

INDIAN WRITING IN SPECULATIVE FICTION: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Speculative fiction, a term which includes a wide variety of fiction genres, is the super genre of all the other classes of fiction genres. Generally, a kind of fiction genre narrates a story of a hypothetical situation in a real world where as speculative fiction tells a story which takes place in a hypothetical story world that is different from our own real world. In rare cases, Speculative fiction can take place on earth but often takes place in other worlds pictured by the author. Uniquely India is a country with legends, folk-tales, mysteries, horrors and supreme strangeness which would have rendered Indians towards a fondness for various genres of fiction. The meaning of Indian Speculative Fiction is not only written by Indian authors but also with Indian related themes written by foreign authors. The view of speculative fiction writers of Indian literature is out of human world towards social, political, technological, and biological consequences. This paper needs indianism towards innovative thoughts of fictitious characters and / or themes and motives of native India to be a pioneering part of world's speculative fiction writings. This paper may include various modes of themes as well as writers' opinions through their writings especially to excel the greatness of India in the way of Indian speculative fiction writings. This paper contains four sections: section-1: Origin of Speculative Fiction in India, section-2: Important writers in Indian Speculative Fiction, section-3: Themes in Indian Speculative Fiction and section-4: Conclusion.

Key words: Speculative Fiction, fiction genres, themes and motives, indianism,

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Section-1: Origin of Speculative Fiction in India:

According to Anita Roy (Half-Bengali and half-English, has lived in India for the past two decades), Speculative fiction is a literary genre that looks at current events in science and technology, politics, culture and philosophy which assume possibilities. This genre is originated with popular culture similarly to Science Fiction in that it imagines things which would not currently possible. Literally, the origin of speculative fiction in India is in two ways: the former one is the incredible wealth of mythical, historical and folklore traditions, and the latter one is the extremely popular genres of science fiction and fantasy in both literature and film in the West. The opinions of literary figures are supposed to be responsible for the need of a strong tradition in the field of speculative fiction especially in English. Indian writers who are seeking to produce the wealthy speculative fiction might do well to step in this field that matches western science fiction and fantasy in quality and richness. For having a strong and distinct Indian identity, it includes new themes, new ideas, and new colours in the mystifying palette of speculative fiction.

Mythology is particularly the mother of the Science Fiction Fantasy. The elements of fantasy and science fiction are basic to many culturally fundamental epics and myths from the ancient world. *The Odyssey*, written by Homer, the Tolkien and the science fiction fantasy superstar, is the world's first science fiction fantasy of his contemporary days. The stories exclusively entertainment value are designed to capture and interpret the sociological and the cultural issues of the day in the world history as portrayed in these epic stories which can be pictured from the science fiction fantasy point of view.

In this regard, India is not a different sub continent but India is noted as a hallmark country in the history of storytelling from antiquity. Generally, epics were narrated orally and were passed down from generation to generation largely by memory. At later times, these stories were written down. Most of the early Indian stories had dealt with the elements of science fiction and fantasy among which the first and foremost would be *Puranas or Compendium*, each *Purana* was dedicated to the tales about one deity from the pantheon of 33 million Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Out of these many *Puranas* some would be classified as India's first fantasy books and the other particularly noteworthy and extremely popular that are nothing but the "*Panchatantra, Jataka, Betaal Pachisi,*

Chandrakanta & Hitopdesha" tales which can be considered as India's leading and prehistoric fantasy attempts.

The consequent spread of English by the British colonization, Indian tales have got good governance over the worldwide epical stories which acquired the possibility of a global presence. *The Mahabharata*, one of the two greatest epics of the Indian subcontinent, was one of the first texts to be converted into English. For its conversion it took almost thirteen years period (1883-1896) and was translated by *Kisari Mohan Ganguli* who remains the most accurate personality to date.

Section-2: Important writers in Indian Speculative Fiction:

Samit Basu has done more than anyone to bring the fusion of Indian mythology with the modern science fiction fantasy movement into the world literary attention. Samit Basu is an Indian novelist and the author of a fantasy trilogy titled *The Game World Trilogy* which includes the three parts: 1. *The Simoqin Prophecies*: It marked the beginning of Indian fantasy writing in English. The Prophecies foretell the reawakening of the terrible rakshas. The chosen hero and another young man are sent on a quest in order to save the world from the rakshas. 2. *The Manticore's Secret*: a complex, playful, sometimes sombre but always dazzlingly inventive epical fantasy which creates a mesmeric landscape bursting with strange and wonderful characters and a gripping narrative. A mysterious Dark Lord and his grotesque army threaten all that is good on earth. The heroic immortals who defeated rakshas' father long ago have returned to do battle with the forces of evil who threaten history, humanity and the future of the planet. And 3. *The Unwaba Revelations*: the concluding part of the Game World trilogy, which shows the way to be found to save the world. The Gods who control all the heroes are obviously cheating by following only one rule that they cannot be defeated by their own creations. This trilogy draws an exciting, action-packed, epic race to reclaim the flawed and magical world of its heroes.

As the most people know that *Satyajit Ray*, the first Indian to receive an Oscar award, and his father *Sukumar Ray* whose book *The Diary of Heshoram Hushiar* is full of beasts with strange properties, and uses wordplay in order to use Bengali language terms and jokes to western scientific ideas. The former is a world famous director and a prolific part-time science fiction writer but he can be considered a true pioneer of Indian Science Fiction Fantasy. *Satyajit Ray* has written a series of Science Fiction stories which have woven around the character of a scientist called *Professor Shankhu*. *Satyajit Ray's Bankubabur Bandhu* (*Banku Babu's Friend* or *Mr. Banku's Friend*) was a Bengali science fiction story written in 1962. Several science fiction films were inspired by the story and eventually *Sandip Ray* who was the only child of *Satyajit Ray* had modified the story *Bankubabur Bandhu* into a television film. The differentiation between *Bankubabur Bandhu* and other previous science fiction works was the portrayal of an alien from the outer space as a kind natured and playful being which was invested with the magical

powers and capable of interacting with children, in contrast to earlier science fiction works which portrayed aliens as dangerous creatures.

A renowned and the first Marathi writer *Shivaji Sawant* known as *Mrityunjaykar* (Maker of *Mrityunjay*) a prestigious Moortidevi Award winner in 1994 for writing the famous Marathi fictitious novel *Mrityunjay* (English: *Triumph Over Death*). *Mrityunjay* is the autobiography of Karna, one of the leading characters of the epic *Mahabharat*. The search for the meaning of Being is man's eternal quest as the subject of his greatest creations. *Shivaji Sawant's Mrityunjaya* is an outstanding instance of such a literary masterpiece in which a contemporary Marathi novelist investigates the meaning of the life through the personae of the *Mahabharata* protagonists.

Anil Menon is a leading Indian writer of speculative fiction. *The Beast With Nine Billion Feet*, was shortlisted for the 2010 Vodafone Crossword Book Award, tells a story in which the characters' personal lives and relationships become into an ideological conflict pitting two takes on the material consequences of biotechnology in bitter opposition. Formally, the narrative alternates between Tara's and Aditya's points of view and therefore between each sibling's life, fears, aspirations, and relationships.

'God keep you, Sivan-bhau, wherever you are. Come back to us, safe and sound.' She glanced at Aunt Sita's impassive face and Tara's agitated one. "Let's talk about something else. Sita, I've decided to give my favourite teenager a makeover. It's my birthday gift. Oh, you're quite welcome, Tara-darling.' She blew a kiss at Tara.¹

The ending of the novel has impressed the most. Here Menon reveals a terrible irony that casts a new light over the entire story. The exposure not only explains the mysteries encountered the mass but more importantly, compels a re-evaluation of what we have vividly understood.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*, novel has been described as a kind of mystery thriller (India Today). It brings together three searches such as: the first is that of an Egyptian clerk, Antar, working alone in a New York apartment in the early years of the twenty-first century to trace the adventures of L. Murugan, who disappeared in Calcutta in 1995;

*'The first detail to appear was a patch of hair, carefully trimmed, but rather thin and discoloured: definitely a man's hair. Then came a pair of bright black eyes. It occurred to Antar to wonder whether he might be Egyptian, whoever he was: he could have been – but he could just as well be Pakistani or Indian or Latin American. But once the cheeks and nose and mouth appeared, Antar had no doubts left.'*²

The second search appropriates to Murugan's preoccupation with the missing links in the history of malaria research; 'Morgan' first discovered the great love of his life: the medical history of malaria. He spent several years teaching in a small college in upstate New York, and during this time he came to be increasingly interested in one highly specialized aspect of this subject: the early history of malaria research.² the third search is that of Urmila Roy, a journalist in Calcutta in 1995 who is researching the works of Phulboni, a writer who produced a strange cycle of Lakhan stories that he wrote in the 1930s but suppressed thereafter.

'I'VE BEEN DOING a little research,' Urmila said to Sonali, 'and I've discovered that when Phulboni was a young man he wrote a set of stories called The Laakhan Stories. They were published in an obscure little magazine and have never been reprinted. I managed to find the right issue in the National Library.'²

Not only the writers of the Epic India environment but also some of the other writers namely Rajdeep Paul, Vandana Singh, Vikram Chandra, Sangu Mandanna, Rajan Khanna, Priya Sharma, Manil Suri, Ashok k. Banker, Indrapramit Das, Dinesh Rao, Chitra Divakaruni, Ashok Banker, Amish Tripathi, and Aditya Bidikar should monitor and presented the other themes in their novels of Indian Science Fiction Fantasy.

Section-3: Themes in Indian Speculative Fiction:

The core subject matter of Themes and motifs play a vital role in world literature especially good cultured and traditionally valued Indian writings in English Literature. Notably these many kinds of coined themes are being practiced by many more literary figures in worldwide genres particularly in Indian speculative fiction.

Among the most prolific themes, Gender has been an important theme which explored in speculative fiction. The genres that make up science fiction, fantasy, supernatural horror and related genres have always offered the opportunity for writers to explore social conventions including gender, gender roles, and beliefs about gender. Like all literary forms, the science fiction genre reflects the popular perceptions of the eras in which individual and creative geniuses were writing and those creators' responses have been towards gender stereotypes and gender roles. The first Indian female speculative fiction writer, Vandana Singh has said in her writing *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet and Other Stories* that her genre includes a "chance to find ourselves part of a larger whole; to step out of the claustrophobia of the exclusively human and discover joy, terror, wonder, and meaning in the greater universe."

Indian Women in the House of Fiction by Geetanjali Singh Chanda explores the quiet negotiation of women and the kinds of homes they wish to inhabit. The house is not merely a backdrop in Indian women's fiction but almost a character that bears witness to the

changes taking place in the protagonists' lives. The architectural and social spaces of havelis, bungalows and apartments impose their own unique patterns of women's relationships inside and outside the domestic space.

Speculative Fiction gives the freedom to imagine societies different from real-life cultures. It is an insightful tool to examine sexual bias and forcing the reader to reconsider his or her cultural assumptions. The incorporation of sexual themes into science fiction or related genres are elements which may include depictions of realistic sexual interactions in a science fictional setting, a character with an alternative sexuality as the protagonist, or exploration of the varieties of sexual experience that deviate from the conventional.

Overpopulation is a major theme in the 1950s and 1960s and one of the most notified themes throughout world literature specially concentrated on some genres like Science fiction, utopian and dystopian. Writers of these genres have frequently made famous predictions in which they portrayed the pros and cons of overpopulation as the theme in their works. LGBT - lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender themes into science fiction, fantasy, horror fiction and related genres have become less alien in the world of Speculative Fiction. Despite this, we remain aliens within that world in many of the same ways that our characters are aliens within those stories.

Conclusion:

In view of Indian Writing in Speculative Fiction, it covers many aspects of indianism like mythical values, cultural and traditional values, political and philosophical issues through writings in various genres which measure the scope of Indian Speculative Fiction. The property of India through literature is vividly shown in the writings of foreign and Indian writers whose writings are projecting purely Indian themes. Many writers have chosen to write with little or no questioning of gender roles, instead effectively reflecting their own cultural gender roles onto their fictional world. However, many other writers have chosen to use science fiction and non-realistic formats in order to explore cultural conventions and so. The current popularity of Indo-English literature is the anxiety of conveying an authentic Indianness through different modes of themes and notions. Eventually, Indian writing concerns about identity, language, nationalism, family or community values and gender roles etc.,

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