

Science and Indian Literature

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Abstract: The scarcity of science fiction in Indian literature and Indian Cinema raises many questions related to our mind sets and ideologies. Since the time of the printing machine, millions of the books got published in India in English, Hindi and more than twenty five regional languages. But when we count the number of science fictions, it is horribly meager. These books found neither readers nor acclamation.

The earliest science fiction in India is 'The Taming of Storm'. This was written by the Bengali scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose in 1897. This book is rare and cannot be found in market. This was the one out of three science fictions written in English by Indian authors. The second one is 'The Return of Vaman'. This novel is written by the living legendary Indian scientist Dr. Jayant Narliker. The famous film maker Satyajit Ray also wrote some excellent science fictions. His 'Professor Shonku' is very famous series of the stories. As in Sherlock Holmes Dr. Watson is the narrator and friend and assistant of the detective agent Sherlock homes, one Mr. Tarak Chatterji accidentally becomes the narrator of the stories of professor Shonku. Mr. Chatterji is an amateur writer –not very well known. He is fond of writing the jungle stories, especially the encounters with the Sundarvan tigers. One day while wandering in Sundarvan he comes to a place where a big meteor had hit the land. He finds a red notebook. This notebook is nothing but one Pro. Shonku's diary. Some people believed that Prof. Shonku was dead, while some others believed that he had gone to a secrete place and doing very important and mysterious scientific experiment. They were sure that he would reappear in at a particular moment of future. Some of the pages were eaten by insects. Therefore it was difficult for Mr. Chatterji to narrate the stories without adding whatever was missing. Mr. Chatterji finds out the location of the laboratory of Pro. Shonku where he used to work before he disappeared. He recovers some other diaries and tries to narrate his experience.

In Hindi literature the earliest science fiction was written by Ambika Dutt Vyas around 1884. This was published in form of episodes in one of the Hindi magazines 'Piyush Prawah' published from Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The Hindi title was 'Ahchary Vrittarth'. These stories are inspired by the novel of Jules Verne. The protagonist Mr. Gopi Nath goes on a scientific adventure in the center of the earth. It is clearly seen that those stories were influenced by many science fictions written in the western world. Another notable Bengali science fiction is 'Shukra Bhraman' (travels around venues). This was written by one less known writer Jagadnanada Roy. But the first notable science fiction was written by the famous scientist Jagdish Chandra Bose. The name of the book was 'Absconded Tempest' (Palatak Toofan). This book was published in 1896. It is very interesting to note that this science fiction was based on 'Chaos Theory' which was to come after 50 years.

In Marathi literature the first publication of science fiction occurred in 1910. This work was the translation of Jules Vern's 'Man on the Moon'. In Tamil literature the all time great poet C. Shubramaniyam Bhartiya wrote a story titled 'Kakkai Parliament' (Parliament of Crows). This story cannot be called

an entire science fiction but it has some element of science fiction. Another notable short story collection in Tamil is 'Vishumbu' by Jeyamohan. In this collection, most of the stories are based on Indian Vedic science which includes Siddhayog, environmental science, evaluation of mankind and alchemy. One female writer Sujata wrote a notable science fiction 'vignana' (chirukadhaigal). The most important stories are also admired for craftsmanship and style. The most important stories in this collection are 'Aagayan' and 'Adimal'. These stories deal with the fear. We mankind feel because of our own scientific invention. Another stories 'Yaagam' narrate the influence of science on the culture of the society. The most read and admired Tamil science fiction is the novel 'Sorgha Theeu'. This novel is written by Sujatha Rangrajan. Our likes robes and can be control by another super computer. This is really interesting to note down that such a science fiction in a regional language was written in 1976. Another notable story written by the same author is 'Pesum Bommaigal'. The protagonist girl starts working in a laboratory in which her elder sister once worked in past. As soon as the elder sister went to America, the job was given to the younger sister. This young lady finds many strong things occurring in the lab. Later on she herself becomes a prey of new scientific invention was about human memory download. It is surprising that this concept is very modern in America and other European countries on how to download human memories. This concept came in to existence when the scientific came to know that our memory is in electro- magnetic form stored in billions of cells of human brain.

One of the reasons why there is the drought of science fiction is related to budget. The science fiction films cost very high. But that is neither only nor the main reason. Reviewing the scenario in Bollywood it is difficult to find such film which can be labelled as science fiction or science fantasy. The fact is that we don't have fiction writers and as a consequence we don't have science fiction films. The basic question that has pricked my mind regarding the subject is why there is a drought of Science Fiction writers in Indian literature and Indian Cinema. The answer of this question helps us to understand what kind of people are. Is it related to our mind set, ideology, beliefs, religion and culture in general. Why are our writers busy in drawing the characters in such a way that they arouse our emotions rather than delight our reason? Why is no any Frankenstein, or Cyborg, Zombie or Clone as a character in Indian Literature and Cinema? The answer of these essential questions perhaps lies in the study of Indian culture. The endeavour to answers the questions led me to some probable conclusions.

It is a preset notion among the minds of Indian students and teachers also that science and arts are at the opposite ends. They are not supplementary, but hampering factors for each other. Often and again I come across the people who believe that science is empirical while literature is not, and therefore they don't go hand in hand. The scholars who learn science don't read literature, and the scholars from the field of literature are reluctant to the new invention and new discoveries. We have very few poets or authors who are from medical or engineering

profession. This is one of the reasons why we don't have science fiction in our literature or films.

We did not provide an opportunity to study literature along with the other subjects to the students of science. There was no choice-based option in the universities of India for many years. In the same way, a student of literature remains aloof from the basic knowledge of the new theories. They are not taught the fruitful relation between these two. Though many of our universities have adopted choice based credit system for the students, there are very few universities or institutes who offer the science students an opportunity to learn literature, and vice-versa. The multi-disciplinary branch may be in some of the universities but most of them are twin-branches like physics and chemistry, sociology and anthropology etc.

We as a people are the people are without scientific approach. The new discoveries and inventions don't affect our ideologies or beliefs or life style. The evolution theory by Darwin, the conning of a sheep, the invention of the synthetic blood, the first one-celled living organism in the laboratory-all these inventions were neither discussed in our print media or electronic media. Naturally it could not change our beliefs, ideas of ideologies. We don't have the habit of redefining our religion or ideology in the light of the new discoveries and new ideas. When Darwin published the theory of evolution, there was a big uproar in the Europe and Nietzsche declared 'God is dead'. The reason is it challenged the Biblical notion that we the human being are the progeny of Adam and Eve. Look the scenario in our country, so many new discoveries and inventions made in the last year challenged our beliefs also, but there was no discussion or the thought provocation or the brain storming action on our part. For us, science and religions are entirely different entities. They should not influence each other. Our scholars never tried to redefine our religions and beliefs in the light of new scientific discoveries and scientific inventions.

Scepticism is never admired by us. Faith is a virtue. A man can have new ideas when the old ideas are deleted from his mind. If one has the pre-notion about something, the progress stops. In our country, 'faith' is admired and 'scepticism' is condemned. The salvation can be achieved through unlimited 'faith'. And if you are skeptic, hell is the only place for you. We forget that Buddha and Nanak and Mira were the most skeptical of the prevalent beliefs in the then societies.

It is quite a vital question: do our institutes encourage scientific approach? The fact is that our education system does not encourage the scientific approach, though it is one of the prime concerns declared by UGC. The reason is that our teachers are without scientific approach and they themselves indulge into so many kind of superstitious activities. Now again it is very essential that we the teachers are not for imposing our beliefs on the students but we have to enable the students to see the things from multi dimension and multi angle. But unfortunately it does not happen. Another misconception that prevails in modern India is the result of our confusion of scientific temperament with the techno savvy-ness. People now a days are using computer, net and mobile very freely, and we have begun to think that we are

becoming the people with scientific temperament. But the fact is that science and technology are two different things. Science is related to our thinking and ideas, while technology is the application of the scientific ideas to make new things. We may be becoming techno savvy people, but not with the scientific temperament. We fail to generate new ideas. We have been importing the ideas from Europe and America for last three hundred years.

This thing is reflected in our literature as well as our cinema. Mary Shelley wrote the first science fiction in 1818. And we still don't have any notable science fiction in Indian literature and Indian cinema. A dead man is revived by a doctor with the help of science, but he turns to be a monster. The movie based on the same novel also followed in 1931. The American and European movies are reflecting the variety and imagination of the writers there. But the scenario in Bollywood is quite different. The Hindi movies are unbearable for a person with a reason. The science fiction in the West reflect two things clearly-first the people are in search of super power, and they are ready to fight against nature. Nature is bound to give us death. But there are ways to escape. There are many movies based on the cloning and the transfer of the memory in the newly cloned body, and that way escaping the death. Cyborg is another kind of man. Its vital organs are replaced by machine. As we know that the greatest living scientist Stephen Hawkins is a paralyzed man but his nerve system attached with a computer and he now can do so many things. It's a small step towards the man's ultimate wish to live forever. For Indians it is against the preset notion that nothing is permanent and to think of being immortal is foolish. This is the reason we did not make synthetic blood, we could not give ideas of the cloning and so many novel things.

Talking of scientific temperament in India Dr.Narlikar says: "I correspond primarily to distribute my liking of the study with my readers. But wise the need for dealings with some friendly problems, I occasionally do write with a gregarious think in intelligence. For model, I individual graphic against astrology, miracle-makers and the unfavorable management meted out to the someone gender ripe from the arrange of state in the womb.

I am not so contented on this foremost. Tho' there is statesman consciousness of ability in the gild, the superstitions maintain to command. And yet in the late reproduction there is no discernible improvement towards a more scientific temperament.

The use or misuse of religious sentiments, suffrage banks, etc., are reprehensible. But in statesman distance than one we see superstitions overlooking the minds of our political body, disregard less of parties they concur to. Pseudoscience, vastushastra, godmen are both examples. Jawaharlal Statesman had hoped that after freedom the technological annoyance would swear delve amongst the masses. This has not happened. Indeed how can it hap if the body of the mass are themselves superstition-prone? " (An Interview to THE HINDU daily on 17.05.2005).

The time has come to re-think of our education policies and widen the perspective of our people through real education which may provoke them to observe their own behavior.