

# Indian Science Fiction:

## History and Contemporary Trends

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### The Beginning:

In India, Science Fiction is generally accepted as a study of the impact of Science and Technology on humanity. It is a literature of change brought out by the advent of new Science gadgets or technological developments. Often, Indian SF is associated with a number of mythical elements. They are mainly, space, time, travel to the far of lands, and the attempts made for the longevity of human beings.

*Chatursgar Paryantham* in Sanskrit means that the **Space** concept of the Earth was extended primarily to the four seas which were supposed to have surrounded the Earth. According to the ancient mythology there existed mainly three worlds namely, *Athala*, *Suthala* and *Pathala*. They are also described as *Swarga* (Paradise), *Naraka* (Hell), *Bhoomi* (Earth), *Pathaala* (Under World), *Jalagola* (water world), *Mathsya loka* (the world of fishes), *Akasha* (the Sky), *Yaksha*, *Kinnara*, (world of Angels) *Naga loka* (world of snakes) and others. From the very beginning the *Chandra Loka* (The world of Moon) and the *Nakshathra loka* (The Starry world) were known to Indians. It is believed that sage Vishwamithra had created a world called *Thrishanku* (a Pandemonium). The space concept is also conceived in the form of a *shloka* (hymn): *Bharathavarsh*, *bharathakande*, *jambudweepe*, *dhandakaranya*, *godhavariya*, *dakshinapashwe*, thereby locating oneself in the continent of *Bharath* (India) where the subcontinent is named as *Jambudweepa*. *Dhandakaranya* stands for the present day Vindyan mountains. The river Godhavari thus bifurcates north and south India. In which dhakshinapashwe means the people who live in the south of Vindhayans. Similarly, the concepts of Time, Science, Travel and Lands beyond the seven oceans and seven mountains are also described at length in earlier works.

The origin of Science Fiction in India dates back to the times of the great Hindu Epics. The description in the *Ramayan* refers to *Pushpaka Vimana* which could transport people to any *loka* (world) in a fraction of a second. In the *Mahabharata* the architectural excellence such as mansions, palaces, waxed floors blended with crystalline water and *vice versa* as well as a real-time transmission of war episodes by telepathic device are all vividly described. Similarly, there are innumerable *shlokas* (hymns) describing methods for restoring youth and prolongation of the life span. As none of the above cited items have convincing scientific proof, they could all be classified under the heading Indian proto Science Fiction.

A notable Bengali science fiction Jagadananada Roy's "Shukra Bhraman" (Travel to Venus), was published in 1879. However, it is acknowledged that the first Indian science fiction in Hindi was a serial written during 1884-88 by Ambika Dutt Vyas entitled "Aaschary Vrittant" ("The Strange Tale") which was published in *Peeyush Pravah*, a magazine published from Madhya Pradesh.

Influenced perhaps by the adventure stories of Jules Verne, "Aaschary Vrittant" presented a very interesting, captivating saga of one Mr.Gopinath, the protagonist who took the breath taking adventurous journey underneath the Earth. Though influenced by western stuff the story is an original effort of science fiction writing in Hindi. However, as a literary form, Science Fiction emerged as a result of the impact of the industrial revolution. In this regard, as has been reported in many books and magazines, science fiction was born in India in 1897 with the publication of Bengali science fiction story "Agosh"/ Palatak Toofan" ("Absconded Tempest") in 1896, by Jagadish Chandra Bose. It is a thrilling story of how a turbulent sea was calmed down by an ordinary drop of oil. The story might have created an impetus for propounding the 'chaos theory' later. Around the same date the publication of the *Marathi* science fiction stories, "Tareche Hasya" (The Laughter of a Cable) of SB Ranade, and "Srinivasa Rao" by Madhav Nath have been published.

### **SF in Hindi:**

In Hindi language Jules Verne's "Chandra Lok Ki Yatra" (Journey to the Moon) by Keshav Prasad Babu Singh has appeared in *Saraswathi* on November 6, 1900. "Ashcharya ki Ghanti" (A wonderful bell) of Sathya Dev Parivarjak was published in 1908. It has been reported that during those years Kishorilal Goswamy, Lala Shivnivas Das, Gopal Babu, Ram Gahwari and others wrote works of science combined with fairy tale themes. In Malayalam, science fiction writing started late around 1910 with the publication of a translation of Jules Verne's *Journey to the Moon* was serialized in a magazine named *Kerala Kokila* printed and published in Cochin, Kerala state.

Around that time great works were published as "Chandra Kantha" and "Chandra Kantha Santhati" by Devakinandan Khatri. These stories are so popular that they have been transformed into TV serials are being beamed on National channel during prime time on Sundays even now. Around that time great works were published as "Chandra Kantha" and "Chandra Kantha Santhati" by Devakinandan Khatri. These stories are so popular that they have been transformed into TV serials on National channel during prime time on Sundays.

Devakinandan Khatri's son Durga Prasad Khatri in the footsteps of his father, published *Bhooth Nath* (1913), *Pratishodh* (1925) and *Lal Panja* (1925), followed by *Rakt Mandal*, *Swarg Puri*, *Safed Shaitaan* and other novels. The common theme of these works is to explore the possibilities of scientific inventions like the use of the nuclear guns and others. It seems that his "Lohe Ke Admi" is the first Indian robot story. As in the novel *Rossums Universal Robots* by Karl Capek, its protagonist, Professor Gamat, invents a robot which rebels against his maker. But, the robot is governed by the principles of mechanics. The story also describes many monstrous creatures.

Probably because of the negative impact of the Second World War, the development of Science Fiction in India suffered a hitch. But the movement gained momentum by the progress in the scientific-technical sphere in the sixties. Thus it reflects the global trend tempered by 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. With these elements in the background, people in the scientific world began writing science fiction in journals with the aim of popularizing science.

As a majority of people in India speak the National language Hindi, it is difficult to assess the progress of the genre in this language. Mainly because, it covers a vast area, a number of writers who might have stopped writing SF after the publication of one or two stories,, innumerable number of magazines, News Papers and other print media. However, Devendra Mewari, and Arvind Mishra are acknowledged to be the contemporary representative writers in the language.

### **Tamil:**

In yet another prominent Indian language, Tamil, the history of science fiction writing could be traced back to 1959, of course a very late beginning, in the writings of a great saint-poet C. Subramania Bhartiya whose story entitled, “Kakkai Parliament” (Parliament of the Crows) is said to have some science fiction elements. Sujatha (Rangarajan) being an editor of a popular Tamil monthly magazine *Kumudam*, has produced a number of Science Fiction works and serialized them in the magazine.

### **Bengali, Telugu and Oriya:**

The SF publication in Bengali, Telugu and Oriya are very few in number. This means that many authors might have stopped writing stories after rehearsing with one or two fiction. However, Adrish Bardban, Anish Deb, Meenakshi Chattopadhyay, Narayan Sanyai, Niranjana Sinha, Sathyajith Ray, Sirshendu Mukhyopadhyay and others are the representative writers in Bengali. The only SF pointer in *Telugu* is KRK Mohan. Mohan has written a number of SF stories and articles in Telugu. His SF anthology, *Science Fiction Kathalu* (2001), contains twenty-three stories which deal with the journey to the moon, about aliens, interior space, robots, and others. Gokulananda Mahapatra has produced six Science Fiction works in Oriya language. His *Pruthivi Bahare Manisha* has been translated into English by Jothisna Mahapatra and has been released in 2013.

### **Assamese:**

Dinesh Chandra Goswami who is a prominent Assamese Science Fiction writer opines that Hariprasad Baruan has published the first Assamese SF in *Awahan* in 1937. A story in the anthology entitled "Biracharitiyar Desh" describes the adventures of an inhabitant of the planet Jupiter. In 1938, Nagendra Narayan Choudhury published "Rasayan" in *Awahan*. This story describes the vain attempts of a scientist who wants to make the protagonist younger by ingesting a chemical in her body. Kumudeshwar Borthkur's *Atom Bomb* (1946) describes how a person hires a scientist to build an atomic bomb near Gauhati and tries to make it explode near the mountainous region of the state of Meghalaya.

"Mini Noise" (1966), by Saurabh Kumar Chaliha published in *Asom Batori*, is the first story which has all the attributes of a Science Fiction Story. It deals with the measure of controlling noise pollution. Bijoy Krishna Deva Sarma wrote SF stories in the sixties. "April 1, 2466" (Pratinidhi, 1963), "Chandralokot Pratam Manuh" (1969), *Suryyar Aapel Sonali* (1976), *Bignan Bhittik Galpaguchcha* (1991) and *Talat Tulasi Mriga Pahu Chare* (1994 ) are his contributions to the Assamese SF.

Dinesh Chandra Goswami has published short story "Kankal" (1970), anthologies *Bhadrata Mapak Yantra* (1985), *Odor Absorbing Notebook* (1985), *Ek Tarangar Dare* (1993) and *Abhinna Hriday* (2003). His SF novels include *Ejak Jonakir Jilikani* (1992), *Sabda, Nirantara Sabda* (1992) and *Usma Prabha* (1993). Goswami has published forty short fictions for the monthly magazine *Bikol*. His novels *Ati Bisista Samaj* (1999) and *Mananiya Sampraday* (2000) were adapted for television serials and Asom Bani Sadin, and also wrote a children's science fiction drama, *Tritonor Abhijan* (1985). Ajanta Das, AK Ziauddin Ahmed, Amulya Kumar Hazarika, Bandita Phukan, Manabendra Kumar Baruah, Mihir Kumar Goswami, Nabakanta Baruah, Parag Rajkhowa, Prabhat Goswami, and Rathindranath Goswami, are also contributing to the development of Assamese Science Fiction.

Right from the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century the SF translations have gained popularity in Assamese language. To name a few *Adrisya Manav* (1956) by Hemabala Das is a translation of *The Invisible Man* by HG Wells. Another translation of the work "Adrishya Manuhjon" (2001) by Abhijit Sarma Baruah. Sada's translated version *Aielita*, Kshiren Roy's translated work *Sagaror Taliyedi Kurihazar* from Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, Dinesh Chandra Goswami's *2001: A Space Odyssey* are all the milestones of progress of Assamese SF. In addition, SF progress has been remarkable over the past four decades as special editions for Bihu and Durga Puja gave way to the publication of science fiction short stories in some of the magazines. SF dramas were also aired by AIR, Dibrugarh town.

### **Kannada:**

Science in Karnataka is enriched by the world renowned scientists Rajaramanna, CNR Rao, UR Rao and others. The contributions of the research carried out on various science topics at the Indian Institute of Science, HAL, ISRO, NIMHANS, in Bangalore, various private sector laboratories, Science Departments in Bangalore, Mysore, Karnataka, Gulbarga Universities, CFTRI, Mysore, Defense Food Research Laboratory and innumerable institutions of both private and public sectors are infinite in number. Also, Science literature in Kannada language includes works in the media like Radio, Television, Drama, Street Plays, Workshops, Exhibition, Museums, and Lectures by eminent experts in the field.

The Origin of Kannada Science Fiction is traced back to the publication of Nagavarma's work *Karnataka Kadambari* (10<sup>th</sup> century) which describes an elaborate process of preserving the dead body of the protagonist Pundarika in ice. In the same century, Shivakotyacharya's novel *Vaddaradhane* was published. A story within the story is Vidyuth Chora Risi (a story of a thief). Vidyuth risi, a prince who goes to forest for hunting with his Army Commander's son Yamadanda. The latter by the art of 'Alokana' disappears. The former pledges that in future he would steal in Yamadanda's territory and subject the latter to punishment. The former learns the art of jrimbini, sthambini, mohini, vidyamanthra, choorna, yoga, ghatikanjana and others. Later on, by making use of an ointment (Anjana) the former appears as a leucodermic patient, who could disappear at any time and reappear at a different place. Thus he keeps up his pledge. A similar theme is dealt in "Godegalannu Thoori Nadeyuvavanu" by G.B. Joshi in 1976 and in "...E= mc<sup>2</sup>" by Sanjay Havanoor

Historically speaking, "Pashu Bala" by Shivaram Karanth was published in 1935. It is a story of human relationship with thinly coated science element in it. A few stories like Na D souza and others could be traced before 70's. Rajashekhara Bhoosanoor Mutt who published "Holiday Planet" in 1965 never turned back as he continues to contribute at least sixty works of SF till date which is a remarkable point to be noted here. His major Science fiction works are Manvanthara, Atlantis, Rakshasa Dweepa and others. H.S Bhairnatti has produced Triplet Sigma. Similarly, Nalina Murthy's *Mangaladha Kelagondhu Mane*, the serialized SF works in popular journals by Manu, Mattur Subbanna, Pallavi Murthy, Hariprasad, Amrutheshwar, Ananthanarayana Swamy, Kiran Prasad, Gaythri Murthy, Y.S. Lewis, Nagesh Hegde, Sanjay Havanoor, Banakar, Sathya Murthy, Sampatur Vishwanath, Sathyabodha, Malathi Mudakavi, Srinatha Rayasam, Kiran, Kanaka Malini, Vishukumar and K.T.Ghatti were published at contemporary times. A special mention has to be made of Nagesh Upadhyaya and Santhosh Kumar Mehandale who have enriched Kannada 'SF world' by contributing a number of articles and stories to the weekly and monthly magazines in recent years.

*Yanthra Manava* edited by Srinarahari is an anthology of eighteen robotic stories translated from Marathi to Kannada. *Kannada Vyjnanika Kathegalu* edited by Subhashini is published at the turn of the century. They have dealt with machine phobia, ecology, Feminism, and hardcore elements of Physics and Botany.

A pioneer work of SF story writing workshops were conducted for the children of the age group 13-15 in the entire state. DSERT Bangalore has published the workshop product entitled *101 Science Fiction Short Stories written by children (2004)*. Similarly, a workshop was conducted for the Science writers and Scientists and the workshop product was brought out as *Mundanodu Kaalada Kathegalu (2006)* by National Book Trust, India. In the same way Hampi University and KRVP conducted a workshop for Women Science Writers (2012). In addition, a Science fiction short story writing workshop was conducted by Dr.Srinarahari at the Regional Science Centre, Dharwad in May 2014. There was no restriction of age, gender, class, education and experience for the entry as it was a heterogeneous group. The participants who were between 14 and 72 in age have produced hundreds of stories in a span of 4 days. All these workshops were conducted and edited by Srinarahari and Bhoosnurmutt. In addition, *Mayura*, *Sudha Taranga*, *Tushara*, and other popular Magazines are also bringing out special editions of SF short stories.

### **Marathi:**

The first work of science fiction in *Marathi* is by an anonymous author. It is "Aprakashith Kiranaancha Prakash" (1916). But Marathi Vijnan Parishad goes even further back to the publication in 1915 of "The Laughter of a Cable" by NB Ranade. During the 30's and 40 there were sporadic attempts to write science fiction stories. It was then followed by the publication of horror stories.

The second wave of stories of the genre came with the return of England during the sixties by Dr. Jayanth Narlikar, a renowned astrophysicist. He was soon joined by many of those named and began writing for the Diwali special issues. These magazines or newspapers (festival of lights) are a unique feature of Maharashtra state. Are mainly aimed at the social, cultural, and literary state. These Marathwada and Tarun Bharat Deogiri were dedicated to the development of Science

and Technology. A number of these accounts belonged to the genus. They highlighted the principles of physics, chemistry and mathematics. Later the hard science fiction stories gave way to ideas related to biology, microbiology, archeology and astronomy. YH Deshpande, who has studied the historical perspective of science fiction *Marathi*, has expressed great concern about the current trend in these stories to point out that these stories have been written without the slightest idea of science, or this has been maliciously interpreted. This is likely due to lack of knowledge about science, or the existence of publishers who have been trained in different environments.

The *Marathi* Vignan Parishad has been promoting its own story competition of science fiction since 1972. During the last three decades they have released several writers of the genre. In 1996 he also organized a National Workshop on Science Writers in Mumbai, which devoted an entire session to the criticism of science fiction.

In January 1999 a national seminar was organized in Aurangabad which focused on the theme "Stories in Marathi science fiction: Form, Entity, Identity, Review, Analysis and Criticism."

Both radio and television have provided a platform for reading science fiction stories in *Marathi* language. The radio also has provided enough room for the representation of science fiction dramas.

The most prominent writers in *Marathi* language are Bal Phondke, Jayanth V Narlikar, Jagadish Kabare Arun Manday, Archana Patil, Laxman Londhe, Subhodh Jawadekar, Dilip M.Salwe, DA Jahagirdhar, Shirish G. Deshpande, Niranjana Ghate, Saroj Joshi, Meghashri Dalavi, Baijal Rekha, Mandakini Gogate, Kishor Kulkarni, Yashavanth Deshpande, DV Kulkarni, Gangadhar Joshi, Shubhada Gogate, and others.

### **English:**

The prominent SF writers in English are 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 Sugata Mitra, Mukul Sharma, Niranjana Gagte, R.N.Sharma, Radha Ganguli, Rajashekara Bhoosanoor Mutt, Ramesh Deshpande, Salil Chowdhary, Sanjay Havanoor, Sathyajit Ray, Shalini Tuli, Sourabh Bhattacharya, Srinarahari, Subodh Jawadekar, Surekha Nagar, Surekha, Vandana Singh and others.

The publication of the English version of the science fiction anthology entitled *It Happened Tomorrow* (1993) edited by Bal Phondke, marks a milestone in the history of the genre in India. Dr. Srinarahari (1996) and Uppinder Mehan (1998) have written reviews which are published in India and England respectively. A review entitled "Narlikar's World"(2007) by Dr. Srinarahari in [adbhut.com](http://adbhut.com) describes the entire works of Jayanth Narlikar.

### **Scholarly World:**

The system scholarships in Science Fiction India is still in its infancy stage.. However, the PhD work, "Fiat Homo - Let there be Man - Renewal apocalyptic Series of Asimov's Foundation"

(1992) by Dr. KS Purushothaman who was awarded Ph.D from the University of Madras. The Same University awarded doctorate to Panneer Selvam for his dissertation "The criterion of credibility in the Foundation Trilogy".At the turn of the Century." Dr. Srinarahari MH received a Ph.D. in English Literature from Kuvempu University for his dissertation "The Robotic Works of Isaac Asimov: A Study" (2003). Dr. Laxmithai also received a doctorate for work on Ray Bradbury. Mrs. Geetha has received a Ph.D degree from BITS Pilani for her doctoral dissertation for her work on Arthur C Clarke. From this Rathnakar Bhelkar has received Ph.D from Nagpur University for his work on American Science Fiction. The writer of this paper has found out that students have lot of interest in the genre Science Fiction. But there is lack of material, exposure, environment, monetary benefits, and guides for pursuing their research in the field of Science Fiction.

## **Organizations:**

### 1. NCSC

The National Center for Science Communicators, Mumbai, is successful in bringing together all science fiction writers in the last thirty years. The NCSC had organized annual contests every year in writing Science Fiction stories since 1976. Gajanana Phondke, Jayanth V.Narlikar, Laxman Londhe, Madhusudan Dingankar, Meghashree Dalavi ... are among the winners of this contest. Receiving awards for writing good science fiction stories was followed by the publication of the winning stories in magazines.

In 1996, the NCSC also organized the National Conference of Science Writers, which was chaired by Dr. GP Phondke. Activities included a full session devoted to discussion of science fiction themes. This event was called "New ideologies - New thoughts in Science Ficiton." Gangadhar Gadgil, Chandrakanth Patil and Dr. Srinarahari gave lectures on related topics.

In another project of the NCSC, Dr. Srinarahari took the initiative to translate short stories to science fiction *Marathi* to *kannada*, and then into English. The book edited by Srinarahari entitled *Yantra Manava* an anthology of eighteen stories of robots, was published in January 2001.Meanwhile, Srinarahari selected Londhe Laxman's story "The Second Einstein" as the best science fiction story in India. James Gunn, Director of the Center for the Study of Science Fiction in Kansas, published this story in the anthology *The Road to Science Fiction # 6*. The story was also published in German and Chinese languages.

### 2. IACIS (ASRC)

The Indo-American Center for International Studies (formerly Centre for American Studies Research), Hyderabad, is another organization that has promoted the scholarships in the area of science fiction. The first step in the path of progress was to provide a number of books to readers. Second PS Krishnamoorthy has helped to carry out a project and publish the book *AScholarly Guide to American Science Fiction*" (1983). The valuable material available in the centre has helped to create enough momentum to continue their scholarly research in the filed of science fiction.

### 3. IASFS

It is a matter of great pleasure to bring on record that in 1988, the magazine *2001* from New Delhi had an interview via satellite with Isaac Asimov. This event was carried out by the team work of Mukul Sharma (editor, *2001*), Chandan Mitra (coordinator), and *The Times of India* Asst Editor Jug Suraiya. I presume that this is the beginning of the II wave of the World Science Fiction movement in India. Exactly a decade later, Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies was established on Asimov's birthday. Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies was established on January 2, 1998. The day not only marks the Isaac Asimov's birthday but also it coincides with the centenary publication of "Agosh" by Jagadish Chandra Bose. The main objectives of the Association is to provide materials and guidance to students who wish to develop courses for Masters and Doctorate in the field of Science Fiction. From its inception, IASFS has organized 11 National and 3 International Science Fiction conferences at different locations in India. The first conference was attended only by a dozen delegates. But from the second conference there was no turning back. The Association had began to collaborate with many colleges, universities, and local bodies and organizations in organizing conferences. Hence, it could bring together hundreds of scholars, scientists, writers, publishers, critics, journalists, fans, webmasters, industrialists, technologists, farmers and readers. So far the Annual Conferences were held at Chennai, Coimbatore, Gandhigram, and Vellore in Tamil Nadu, Bangalore and Mysore in Karnataka, Varanasi in UP, Aurangabad and Pune in Maharashtra States, Pondichery a union territory and Kochi in Kerala State. During the annual conferences, participants have shown keen interest in discussing the following topics: the forms of science fiction, The themes dealt in the previous conferences are Artificial Intelligence, Cinema and SF, "Science Fiction Film : Seventy Years of Synergy, 1926 to 2003", A Tribute to Kalpana Chowla, Fantasy, Genetic Engineering, Hindi SF, Indian Responses to World SF, Indian SF in Vernacular languages, Literary Criticism on Indian SF, Myth, Fantasy, Popular Science, Genetic Engineering, Robotics, Information Technology, Nanotechnology, Print versus Visual SF, Science and Science Fiction, Science Fiction theme: Time, Science Fiction Today, Science Today, SF and Mainstream Fiction, SF Narration, SF the Human Aspect, Women in Science Fiction and others. IASFS had also arranged an SF Story Writing Workshop conducted by Eric Miller and story reading session by respective SF writers.

The association has represented the country at international conferences. Ms. Geetha (member of executive committee of the state of Rajasthan IASFS), who is also a scholar of the genre, represented our country in a sci-fi mega-event: the World Science Fiction Conference held in Glasgow in August 2005. She also received the year's prestigious award granted by the Foundation Bursary British science fiction. In addition, Dr. Panneer Selvam (Secretary for South India of IASFS, who is based in Chennai) has represented India at the Conference of science fiction, Kansas and was chairman of a session in the gender conference held in the UK.

The Association publishes quarterly magazine entitled Indian journal of Science Fiction Studies. Apart from the publication of scholarly papers presented during the previous conferences, the journal devotes several pages to publish the best stories of Indian writers and a space for readers' views. The Association publishes monthly Newsletters also. Based its headquarters at Vellore, Tamil Nadu, Dr. Purushothaman and Dr. Srinarahari are the President and General Secretary of the association respectively since its beginning.

#### 4. ISFWA

The India Association of Science Fiction Writers was established in Varanasi in 1995. Currently R. Upadhyaya is its president. It has established a discussion over internet called yahoo group which is carrying out online discussion on the latest trends, progress and informs upcoming events. Dr. Arvind Mishra has taken lead of the group.

#### **Eye Sifi:**

Most of the films in the past were produced with the element of fantasy and not with exact Science. However, the first Indian Science Fiction film is about living woolly mammoth Kaadu or *The Jungle* released on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1952. It was a Tamil-American SciFi film directed by . William Berke starring Caesar Romero, Rod Cameron of Hollywood and Sulochana an Indian actress in the lead role.

A number of Indian films in the nineteen sixties have shown imaginary worlds with imaginary beings. They are: the paradise, the pathala (an imaginary world in the centre of the Earth); the fairy worlds such as Gandharva lok , Yaksha lok; Kinnara lok (All these are the worlds of Gods, Semi gods, angels and others); Mathsyala lok (an underwater world with aquatic beings that have mermen and women: human bodies in their upper part and the lower part resembles the scales of fishes, but usually with divine qualities); Chandra lok (the Moon); Naga lok (the world of snakes) and others.

Indian myths usually are associated with the co-existence of human beings with other forms of life. For example, visit any Hindu temple and it can be seen that the Hindu gods are chimeras created with the combinations of man/woman bodies with the faces of elephants, lions, pigs, monkeys, and others. The female gods are of two types namely, divine and awesome. Invariably, the second type of gods are endowed with a variety of weapons held in each of their ten hands. Further, each god has his/her own animal vehicle ranging from lion to mouse. *Dashavathara* (directed by B. R. Panthalu, 1964) is a film produced in all the Indian languages and which describes the ten avatars (reincarnations) of the god Vishnu. With each of his avatars the god kills evil and protects good. Just like with some early western Science Fiction tropes, evil used to be associated with monsters or (non-humanoid) aliens. In *Dashavathara* , 'good' is associated with human beings but with an exception in that they are invariably the devotees of that particular god or goddess.

The concept of air travel can be traced back to the depiction of 'pushpaka vimana' in legends that probably date back as far as 3500 BC. This is the earliest record of such travel in the history of humankind - the airplane belonging to the richest among the Hindu gods - Kubera - in the Ramayana. 'Technological gadgets' and vehicles like magical carpets, a sofa, a cot and others were made use of in films where transportation was required to other worlds. But in many films a few lines of incantation of Vedic hymns were sufficient to transport the protagonists (usually saints, and gods, or representatives of gods) from one world to another.

Interstellar travel is very common in these mythological films. In fact, Narada a character in many of those films. He is often referred to as 'thriloek sanchari' meaning one who could travel in all the three conventional worlds; namely, the Earth, Paradise and the Hell or the underground

world. *Makkala Sainya* (directed by B. R. Panthalu, 1964) is the first social Kannada [a 1960s trend to explore issues such as feudalism, class structure, gender conflict and unemployment] movie in which travel to the Moon and life on the satellite is depicted albeit ridiculously (for example a lunar lady is portrayed with her head separate from her torso).

The concept of an H.G. Wells-type time machine is made use of in the Telugu language [spoken in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh] film *Adithya* (released in the 1990s). The protagonist goes back to the court of the king Krishnadevaraya who had ruled the Vijayanagar Empire (18th century) It also depict war weapons, which could chase the antagonist and instantaneously kill him wherever he might be. The well known among them is Vishnu Chakra - the circular disc weapon of god Vishnu, the preserver of human beings. Each war scene has special effects in for weapons that could bring rain, fire, and total destruction.

Conversely, the idea of tele-viewing is found in the Hindu epic, the Mahabharath. In it the King, King Dritharashtra, though visually handicapped is endowed with special powers at the time of the war. And so his half brother Sanjaya makes the King witness the war, much as if it was the live telecast we see today.

The use of science and technology in films is typically exemplified by the use of different kinds of arrows in war. These arrows vary in their destruction and effect. Some could bring instantaneous rain or fire, while other could split the Earth or the sky into pieces. There were even arrows, that could also bring total destruction. On the other hand , the protagonist's arrows could frequently neutralize the effect of the enemy's. In a social entertaining, or social escapist, film *Muqabla* (1996), particularly in the title song sequence, there is a transformation of the man into a machine and *vice versa*. In short, there are plenty of examples of technology, albeit magical technology, playing an important roll in the films. There is also magic as well as biology.

In the 1960 film *Paras Mani* (a precious stone) the bead could bring back life and restore youth. . Thus dealing with the feature of longevity and reincarnation. The prolongation of life span could be witnessed if one studies the mythical character of Bhishma. He is a male character in the Mahabharath and the brother of the great grand father of Pandavas and Kouravas. He remained unmarried till the end. As *per* the legend, he was the '*iccha marani*' (meaning he had the blessings of God to choose his time and date of his death). Another magical biological phenomena often portrayed is that of the body which could also expand as per the need of the hour. To cite a few examples: the character of Hanuman in the Ramayana has a tail that extends to unlimited length at the court of Ravana in Sri Lanka, and the Vishwaroopa darshan of Lord Krishna in Bhagawatha has a body that can be compressed. There are numerous other examples and even biotechnology of 'test tube babies' features in Mahabharatha with the birth of Dronacharya.

This represents just a cross-section of the SF and fantasy tropes to be found in Hindu mythology portrayed in films. In the past, particularly during the Vedic age (prior to the Ramayana before 3500 BC), magic played an important roll. Since it seems to have certain resonance with today's science, and as they have been narrated in fictional form, is this Science Fiction? Whatever, Indian mythological films do provide a rich tapestry of magic and fantasy. They capitalize on traditional mythological beliefs that many in the general population still hold. Neither the writer nor the

producer need explain to the viewer any scientific principle because, the audience has grown up with such beliefs.

Though the advent of computers has brought in a revolution in cinema, it is a sorry state of affairs to note that films still largely focus on a belief in the unbelievable: fantasy rather than SF. Consequently anything is possible in India's mythical films. However one could say that these are all (what Brian Aldiss and John Clute might call) Proto-Science Fiction. Proto-SF because, one cannot exactly explain the scientific principle involved in each act, though there is a certain SF echo. Conversely, with India's first true SF film, *Koi Mil Gaya*, most of the questions or phenomena are explained as if scientifically.

*Koi Mil Gaya* (August, 2003) is directed by Rakesh Roshan starred by Rithik Roshan. The sequel *Krrish*, *Krrish II* and *Krrish III* were also released subsequently. However, it is an adoption of *ET.I Robot* is yet another film in which Rajani Kant and Aishwarai Rai have acted. It is full of Robot manipulations. The scifi movies in Indian languages depict more of romance rather than the elements of science. Hence, it is appealing to all the sections of the society.

### **Over the Web:**

Formerly Dinakar Charak's Adbhut.com and Arya Madanmohan's Indianscifi.com were very popular in publishing series of SF short stories. As is the case of innumerable SF magazines of the world, these magazines also closed a decade back. However, Kalkian and muktware are bringing out online publications of Indian SF works. Indian sci-fi.com a yahoo group is discussing contemporary Science fiction topics over the net every day. Hence, it is keeping Indian SF alive.

In conclusion, as we know that out of the known 1635 Indian languages spoken in India, the constitution of India has recognized 22 as official languages. Hence, presently it is difficult to go deeply into the print media of those languages and to have a comprehensive study that too by a well established Science Fiction Scholar. However, as James Gunn's says "... the fear of the machine, fear of the creature rebelling against his creator ( ...) people without depth of thought, religious fanatics, short-sighted unions "(Gunn, *Isaac Asimov: The Foundation of Science Fiction*, Oxford: OUP, 1982, 59-60) applies to Indian SF writings also. Most of the people believe the unbelievable. They are mostly on the threshold of skepticism and rationality. Hence, It is seen that during the last century, Indian SF works show an impact of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Rossums' *Universal Robots* by Karl Capek, the novels of HG Wells, "The Machine Stops" by EM Forster and others. But it is noticed that year by year the stories tend from skepticism to rationalism and show a strong tendency towards positivism. Hope and optimism, the "mantra" of American philosophy, can also found in the content and form of science fiction stories of India as the latest trend of development.

In general, the themes of the Indian Science Fiction range from hard science fiction elements to the light fantasy. However, the use of myth runs as an undercurrent in these works. Moreover, most of the stories are highly philosophical and quote or based on the hymns of Rigveda, Kathaharithsagara, the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, the Bhagawat Geetha and the Bible.

Most of the Indian SF works could be classified under the head "robot stories" or "alien encounters". But in these stories homosepians triumph over the Extra Terrestrials. The *Gadenken experiment* is carried out in the areas of Ecology, Biotechnology and Physics. Certain stories are about humanoid and supercomputers. However, the stories moralistically tend to advocate the qualities of a perfect human being. As most readers do not know the SF genre in depth, the elements of language has to be targeted to the base level.

The efforts of the media in highlighting the SF events are to be appreciated. In this regard, it shows a positive signal in the response of youth to the genre. Jnanavahini, an educational channel radio on the FM band has released the speech of Dr. Srinarahari several times. He spoke mainly about the concept, history, forms, movements and latest trends in global and Indian science fiction. The nation's leading newspaper "The Hindu", covers the major events of science fiction in India, and some magazines tend to include articles and stories of science fiction. Likewise "The Times of India", The "Deccan Herald", "Bangalore Mirror", "Tehelka", and others, have highlighted the SF events so far. Young people with innovative ideas are currently working in this region. We are also grateful for the seminar, workshop, conference organizers, publishers, advertisers, and other institutions which are sponsoring programs of science fiction. As Bal Phondke has suggested the way in which Indian SF can progress, "What is needed, is cross-fertilization of the Indian offerings with the fare world at large has to offer. For that to occur, an introspective look at the entire spectrum of Indian science fiction would have to be resorted to, so that the strengths are recognized and the weaknesses identified."

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