marketing of culture--of music, dance, theatre, cinema, art, and literature--likewise, is now being pursued more vigorously than ever before. That something exists culturally is not enough; if you cannot capitalize upon it, if you cannot sell it, then it's of little use. This is the current trend in India.

In postmodern techno savvy world culture and literature have themselves changed into a kind of capital. Pierre Bourdieu has raised this question in a slightly different way in his essay 'Systems of Education and Systems of Thought': "There is diffused within a social space a cultural capital, transmitted by inheritance and invested in order to be cultivated" (Bourdieu 1990, p.112). What Bourdieu was referring to, however, was the differential and stratified processes of socialization within a capitalist society. These processes predisposed the privileged classes to inherit not just economic or political, but cultural capital too. In this manner, cultural 'superiority' was reproduced and reinforced. Bourdieu was unmasking how the political function of culture was disguised by a whole network of institutions, including the education system, so as to promote anti-democratic social inequalities.

The technology, commercialization and globalization in postmodernist era have spoiled natural flow of culture in general and literature in particular. Literature is facing the problem of creativity and literariness and the question of self-respect. In time of bloom in communication techniques, printing

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methods and technology every moment developing mechanical and electronic inventions have made literary creation 'painless' and 'paperless'. Author is not dependent on other people responsible for creation. An author has become machine. In such ambiance the balance between literature and technology is not easy to manage. These facilities have created lot inequalities in culture as well as in literature which must be analysed.

First of all, these inequalities work in the realm of the mediums of creative expressions, more specifically the languages of literature. What we observe is the books published in certain languages have a greater visibility and marketability than those in other languages. In fact, languages can be ranked in terms of their market power (Paranjapey 1998, p.3). English, of course, is the quintessential global power-language (Chetan 2009, p.1). Apart from English, there are a few other major languages like French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Arabic, Chinese, and Hindi-Urdu, which can boast of a considerable international spread and power. If a writer writes in one of the minor languages of the world, he or she has little chance of being taken seriously, let alone surviving financially. The world cultural system compels you to write, or be translated, into one or more of these major international languages. The inequality between languages has other more damaging consequences: several languages are dying each year either because their speakers are themselves becoming extinct or because these speakers are switching to other languages (Paranjapey 1998, p.3). The global cultural system, then, is forcing greater and greater conformity and homogeneity; as a result, cultural pluralism and diversity are being threatened.

Like languages, there is now a growing gap between the profitability and viability of literary genres themselves (Paranjapey 1998, p.3). Fiction has long ruled the literary roost, but what is truly alarming is the utter marginalization of poetry and drama. The entire vocation of poetry seems to be pushed underground--rather literally, if we take the example of London. While the possibility of new, multi-media genres emerging cannot be denied, the fact remains that the very nature of literature is undergoing a change. The printed word may be dying a slow death, giving rise to the seen and heard or imaged word. Or else, the printed word may be undergoing a change of position and power in the total system of signification, only to re-emerge as an adjunct or assistant to the audio-visual.

Finally, the cultural world system is breeding a great deal of inequality and asymmetry between authors (Paranjapey 1998, p.4). A new star system is now in place in which authors are ranked and respected not so much in terms of that are indefinable but nonetheless recognizable notion of quality, but simply by how much money and hype they can generate. What this will do to the very idea of good literature remains to be seen; perhaps, what will endure in the long run is quality, but then there may not be any long run to speak of. The tyranny of the contemporariness overwhelms us so much that we have all begun to believe that the latest is the best.

These are some inequalities within the internal structure of literature itself, but when we look across cultures and nations, we notice equally distressing imbalances. These latter, of course, are easily identifiable even in the by now all-too-familiar grids of postcolonial studies. The colonies were originally designed as sources of cheap labour for the metropolis. Today, the metropolis extracts not just culture, but the producers of culture (Paranjapey 1998, p.4). The major English writers of most of the underdeveloped nations of the world now live in the West or its outposts. This has led to the phenomenon of the diaspora assuming more importance than the mainland in recent critical debates. It is no wonder, then, that most of

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the major Indian English writers live abroad. This is true of African, Caribbean, and other Commonwealth writers as well. The books of these non-resident writers, whether they are V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, are then exported back to the countries of their origin, often considered the master-texts that define the realities of these countries. Just as globalization has a special stake in weakening the nation, similarly postmodern theories have also attacked the idea of the nation. In other words, a good deal of the energy of postmodernist discourse actually serves the interests of global commerce. Thus, once the state is weakened, international treaties are put in place which takes the sovereignty entirely out of the hands of individual countries. Similarly, it seems to me, cultural sovereignty too will be sought to be taken away from communities and people and vested in the hands of commercial interests (Paranjapey 1998, p.4).

Harmony between Literature and Science

In this techno savvy globalised world, when culture and literature has changed into capital, product and producer, there is need of finding harmony between science and literature because it will a remedy for modern diseases and to solve the overwhelming question of 'to or not to be'. Literature and science are not conflicting forces but they are indeed complimentary to each other. One represents 'heart' and other 'mind'. The 'yoga' of these two forces brings 'unified sensibility' in our personality which enlightens a spark in us, so to survive in present time we should keep up this spark shining. This is only possible when study of literature and enjoyment of science move in us simultaneously.

We can see many grounds of similarities between science and literature. Firstly if science provides facilities to human being to enjoy the outward pleasures, literature gives them the inner peace and a mental satisfaction against the upheavals of the materialistic world. What, Wordsworth opines in concern of Nature's significance, can be also applied for literature's contribution to human life:

... tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts that neither evil tongues
Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. (p.210)

Both are necessary for complete development of human personality. That is why Matthew Arnold has not only painted disastrous picture of techno savvy materialistic society but has also expressed solution of this problem, in his poem, "Dover Beach":

Ah! Love, let us be true,
To one another! For the world which seems,
To lie before us like a land of dream,

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So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain. (p.340)

Secondly, both literature and science strive for making aware to the human beings about their potentials, skills, abilities and capacities so that they can seek perfection as his goal of life. The greatest dramatist of all time, William Shakespeare glorifies human beings, in a perfect manner. In his play *Hamlet*:

What a piece of work man is!
How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties!
In form and moving how express and admirable!
In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like

A god, the bounty of world, the paragon of animals. (Act II, sc.ii)

Thirdly, literature and science provide us the knowledge of our surroundings' our existence in society and universe; and suggest that by having symphony with these forces the human beings can consolidate not only the whole world but also the whole universe. If human beings do not synchronise with others, society and universe, they, being turned into "heap of broken images" (Elliot 1922, p.204), will face the same kind of disaster which is evoked by T. S. Eliot in form of 'The Waste Land'. According to T. S. Eliot we can resolve this problem by adopting Gita's philosophy of- "Dutta, Dayadavam, Damyata/ Shanti, Shanti, Shanti" (Elliot 1922, p. 220) which means we should synchronise first with self, then society and at last universe.

Fourthly, literature and science enhance the human power of seeing more than to be seen, hearing more than to heard, smelling more than to be smelt, touching more than to be touched, tasting more than to be tasted and reasoning more than to reasoned. For this science provides equipments and devices while literature imparts the flight of imagination which is the most essential element for creating even the scientific instruments. Due to this power Wordsworth feels with naked eyes-

A presence that disturbs me with a joy
Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime,
Of something far more deeply inter fused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting sun, (p. 208)

Conclusion

To conclude my point I would like to say that in the globalised techno savvy world the biggest threat to humanity is not corruption or global warming but challenge of saving 'own self'. If a bond between soul and body is essential for blessed human life, in same way a harmony between literature and science is back bone for multidimensional development of human civilization. Alfred Tennyson propagates his own message to bring harmony between these forces:

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell;
That mind and soul, according well,
Make one music as before,
Bust vaster. (p.102)

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For keeping the spark of life shining one should have reasonable goals, balanced approach and habit of not taking life too seriously against four storms of current life- frustration, disappointment, unfairness and loneliness of purpose (Chetan 2008, p.2). This can be achieved by any individual by adopting the means of getting harmony between 'heart' and 'mind' because it enables us to feel and transcend from materialism to spiritualism, from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge and from outward experientialism to inward awakening.

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