

Emerging Trend in the Indian Science Fiction: An Introspection.

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Introduction:

India has its own tradition, myth, history, culture, and way of life from the Vedic times. There are references to pushpaka viman, glassy floor, test tube babies, live telecast, space travel, and various other worlds. They are termed as proto-Science Fiction. Now, there is tremendous progress in the field of Science and Technology. On the one hand we are agriculturists. On the other hand, we are in the super-industrial era. The science fiction of today sets the trend for tomorrow. At the fork of preserving Indian heritage and the emerging global trends of the genre Science Fiction, the modern Indian man has to balance both as hereditary and environment have both made a powerful impact on our thinking process.

The Second wave of Indian SF:

Indians are basically agriculturists. Hence, the impact of industrialization has lately been felt in India. However, as Isaac Asimov analyses,

“[...] there were three steps to salvation. The first one was speech; then came writing; and then came printing. Each one represented an enormous revolution in communication and I was then waiting for a fourth revolution and this had already started and I didn't realize it. I think the computer is every bit as important as speech was, perhaps about half a million years ago, or as printing was five hundred years ago. I think it has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, the way we think and we'll never be able to go back again short of destroying society by a nuclear war or something like that [...]”¹

(Mukul Sharma ed., High- Tech Interview – Isaac Asimov, 2001, Bombay, “The Times of India”, Nov, 1988.)

Due to the success of Man landing on the Moon, the discovery of *quarks*, the advent of TV, computers and the internet, deciphering the human genome and cloning, the movement gained momentum by the progress in the scientific-technical sphere in the sixties. With these elements in the background, people in the scientific world began writing science fiction in journals with the aim of popularizing science.

With the torch bearers Sathyajith Ray and his team, the Bengali Science Fiction laid a foundation for the progress in this direction. As Subha Das Mollick observes, “Both the real scientist Bose and the fictional character Shanku had turned their scientific enquiry to understand the ebb and flow of life’s energy trampled over by mankind.” Further, as Isaac Asimov experiments with the variations in the “Three Laws of Robotics” so does Ray with Artificial Intelligence in his stories. Simultaneously, Hindi SF gained momentum with the writers Aacharya Chatursen Shastri, Gurudutt, Yamuna Datt Vaisnava Ashoka Naval Bihari Mishra, Kailash Shah, Maya Prasad Tripathi, Shukdev Prasad and Devendra Mewari.

Writers in their majority of works overcame the ‘Frankenstein Complex’ during the second wave of Indian Science Fiction which began in the seventies. Marathi Vignyan Parishad, Mumbai (MVP) conducted SF story writing competitions. Drs. Bal Phondke and Jayanth Narlikar emerged as the pioneers in the field of Indian Science Fiction in general and Marathi Science Fiction in particular.

In Marathi, Dr. Jayanth Narlikar, Dr. Bal Phondke, Niranjana Ghate, Subodh Jawadekar, Laxman Londhe, Arun Manday, Dr. Yashwant Deshpande, Meghashri Dalavi, and others have contributed for the growth of SF. The man behind success of Marathi SF is A.P.Deshponde.

Connecting with the west:

India was connected with the western world by the pioneer attempt made by the magazine *2001* from New Delhi in 1988. The team had an

interview with Isaac Asimov over satellite. The event was carried out by Chandan Mitra (Coordinator) Mukul Sharma (Editor 2001), and Jug Suraiya (Times of India). The notable another event was the publication of *It Happened Tomorrow* (1993) edited by Bal Phondke. It contained a dozen and a half short stories which were in various vernacular languages in turn they were translated to English. MVP held the first session on Indian Science Fiction in a conference in 1996. Indian SF Criticism took off with the publication of Dr.Srinarahari and Upinder Mehan's articles in Global journals and magazines in 1996 and 1998 respectively.

During this time, the following scholarly works were produced namely, Prakash S. Rao's "Isaac Asimov's Works of 60's and 70's: A Study in Scientific Humanism". M.Phil Thesis. (Hyderabad: Osmania U), 1982; Veena's "Paradoxes of Order in the Fiction of Isaac Asimov". M.Phil Thesis. (Hyderabad: Osmania U), 1982; S.Guruswamy's "Asimov's Vision of Utopia in Foundation's Edge and Foundation and Earth." M.Phil Thesis, (Thiruchirapalli: Bharathidasan U), 1989; Fiat Homo- Let There be Man – Apocalyptic Renewal in Asimov's Foundation Series" (1992) by K.S.Purushothaman and. Panneer Selvam's "Credibility Criterion in Asimov's Foundation Trilogy" (1997).

Golden Era of ISF:

The prominent SF writer in English are Archana Mirajkar, Ashok Banker, Rishab Dubey, Sami Ahmed Khan, Kalpana Kulashrestra, Nellai S Muthu, Anil Menon, Anupam Bhattacharya, Arvind Risbud, Arya Madan Mohan, Ashok Banker, Bharathi Ramachandran, Bhushan Kapoor, Dilip M.Salwe, G.P.Phondke, Harshita Verma, Jayanth V. Narlikar, Kenneth Doyle, KRK Mohan, Laxman Londhe, Meyhna Sujata Mitra, Mukul Sharma, Niranjana Gagte, R.N.Sharma, Radha Ganguli, Rajashekhara Bhoosanoor Mutt, Ramesh Deshpande, Salil Chowdhary, Sanjay Havanoor, Sathyajit Ray, Shalini Tuli, Sourabh Bhattacharya,

Srinarahari, Subodh Jawadekar, Surekha Nagar, Surekha, Harish Goyal, RR Upadhyaya, HS Bairnatti, Dip Ghosh, Salik Shah, Arvind Mishra, Balaji Navale, and others. Vandana Singh, Hari Kumar Nair, Ashish Mahabal, Divyaraj Amiya, Reema Sarwal, Superno Banerjee & others are contributing to Indian Science fiction from outside the country.

During the turn of the century, two Science Fiction associations in the country namely, Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies, Bangalore and Indian Science Fiction Writers' Association, Ayodhya tried to bring together the people of all walks of life to their activities. The first one organized conferences and workshops and the second one regularly published *Vignyan Katha*. There are online forums like *Sci-fi Katta*, *Mithila Journal* and *Kalpabishwas Kalpabignyan*. As there is an advent of technology, what's app group *Indian Science Fiction*, *International Conference SF* and others created a live online discussion on the various issues of Indian SF. The aim of the associations and forums in India is to popularize Science, to promote inter-disciplinary studies, to provide platform for creating master piece in literature by facilitating scientific temperament and also to provide a common platform for all the scientists, researchers, scholars, technocrats, academicians, students and writers to express and to present papers during the annual conferences, seminars, and workshops.

A Wide angle:

Michael Ioweit the chief editor of *Inter-Nova* from Germany accepted the Indian SF stories to be published in his magazine. On the other hand, many Indian writers like Bhairnatti and Bhoosanoor Mutt, translated the foreign SF works into the vernacular languages and published them in Indian popular magazines. The classic works are from Lucie Lukacovicova from Czechoslovakia and Frank Roger from Belgium. Yun of South Korea also invited a few stories and articles from India which are still under global publication.

Divyaraj Amiya of Tuebingen University in Germany has also made an attempt in organizing a SF conference in which Vandana Singh gave a key note address.

Asian SF Forum:

Asia – Pacific Science Fiction Conference was held in Beijing, China in which the Indians like Bhise Ram and Srinarahari took an active part in many of the sessions.

The first Asian Science Fiction Conference held at Chengdu, China also had Indian representatives like Dr.Arvind Mishra, Sami Ahmed Khan and Srinarahari.

Turning Point:

It is universally acknowledged that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is the pioneer work of Science Fiction. England has given a number of classic SF works which are often termed as highlighting "Frankenstein Complex".

The genre grew with Jules Verne and also with Carl Capek's *RUR* in other countries. However, with the able editors like Hugo Gernsback and WH Campbell, the prolific writers like Asimov, Heinlein, Robert Silverberg, Ursula Le Guin, and others the SF works found further growth in the USA.

Presently, during the Asian Science Fiction meet at Chengdu, China, many prominent world writers like Robert Sawyer observe that the growth of the genre would take a better shape with Asian countries particularly quoting the beginning reference to Chinese Liu Cixin's *Three Body Problem*.

Like SF writers of the Great Britain, Indians too had no editors to streamline the SF writing in the country. The writers found their own role models in the field. Today, we the writers are united through the social media. Every minute there would be updating the knowledge and interaction,

The time has come to establish “One India, One voice, One expression, One direction, and One goal” in developing Indian science Fiction. The destiny is the hands of the writers. A time has come to decide whether to follow the American SF, Asian SF, European SF, or should we have our own indigenous works which can reflect our myth, history, way of life and others. The answer is not so simple. We can neither neglect the progress done in other parts of the world nor imitate others. We are ourselves. In this regard, keeping in mind the works done in the past as a base, keeping the thread of progress achieved globally, we may move forward to generate the topics which may project the plausible solutions for the next generation. Instead of confining ourselves to one region, it is desirable that we may think about the next level of human society. We are aware of the global warming; melting of the glaciers, rise of the sea water level, the natural phenomena of continental drift, Earthquake, landslides, volcanic eruptions, variation of the oxygen- Carbon-di-Oxide percentage and others. There is already science is at finding alternate habitable worlds. Hence, it is desired that our works should indicate the danger zones so as to eradicate the barriers of “Future Shock” and try to show them an optimistic path to make their life better.

ⁱ Mukul Sharma ed., "High-Tech Interview-Isaac Asimov", 2001, (Bombay: *The Times of India*, Nov 1988), The interview was held by Indian scientists in collaboration with the USIS, New Delhi, on September 22, 1988.