



DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH NOVEL: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

In English literature, we come across different genres: poetry, fiction, drama, short stories, and memoirs. As we know, literature is the mirror of society and our life, and so is a novel that projects human life in different hues and colours. Since the beginning of English literature, novels developed in one form or another. But, the reality is that English literature took a new turn and direction with the growth of fictional works. Its presence on the literary scene can be witnessed in the eighteenth century when Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift showed interest in novel writing. With the rise of the “four wheels” in English literature, novels as a genre were liked and constantly read by the reading public in England. Richardson started writing novels with his famous work, Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded, in which he dealt with the idea of morality. Henry Fielding, the father of English novels, wrote a parody of Pamela through his small pamphlet, Shamela, which later came to the forefront with his masterpiece, Joseph Andrews.

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Novel as a literary genre gained currency in the eighteenth century, but its genesis and origin can be traced back to 612 B.C. During this time, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* came into existence. A notable Epic writer, Homer produced the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from 700 BC to 800 B.C. He started writing epic, a long narrative dealing with serious subject matter. Treading the footprints of Homer, Virgil wrote *Aeneid*, which was followed by John Milton, who wrote *Paradise Lost* in ten books, followed by the eleventh book, *Paradise Regained*.

After epics were practiced by several literary men in the 12th century, the writing of romances gained popularity. It was also called chivalric romance that flourished between 1000 A.D. to 1450 A.D. The writers during this period shifted their interest from Epic writing to dealing with the subjects like bravery, honour, adventure, and courtly love. They also assimilated features like magic, spells, necromancy, and enchantment to change the interests and eagerness of the readers. Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (1470) illustrates a chivalric life centered on King Arthur's legend.

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is written both in poetry and prose. It embodies 24 stories. Besides, he also wrote *Troilus and Criseyde*. It is

remarkable for its socio-religious aspects of life instead of the farfetched reality of romances as his predecessors did. Boccaccio's *Decameron* started the tradition of prose tales of amorous adventure before Malory and Chaucer.

With the advent of a new literary style, Burlesque, the popularity of romances was still in fashion till 1600. *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes has been written to mock the seriousness of chivalric romances. It also illustrates a new type of fiction-picaresque novel, which started with the publication of *Lazarillo de Tormes*. The picaresque tradition was a source of inspiration for the writers to come in subsequent centuries, which is evident through the writing of Mark Twain (*Huckleberry Finn*) and Saul Bellow (*The Adventures of Augie March*)

In the sixteenth century, Aphra Behn wrote *Oroonoko, or The History of the Royal Slave*. The novel's main thematic concerns and ideas are encouraged by the quest for adventure life by knights searching for a beautiful lady's love. John Bunyan also wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, a religious allegory based on the pilgrimage of Christians. With its compact plot, the art of characterization, and the narrative strategy followed by the writer, *Pilgrim Progress* is a model for the future generation of writers

The eighteenth century is generally known as the age of prose and reason. This century saw the emergence of two important genres-novel and periodical essay. Periodical essays came into existence as a mini rehearsal of novel writing. Many reasons contributed to making the periodical essay popular among the middle class: faithful mirror of society, a reflection of the temper of the age, appeal to women, avoidance of religious and political controversies, interest in trade and commerce, a decline of drama, readymade material, the rise of common people and, last but not least, no cramping limitation of classicism. Addison and Steele, pioneers of periodical essays, gave a new direction by introducing an element of realism of the contemporary age.

The real beginning of the novels in England took place in the eighteenth century with the emergence of Daniel Defoe as a novelist who dealt with the stories of adventures in his works *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moll Flanders*, *Roxana*, and *Plague*. His main focus was on the story rather than on characterization. His narrative strategy was the main strength of his works.

In this way, the eighteenth-century novel before *The Four Wheels* rejected characterization. It paved the way for a new type of novel-domestic novel

practiced by Oliver Goldsmith, as evident through his work, *The Vicar of Wakefield*. The rise of novels in the eighteenth century was the direct result of the Industrial Revolution, the decline of romance and drama, and the rise of the middle class. Moreover, *Four Wheels* Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, and Tobias Smollett were instrumental in lifting the novel to glorious heights. Through his novel *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, Richardson introduced a new form of fiction, an epistolary novel written in letter form. The present book focuses readers' attention on morality through its female protagonist, Pamela. Richardson's chief contribution lies in plot construction, the sentimental note, morality, allegorical method, and characterization.

Henry Fielding improved the weaknesses left behind by Richardson in his works. Although popular as a dramatist in his early career, he provided new height and gravity to English fiction through his masterpieces *Jones*, *Joseph Andrews*, *Jonathan Wild*, and *Amelia*. His fictional works are marked by realism, morality, characterization, and artistic craftsmanship. As a parody of Richardson's *Pamela*, he wrote a small pamphlet, *Shamela*, which was later produced as a novel by *Joseph Andrews*. Fielding's contribution to realism, humor

and irony, common sense morality, and plot construction cannot be underestimated.

Laurence Sterne, discarding the conventional style of novel writing, practiced a different type of novel, known as the novel of impressionism. He is primarily known for his masterpieces- *The Life and Opinion of Tristram Shandy*, *Gentlemen*, and *Sentimental Journey*. His works mainly focus on the subtlety of humour, sentimentalism, impressionism, and style.

Besides, the contribution of female authors was also equally important and noteworthy. For the first time, the readers came across a galaxy of female novelists-Sarah Fielding, Hanna More, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Susan Ferrier, Miss Mary Russell Mitford, and Mrs. Radcliffe wrote with the same enthusiasm, vigor, and zeal as the male novelists did.

In addition, the Gothic novelists Horace Walpole, Mrs. Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Charles Robert Maturin, Robert Bage, Clara Reeve, and Mary Shelley tried to create an atmosphere of horror and terror which was one of the main tendencies of Gothic fiction. The gothic novel is also known as the novel of terror. Contrary to the realistic novel cultivated by Daniel Defoe and Henry

Fielding, the gothic novelists introduced a romantic spirit focusing on farfetched imagination.

A new type of novel, the novel of manners, became popular with the advent of Jane Austen on the literary scene. The cult of feeling and emotion during the romantic age resulted in the novel sensibility, as can be seen through her novels *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Sense and Sensibility*. Historical novel, a term used by Walter Scott for his novels, was popular, as can be witnessed through his works *Ivanhoe*, *Old Mortality*, *Talisman*, and *The Heart of Midlothian*.

The novel during the Victorian period was a social force that honestly reflected the social condition of the age. Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, W.M. Thackeray, and Charles Dickens depicted the realistic picture of the age by acting as social reformers. Besides, the contributions of female authors George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, and Emily Brontë are also prominent and significant. These female novelists brought glory and laurel to Victorian fiction. Hardy practiced a new genre-regional novel as he depicts the Wessex region's faithful and authentic environment in his works *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

Among the modern novelists, we come across a galaxy of fiction writers: James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, H.G. Wells, Henry James, Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, and Aldous Huxley are worthy of detailed consideration. The stream-of-consciousness novel and psychological novel are the product of the modern age. The impact of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche can be seen in modern fiction.

Among the diverse tendencies of modern novels can be included in the art form of fiction. It was a significant form of fiction writing during the modern period. The twentieth-century fiction writers discarded the moralizing sentiments and irrelevances of great Victorian writers. The compactness and well-knit plot of modern novelists are an advantage over Victorian writers' rambling and loose plot.

The modern novel has few frills and few redundancies; it is more like a well-cut garden than an opulent tropical Jungle, which the novel undoubtedly was in the hands of Charles Dickens and W.M. Thackeray.

During the early years of the twentieth century, modern novelists were preoccupied with the problems related to social life. During the Edwardian period, novelists dealt with novel ideas from every

walk of life- social, political, industrial, scientific, and so on. Being the true Edwardian, H.G. Wells, Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennet illuminated the contemporary period's social issues. In this way, the novel appeared to be a means of social propaganda.

In other words, they had a specific purpose and mission in their minds while writing novels. They focused primarily on social and domestic problems coupled with problems arising out of the ups and downs of life. In the words of H.G. Wells, one finds a fervid articulation of an Edwardian novel when he says: "A novel is, in essence, a discursive thing, a waxen tapestry multifarious interest sufficiently elastic in the form to take the whole of life within its compass-business, finance, and politics, till it becomes a proper medium for canvassing all social and political problems as they are." In their works, the Edwardians manifested problems of the middle and upper middle class as they were also the product of the same environment.

H.G. Wells' works and Peter and The History of Mr. Polly are powerful illustrations of the evils associated with the education system. In the field of education, he tried to bring social reforms. Besides his work, Tono-Bungay is a scathing indictment of modern commercial

practices and fraudulent advertisement. In addition, his work, *Kipps*, is a powerful exploration of the issues related to servants employed in business houses. The struggle between materialism, philistinism, and cultural values is the key concern in Galsworthy's novel, *The Forsyte Saga*.

Realism is the keynote of modern fiction. The two world wars change the ideology of contemporary novelists. H.G. Wells, treading the footprints of Dickens and Thackeray, realistically delineated the misery and predicaments in his novel *Kipps* and *Mr. Polly*. In George Moore's fiction, one finds the realistic portrayal of lower sections of society as is evident through his works, *A Modern Lover* and *A Mummer's Wife*; Esther Waters compassionately depicts the ugly and unpleasant side of the poor masses. In George Gissing's works, we come across pathetic lives lived by lower strata of people.

His works *Thyrza*, *The Nether World*, *Grub Street*, and *Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* are powerful explorations of life lived by oppressed people. Arnold Bennet's *The Old Wives and Clayhanger* are beautiful illustrations of life in five towns. Deflecting from romanticism, the central concern of his works is the sordid and unpleasant life of individuals. To reflect a faithful and authentic picture of

the five towns, he has minutely focused on an objective analysis of these towns.

As the twentieth century was an age of realism coupled with the social problems of the age, one finds in this age the announcement of materialism and inclination and adventure the note of disappointment against religion in the works of authors. The despair and disillusionment against modern realism in novels and the excessive focus on materialistic values were beautifully expressed by the writers of the age- Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, Somerset Maugham, Samuel Butler, and E.M Forster. Their works are replete with realistic portrayals of the absurdity of life. Butler's *Erewhon* is a satirical exposure of the modern tendencies in the modern period.

The despair and immortality of the age find its powerful expression in Aldous Huxley's *Yellow Chrome*. Those *Barren Leaves* condemn the sordid and ugliness of the age. E.M. Forster's *Howard End* is a scathing attack on the materialistic tendencies of the age in the mechanized world of England. Condemning Edwardian realism, Virginia Woolf has rightly and aptly remarked: "It is because they are spirit but with the body that they have disappointed us and left us with the feelings the sooner English fiction

turns. It back upon them, as politely as maybe, as marches, is only into the desert, the better for its soul.”

Joseph Conrad has dealt with a new type of novel in his works as he delineates the scenes of the jungle as is evident through his works, *The Nigger of Narcissus*, *Lord Jim*, *Rescue*, and *Jim and River*. He has beautifully portrayed the adventurous life of a sea full of elections and infused with struggle, adventure, and the odor of romantic adventure.

The glorification of sex, human emotions, and passions as a new tendency was the product of modern novels. During the Victorian period, there were excessive checks and hindrances on sex and love. They favored exalted married love over illegal flirtation. All this finds a blow in the Georgian novel as many of the Georgian novelists delineated sex relationships in their works. Among these, Aldous Huxley, D.H. Lawrence, Somerset Maugham, and James Joyce are worthy of detailed consideration. D.H. Lawrence's novels *Sons and Lovers*, *Women in Love*, *The White Peacock*, and *The Rainbow* are powerful illustrations of the idea of love and sex.

The influence of psychological theories propounded by Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche can be witnessed in modern writers. The stream-of-consciousness technique was popularised

by William James, Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf as a new technique. Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses* are imbued with stream-of-consciousness techniques.

Science fiction is also a new trend in novel writing during the modern age. Closely connected with the psychological novel in the modern age is the new tendency called the scientific novel. As a new genre, science fiction has opened new ways for ideas and imagination to be reflected in fiction. The novels by H.G. Wells, *The Invisible Man*, and *The Time Machine* are full of scientific love. *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley is also the epitome of a scientific outlook.

Detective fiction is also one of the popular forms of novel that emerged during the modern period. Arthur Conan Doyle popularised this tendency of fiction in his work *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. This type of fiction was further popularised by G.K. Chesterton, Edgar Wallace, Agatha Christie, and Dorothy Sayers.

Regional novels, one of the popular forms of fiction, can flourish in the modern age. Among the regional novelists of the age, Thomas Hardy and Arnold Bennet are the chief exponents of this type of fiction. Arnold Bennet's *Old*

Wives' Tales and the Clayhanger series are prominent and significant works that can be labeled as regional novels.

Biographical novels, one of the important novels, emerged during the modern period. This type of fiction concentrated on family life and won recognition during the modern period. Among biographical fiction, we can quote the examples of The World of William Clissold, The Forsyte Saga, and Clayhanger, which are representative and significant works in this direction.

In this way, a close and penetrating study of the growth of novels reflects that it had been a powerful genre to depict reality in every age.

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