

Emerging Issues in Research in English Literature

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Abstract

As the pre - Socratic Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed, “There is nothing permanent except change”. Change is the inevitable law of nature and emerging issues can be seen as proclivity for change. This paper is a specimen of meta-research as it researches on research issues itself. Meta-research is a recent field of research that investigates research practices with the ultimate goal of finding evidence-based improvements. The word research is derived from the Middle French "recherché", which means "to go about seeking". For this investigation, I have tried to compare and analyze the catalogues of proposed researches in the subject of English Literature in prominent Indian universities. The issues include - the investigation of voices which have not been identified yet or suppressed especially in regional/vernacular languages; in popular literature of culture, there is an issue of representing voice of women, which has been stifled till now. Other emerging issues are reinterpreting violence and trauma narratives with respect to major events like Vietnam war , cross border violence in Kashmir , politics of power, states of exile and refuge in diaspora, concept of identity, self and nation, Dalit writings, post modernistic renderings of classical and medieval texts, etc.

Keywords:- meta-research, suppressed/repressed voices in regional narratives, self and nation ,critical studies, postmodernism, diaspora.

The dictionary definition of an issue is “an important topic or problem for debate or discussion.” More formally , issues are matters that attract attention or invite concern of majority . Each age has its own characteristics revealing that particular period and its literature and hence literature of each age has its own issues. The Renaissance age is known for the origin of intellectual liberty. The 18th century literature or neoclassical age demanded that poetry should follow exact rules discovered in the classics Of Horace, Virgil and Ovid. The Age of romanticism verbalised love for nature in different ways. Victorian age was an era of transition and the advent of first world war brought loss of faith in traditional ethics and morals. It is difficult to define any typical characteristics of 21st century. This age is full of experimentation. Some radical philosophical idea(s) along with a great historical event determine a movement in literature and thus an issue. According to Charles Graybell, Professor of English Literature the issues are “Disability Studies, Ecocriticism, Trauma Studies, Animal Studies, Postcolonial, Native American. Discovering new historical contexts “. Though it is very difficult to trace an issue in literature, which opens choice anywhere under the sun from gender, comparisons, historical background to politics, and religion. The given themes and issues are not mutually exclusive. One topic involves and sometimes is the cause or consequence of the other.

1.GENDER:-

Gender is a psycho- social construct as opposed to anatomical or biological construct. Contemporary researches tend to explore how are men and women portrayed in narratives? What role do they play owing to expectations of the present social setup? They seek to bring out suppression on the basis of gender in patriarchal hegemony. The silences or lacunae in narratives are explored to portray parallel narrative of the suppressed. Another aspect that can be grouped under this heading is research from point of view of queer theory which investigates cross-dressing, bisexuality and trans-sexuality from society's normative model of sexual identity, orientation, and activities. Example of researches currently pursued are titled as – "Christopher Isherwood's Autobiographical Experiments: Narrating the Queer Self", "The Satirical Representations of Bengali Women in Nineteenth Century Colonial Bengal and Their Context", "Colonialism: Masculinity and The Literature of the Hunt", "Re-creating the Self:", "Representations of Black Female Body in Black Women Artists' Visual Arena", "Tracing the Growth of Women's Education in Colonial India: A Select Study of Memoirs" "Depiction of Patriarchal Victimization in Select Victorian Novels", And "The ideology of gender in the Kathasaritsagara and the Arabian nights", Subjugation is of many forms . Probing has been done into violent protests but an emerging issue is towards women's dilemma in family structure where families are structured to suppress women like in Rama Mehta's "Inside The Haveli" and Manju Kapoor's "Difficult Daughters" and "Home" and " A Married Woman". How female protagonists like Virmati and Aastha are made martyrs by the greedy families ;greedy in terms of power and control over the woman. So researches focus on two dimensions:- (i) Psychological Probing – which gives more importance to internal psychological milieu of a man like in Desai's "Cry the Peacock".

(ii) Social Dynamics Of Perpetuating Equity-Social Engineering- there is an issue for some decades to explore suppressed voices . there is an adequate commentary on social external tapestry in novels "God Of Small Things" by Arundhati Roy and in "Untouchables" by Mulk Raj Anand. Roy deciphers secretive history of colonised India .These researches investigate texts which are based on discrimination of one man over another in any form be it based on caste, class or religion eg.-Mahesh Dattani's "Final Solutions". Example of research currently pursued is titled as "The Absent Voices: A Study of the Representation of Women and Secular Themes in Pre-Christian and Post- Christian Paite Narratives".

2.POST-MODERNISTIC ISSUES :-

Modernism became a blanket term for different cutting -edge tendencies across different parts of the world like futurism, dadaism, vorticism. Modernism implies a break from what was already there. This movement reflects an attitude that looks ahead, creates new ways of thinking and writing (form and content). Modernists rejected artistic precursors. The major historical event driving post modernism is second world war. Western thought had been dominated by the Greek philosophers who established that reason and logic could lead to absolute truth. Post modernism denies absolutism and inclines towards relativism. As Jean Francois Lyotard says in his book "The Post Modern Condition : A Report on Knowledge" (1979) , " Truth is neither absolute nor self – contained". Now people ,instead of questioning "what is the truth?", question "what is the use?" Therefore there is dominance of technology , applied sciences and

not the basic sciences. Baudrillard while propounding the concept of 'simulation' establishes that there is no way to know the reality except electronic media. Foucault in "History of Sexuality" says that gender or sex is not an absolute natural phenomenon but is rather different across cultures, ages, etc. So, universality, essentiality and naturalness on which depended the humanism of the Renaissance is now lost in postmodernist times. Post modernism includes analysis from points of view of new historicism, eco criticism. This theory advocates that meaning or aesthetics are subject to various factors and change according to them viz. readers, social context, culture, politicoeconomic environment etc. where as modernism seconded ultimate formulae and ideals for art. Socio-historical contexts and their relationship with a literary work gets central focus in post modern thinking. It is believed that a work of art is the product of social forces which shape our sensibilities. Eg: "Exploring Post-Modern Issues in the Selected Novels of Rohinton Mistry". Multicultural and multi-ethnic contexts offer rich possibilities of derivation of material for creation of literature and research thereinto.

3. DIASPORA-

Defined as the dispersion or spread of people from their original homeland, this literature deals with the feelings of isolation, difficulty in adjustment, discrimination and segregation they face in the land where they have migrated because they have not yet been assimilated into the culture of the land where they have settled. Not only the migrating generation but their children also have to bear this brunt. Where in Europe a Polish man like Joseph Conrad can easily assimilate into British culture, there it is difficult for an American poet, Pearl S. Buck, to adjust in Sino culture. This problem has begun since people have started migrating overseas. At a time when Gandhiji returned from England there was no one except his elder brother to receive him because of the taboos of 'jaat', 'malichh' etc. Ethnic dialectical study is its sub-field. The inflow of Diaspora writings also provides a variegated picture of resistance. A major body of fictions comes from Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee along with Randhwa, Shona Ramaya, Jhumpa Lahiri and others. These diaspora writers are more exposed to influences of resistance and have more space to interact. Dimple in "Wife" by Bharati Mukherjee resists being hyphenated American. Jasmine in "Jasmine" resists her native culture at every step and with every bold assertion. Divakaruni, Randhwa and many others offer resistance to their otherisation as diaspora subjects. In the host country they, being the Indians, are the "other".

4.GLOBALISATION COTERMINUS WITH LOCALISATION –

There have been present both centrifugal and centripetal tendencies in recent discourse. It is evident as many vernacular literatures are getting translated into lingua franca English and vice versa. In the 'global village' (as coined by Marshall McLuhan), there are issues in terms of bringing to prominence the study of local groups or groups within that global village. Both contradictory forces are working simultaneously in post modern world. Globalisation implies there is unipolar world with one centre of power. That centre labels its worldview as new liberalism which is basically capitalism advocating not political interference or restraint but political facilitation to optimum individual prosperity. John Barth in his essay "the Literature of Exhaustion" (which is sometimes considered the manifesto of postmodernism) points out

that why contemporary novel is parodic ? A core trait of postmodernism is that the forms developed by past authors and their roles cannot be surpassed and conventional modes of literary representation have been “used up”, their possibilities consumed through overuse. Another essay of John Barth “Cheerful Nihilism” proposes ‘laugh it away’ attitude towards absurdity. Life is contingent on day to day basis, we live minute to minute ad hoc. There isn’t a moral purpose of this world but simply ‘struggle for existence’ and ‘survival of the fittest’. So there is a dichotomy in looking for the moral purpose, a meaning (as exemplified in “Waiting for Godot”) which does not exist. An issue which has arrested attention is the unconventionality of literature that the author instead of living among people and sharing life with them, focuses on autobiographically journalistic (rather than creative) history in his narrative with a non-linear notion of time panning out genres like magic realism. He is an isolated individual from the context like many authors, who are not living in India, are writing about India . For instance:- * Arvind Adiga ; a historical event is re-narrated in terms of the experience and viewpoint of the the author in autobiographical tones in Salim Sinai’s experience of partition of India in Salman Rushdie ‘s “Midnight’s Children”. There is a power play in who gets to be translated (without translation Tagore would never have got his Nobel Prize); globalisation means that there is an increasing market for writers from everywhere, but only those who find a translator will get multiplied sales and international attention. And it may be that only the works closest to dominant cultural taste will be selected for translation, and genuine regional voices remain marginalised. This is why it is increasingly desirable for the postcolonial scholar to be multilingual, and for the regional writer (like Ngugi Wa Thiango of Kenya) to persist in local production but push for national and global reach via translation. The issue of bringing to the centre which was once at periphery is exemplified in creating narratives of minor characters in canonical works viz. Tom Stoppard’s absurd play “Rosencratz and Guildenstern are Dead”. Eg. of researches being pursued in this direction:- “Socio-Cultural Impact of Globalization: A Select Study of Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga”

5.RESISTANCE LITERATURE-

Another issue emerging is resistance. Wherever coercion is there, there may be violence and trauma studies like “Nation, Nationality and Resistance Literature:Reading the Contemporary Literary Texts from Kashmir,North-east and DalitCommunities”, “The New Normal’: Trauma, Biopolitics and Visuality after 9/11”. This term was coined by Barbara Harlow.By its semantic nature,the term “resistance” is a derivative of“resist”which is derived from the Old French “resister” and the Latin “resistere”, from re-‘expressing opposition’and sister‘stop’. According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary , resistance is refusal to obey. According to Haynes and Prakash,“Resistance should be defined as those behaviours by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations and threaten to unravel the strategies of domination”. It is different from protest revolution. It may take different forms ranging from civil disobedience to individual statements to mass movements or even silence . Resistance arises when there are two classes: the dominating and the dominated or the subjugated . Thus power play engenders interplay between domination and resistance. Social reforms like social reformist movement in

nineteenth century and nationalist movement in 20th century reflect simmering voices of resistance. Dalit writing which primarily emerged in Maharashtra in 1960's is a much exploited area of research in contemporary research scenario. It is not necessary to be informed about ideology. Eg of researches being pursued in this direction;- "Dalit Lives and Tidal Landscapes: A Symbiotic Relationship explored through fictions based in Bengal" ,"Anti-Establishment Literature: The Dalit Panthers and Naxalbari movement"," A Memory of Musk, the Rebel Face of Hope:Exile, Memory and Resistance in Agha Sahid", "Dalit Discourse in Modern Indian Literature: Reading the Dalit Novel as Counter- Discourse", "Self and Society: A Study of Hindi Dalit Autobiographies"," Dalits and the New Media: Rewriting Caste and Gender". Thus major fields in Indian context is research on partition literature circumferencing works like "Train to Pakistan" by Khushwant Singh, "Ice Candy Man" by Bapsi Sidhwa, "Pinjar" by Amrita Pritam, "The Shadow Lines" (Amitav Ghosh), "Sunlight On A Broken Coloumn" (Attia Hosain), "Basti" (Intezar Husain), "Toba Tek Singh" (Saadat Hasan Manto), "Tamas" (Bhisham Sahni), "Midnights Children" by Salman Rushdie.

6.POST COLONIAL DISCOURSE:-

It can be grouped under resistance, but this field is so vast that it is convinient to take it separately . It acknowledges two sections or power groups that of the coloniser and the colonised. This movement gained popularity in 80's,the research is made not only on contemporary but classisc texts (like "The Tempest",Shakespeare) as well . It is an ambivalent ideology having contrasting love and hate- love for the native culture and heritage with the hate for the coloniser's imposed code and centuries of oppression and suppression. As the pioneer of this school, Edward Saith , observes, "east is the passive reacter while west is the actor ; west mythicizes, exoticizes the east but east is denuded of its cultural identity" . This consciousness aims at restoration of the glory of colonised's culture by rejecting and overthrowing image of colonised formulated by colonisers. Prominent texts and authors explored are "Things Fall Apart" and "Anthills Of Savannah" (Chinua Achebe), "Troubles" (Jg Farrell) , Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad. Eg:- " Reading the American Imperium in Salman Rushdie's the Ground Beneath Her Feet (1999), Fury(2001), Shalimar the Clown(2005) and theEnchantress of Florence(2008)" "Re-membling J.M . Coetzee, Present Hope andPostcolonial Futures". Concept of nation, identity and self become relevant issues. Eg:- "Collective Experience: Individual, Family & Community in the Works of Bhikhari Thakur"

7.INDIAN AESTHETIC THEORIES TO WESTERN WORKS :

Wealth of literay philosophies of India have been forgotten . There is an issue to study western works from Indian aesthetic theories like rassiddhanta of Natya Shastra. Shakespeare, Spenser and Keats have been better understood from rasa analysis. Critical-aesthetic theories originated in West by literary critics like Coleridge , Matthew Arnold, F. R. Leavis, etc were found inadequate as compared to Indian theories. A much studied author from this viewpoint is T.S. Eliot . Writer- critic C.D. Narsimaiah, founder of Dhvanyalok Centre For Indian Studies , has worked much in this field. Another linguist is Kapil Kapoor who has significant remarkable contribution in this field .

8. FEMINISM AND AFRO AMERICAN STUDIES:

This is a theory emerged in west and well assimilated in Indian culture unlike ‘queer theory’. Many educated women returned from abroad to India to raise voice for their rights and against their suppression. Newspaper columns and streetside bookstalls are enough to show the flood of women writers that have emerged on contemporary literary scenario breaking the conventional moulds. Example - Manju Kapoor in “A Married Woman” and Suniti Namjoshi are such authors who explore lesbianism. Literature does not concern itself with events but human material. Be it any event, what were the repercussions on human existence, feelings and emotion—that is the subject area of literature and so this is an enigma of triple oppression on the basis of gender, race and color. Major authors researched are Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Maya Angelou, Eg. of researches being pursued in this direction – “Re-creating the Self: Representations of Black Female Body in Black Women Artists’ Visual Arena: Feminism and Indian Cinema” .

9. AMBIVALENCE TOWARDS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY –

Ambivalence is the presence of contrasting emotions at the same time towards same object. Science and technology are viewed both optimistically and pessimistically. Dystopias like A Brave New World (Aldous Huxley), 1984 (George Orwell), Atwood’s Handmaid’s Tale, Burgess’ A Clockwork Orange, fiction of Liu Cixin express anxieties about future of technology driven world . Both writers and readers are becoming much more sophisticated—writers in terms of concept and tone, and readers in terms of their understanding of what the genre entails. As a result, there exists this cycle in which the writers are challenging readers’ preconceived notions of “science fiction”. The major emerging sub-genres are as follows ; (i) Science fiction subgenre of space opera is gaining popularity partly due to the success of the Star Trek and Star Wars franchises .It involved large-scale, fast-paced science fiction adventure featuring space warfare, alien races and intelligent machines. Often it had a military aspect to it, although the main character focus was on civilians. It’s also usually more scientifically rigorous, more literary, has more emphasis on character development, and addresses social issues of race, gender, class and postcolonialism.

(ii) Climate Fiction, that is, fiction that deals with climate change, often in a post-apocalyptic or dystopian future. Australian author George Turner wrote the quintessential cli-fi novel well before it was a recognised subgenre of science fiction. His The Sea and Summer (The Drowning Towers in the US) was set in a world where global warming had resulted in a Melbourne landscape that was largely underwater. (iii) Generation Ship Fiction focuses on sub-light-speed starships that take several human generations to arrive at their destination, where the original occupants grow old and die, leaving their descendants to continue travelling. Unlike works relying on faster-than-light (FTL) travel, this subgenre is based on the more rigorous extrapolation of current science where FTL speed is impossible. The closed environment of a generation ship has proven to be a particularly versatile story vehicle, allowing powerful explorations, ranging from sustainability-based dilemmas and breakdowns in social structures to murder mysteries. Recent examples include Aurora by Kim Stanley

Robinson, Neal Stephenson's *Seveneves*, and *Six Wakes* by Mur Lafferty, a 2018 Hugo Best Novel Finalist. (iv) Gender-focused Science Fiction works deal with gender identity and involve depictions of single gender or genderless societies. Because of the political and economic domination of the west by western science fiction writers, most science-fiction readers knew little about other societies; this is now beginning to change. With the economic and political rise of China, there are now Chinese authors who are writing science fiction which is set with Chinese society and culture as background. Notable works are:

Folding Beijing The Three-Body Problem●

10. EXISTENTIALIST VIEWING OF TEXTS-

Existentialism as a philosophy talks about this world, not the other world. Individual interacts with his palpable reality, his immediate reality, the social structures of which he is a part and it is his responsibility in the decision which he takes by exercise of freedom of will. ("man is condemned to be free", Sartre). This entails a heightened awareness of self and the absurdity of existence. (Sartre 's quote "existence precedes essence" , implying that human beings—through their consciousness —create their own values and determine a meaning for their life because the human being does not possess any inherent identity or value. That identity or value must be created by the individual. By posing the acts that constitute them, they make their existence more significant.) In existentialism, a kind of power is vested in the individual through choice and he commits himself to action in contrast to abstraction and fragmentation put forth by modernism . Modernism proposed that the individual is not able to connect ,even react, to his objective reality. The individual wallows in aloofness cut-off from the world. The reality that modernism privileged is interiority, circularity which leads him nowhere in constructive engagement with society.

11. NON FICTIONAL META NARRATIVE –

Way back in 1949, Rene Wellek raised a question that still keeps haunting us. "Is it possible to write literary history, that is, to write that which will be both literary and a history? Language, literature, and nation form a colluding triad. But with the advent of Foucauldian theories regarding the operation of power structures, and more recently with the foundational work of Homi Bhabha (*Nation and Narration* and *The Location of Culture*), followed by the recent writings of Sheldon Pollock and Aijaz Ahmad, the term has grown more inclusive to mean what has been grandiosely called "nonfictional meta-narrative" that attempts to redefine the history of a nation state using literature as one — if not the only — frame of reference.

12. WORLD LITERATURE-

The term emerges in 19 th century when the world is beginning to be seen as an "entity " , when the writers become conscious of the same problems experienced elsewhere than the place where they live and think that the issues are not just confined to their space. Neither Shakespeare nor the Greeks could be termed as writers of world literature because the notion

of world as it is today was not there then. An associated conceptual issue is Transculturalism . Defined as "seeing oneself in the other". transcultural is in turn described as "extending through all human cultures" or "involving, encompassing, or combining elements of more than one culture". According to Richard Slimbach, author of *The Transcultural Journey*, transculturalism is rooted in the pursuit to define shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders. Slimbach further stated that transculturalism can be tested by means of thinking "outside the box of one's motherland" and by "seeing many sides of every question without abandoning conviction, and allowing for a chameleon sense of self without losing one's cultural center" Some of the issues not discussed in detail in this paper are - Graphic Novels including fiction as well as non-fiction texts with pictures—"comics" in book for-format , Cinematic adaptation of literature and parallel between both , Reinterpreting regional fiction and oral folk literature, etc.

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