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COMPILED IDEAS ON POPULAR FICTION OR PULP FICTION; IT'S RISE AND RELEVANCE IN
UPCOMING RESEARCHES IN INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE: AT A GLANCE

Dr. VIKRAM PATEL

Sr. Lecturer in English, B. S. Patel Polytechnic, Ganpat University Campus, Kherva.
vikramnpatel@gmail.com



Dr. VIKRAM PATEL

ABSTRACT

At the simplest, what is not serious or artistic literature is all popular literature. However, critics are of the opinion that the word 'Popular' here does not necessarily mean opposed to artistic literature or serious literature, rather it synonymously means successful literature, a kind of literature which is widely read for specific purposes. Popular literature does not mean bad literature; rather it is a kind of writing which is written in a lower category of language and other literary elements. The researcher is strongly in the opinion that fiction is top-most favourite genre for literary research studies in the recent time in India. Very few genres are as cultivated as fiction during the present time. To his limited senses, the researcher observes two different types of fiction writings in literature. One may be called a serious fiction and another may be called a popular fiction or pulp fiction. The present trend is that even the upcoming literary research scholars conventionally choose serious fictions for their literary research project. Few scholars go for what is exactly called popular or pulp fiction though it also has deeper and wider possibilities for research investigations. The first decade of the 21st century witnessed a whole brigade of new generation popular or pulp fiction writers with their whole set of creative range of fiction writing in Indian English literature.

The present paper is a sincere attempt to draw the attention of upcoming research scholars in Indian English literature to develop their literary taste for popular fiction so that serious reading with scientific inquiry, objectiveness, systematic analysis with relevant hypothetical questioning can be possible.

Key Words: Compiled, Popular Fiction, Rise, Relevance, Upcoming Researchers

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Introduction: Popular Literature versus Serious Literature: A Glance

At the simplest, what is not serious or artistic literature is all popular literature. However, critics are of the opinion that the word 'Popular' here does not necessarily mean opposed to artistic literature or serious literature, rather it synonymously means successful literature, a kind of literature which is widely read for specific purposes. Popular literature does not mean bad literature; rather it is a kind of writing which is written

in a lower category of language and other literary elements. Various forms of popular literature include popular fiction or Pulp fiction, action adventures, gothic, fairy tales, dystopia, young adult, autobiography, biography, travelogue and story books. Newspapers, periodicals and magazines, cookery books, books on childcare, literature for children, jokes books, books on motivation, spiritual knowledge books etc. which are read by a vast community of readers, can be considered in the category of popular literature. Engineering and medical books or science and technological books, or books for specific purposes like books on general knowledge, books for the preparation of competitive exams or entrance exams can be added to the list of popular literature in the modern time. The researcher believes that *Periodical Essays* of Richard Steel and Joseph Addison can also be taken as a form of popular literature as such literature was widely read and discussed by the middle class people in coffee houses during the time. Victor E. Newburg in his book *Popular Literature: A History and Guide* traces the origin and development of popular literature in English to the beginning of the printing press in the year 1897. Popular literature was specifically printed for the people of the lower class community who could not afford expensive books of serious literature. Also their level of language skill was not much advanced. In the modern time, popular literature is also called paperback literature, or yellow page literature, as it is mostly printed on a low quality paper, or recycled paper. It is also called cheap literature as such literature is sold at a comparatively lower price. The wider readership of such a literature consists of low educated or low community of people. Popular literature is generally read for 'Time Pass' purpose, mostly during long travels or in leisure time. Such a literature is generally sold at railway station book-stores, bus-stop book-stores, on the busy streets and highways or by the handcart pullers, peddlers and venders at the university or college entrance gates, or some specific trade-expos, book fairs or at the corner of shopping malls or online shopping websites in recent times. Even some of the serious literature books are printed in paperback or produced on the pulp papers as cheaper version or say low price version. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica:

"Popular literature today is produced either to be read by a literate audience or to be enacted on television or in the cinema; it is produced by writers who are members, however lowly, of an elite corps of professional literates. Thus, popular literature no longer springs from the people; it is handed to them. Their role is passive. At the best they are permitted a limited selectivity as consumers."

Generally popular literature differs from artistic literature in the sense that it has very short-lived. It can be considered as 'Read and Throw' type of literature. To be brief, such a literature is not necessarily for the next generation but for the contemporary generation. The prime objective of such a literature is entertainment. It has not necessarily to do with the artistic way of writing a piece of literature. The language or the diction does not necessarily bear high seriousness. It has very low permanent value. It may attract or appeal to the present generation not necessarily to the generations to come. The nobilities of human life may not be found well expressed in the fictional world of popular literature. Popular fictions mostly aim at the middle class community as readers, so the characterization and thematic concerns are always associated with the lower community of society. The prime objectives of popular literature writers are entertainment, grabbing public attention, or earning money. On the contrary, artistic literature is an everlasting sort of literature. In his article on the official website of *The London School of Journalism*, John Oldcastle (October 2000) has pointed out some of the basic characteristics of literary writing like artistic merits, creative genius, didactic purpose, creative and artistic intent, profundity of language and arty rhetoric and prosody, creative imagination, nobility of theme like life, love, war or death, and description of life as a whole expressing nobilities of mankind. One has to be very aware of the fact that the above exclusive characteristics of serious literature are not necessarily strictly followed in Popular Literature.

The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica write:

Popular literature includes those writings intended for the masses and those that find favour with large audiences. It can be distinguished from artistic literature in that it is designed primarily to entertain. Popular literature, unlike high literature, generally does not seek a high degree of formal beauty or subtlety and is not intended to endure. The growth of

popular literature has paralleled the spread of literacy through education and has been facilitated by technical developments in printing. With the Industrial Revolution, works of literature which were previously produced for consumption by small, well-educated elites became accessible to large sections and even majorities of the members of a population. The boundary between artistic and popular literature is musky, with traffic between the two categories according to current public preference and later critical evaluation. While he was alive, Shakespeare could be thought of as a writer of popular literature, but he is now regarded as a creator of artistic literature.

The following document originally produced by Community College of Denver on the web address <http://www.ccd.ccoes.edu/-ksmiles/lit/115/sersuprf.html> in tabulated form uploaded on <http://webs.anokaramsey.edu/stankey/Literat/Other/SerPopLt.pdf> makes the difference between Serious versus Popular Literature very clear

Serious Writing	Popular Writing
Definition:	Definition:
1. Writing that requires philosophical thought by both the reader and the writer.	1. Writing that deals with the obvious or with the easily seen.
2. Writing that deals with deep moral problems of life that affect people permanently.	2. Writing that deals with temporary problems.
Purpose:	Purpose:
1. To help us gain insight by expanding our minds and our awareness of life.	1. To provide escape and entertainment for the reader.
2. To present a universal truth about life as the author sees it. (Thematic intent)	2. To make the reader's dreams come true.
Identification Mark:	Identification Mark:
1. Original plots, realistic characters. At the end, the reader will have to make decisions about the way the author and/or characters solved the problems. Ambivalent endings.	1. Predictable plots often involving a god-like figure who solves everyone's problems. At the end, all the reader has to do is sigh with satisfaction. Happy endings.
2. Characters are usually individuals and may act in unexpected ways as do real people.	2. Characters are often stereotyped ("good guys wear white hats") and predictable in their actions or decisions, as real people are not.
3. Characters make major personality changes slowly and, sometimes, painfully.	3. Characters make major personality changes easily and quickly.
4. View of life is complex; world and characters are seen in shades of grey, having both good and bad qualities.	4. View of life is simplistic: world and characters are seen in black or white, as good or evil.
Life Expectancy:	Life Expectancy:
A well-written serious book has a good chance of being a permanent addition to the literature of a country and/or the world. It can sell immediately after publication or be ignored until many years after the author is dead.	A well-written popular book usually has a temporary, although well-paid, existence. It can be tremendously successful for a short time and the author gets as wealthy as income taxes allow, then is forgotten just as fast.

Origin of Pulp or Popular Fiction

The origin and gradual rise of pulp fiction or popular fiction or say paperback fiction root back in late 19th century and early 20th century pulp American magazines. The Literature Network Forums holds the view for the origin of the pulp fiction in late 19th century, such as *Weird Tales* and *The Strand*, which featured the work of such prolific literary masters as H.G. Wells, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, J.R.R. Tolkien and Edgar Rice Burroughs. By the early and mid-20th century, pulp fiction, with its mix of science fact and speculative fiction, launched a new era and genre of fantasy stories with compelling alternative or parallel realities.

An article on www.goodreads.com rightly traces origin and the gradual rise of pulp fiction as:

The earliest pulp stories were printed in pulp magazines from 1896 through the 1950s. Pulp magazines were the successor to the penny dreadful, dime novels, and short fiction magazines of the 19th century. The term pulp fiction can also refer to mass market paperbacks since the 1950s by publishers such as Ace, Dell, and Avon. After the year 2000, several small independent publishers released magazines which published short fiction, either short stories or novel-length presentations, in the tradition of the pulp magazines of the early 20th century.

Tabish Khair from Aarhus University, Denmark in his scholarly article *Indian Pulp Fiction in English: A Preliminary Overview from Dutt to De*, published in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* (2008; 43; 59):

Its roots go back to the decline of the Downloaded from circulating library in late nineteenth-century Europe, when the popularity of circulating and serialized novels (like those of Dickens) gradually metamorphosed into shorter single volumes – particularly of such genre fiction as the detective novel and science fiction – meant to be sold to individual buyers. This tendency was reinforced in the early twentieth century by the rise of the mass culture of industrial printing, radio and cinema, as well as the increasing popularity of older revived genres like the romance and gothic horror.

Popular Fiction; Pulp Fiction, Paperback Fiction, Commercial Fiction: Various Definitions

The study of various definitions of popular fiction, pulp fiction and paperback fiction by various thinkers may bring to the surface, the actual understanding about the genre of popular fiction. Cambridge Dictionary (online) defines the term 'Popular' as liked, enjoyed or supported by many people and the term 'Fiction' is defined as the type of book or story that is written about imaginary characters and events not based on real people and facts. To merge the above two meanings into one line, the phrase 'Popular Fiction' can be understood as a book or a story based on imaginary situations and characters which is liked or supported or read by many people.

Some of the sub-genres of popular fiction are romantic fiction, realistic fiction, fantasy fiction, mystery or detective fiction, crime fiction, spy fiction, horror fiction, sports fiction, thrillers, science fiction etc. Generally popular fiction is supposed to be read for various purposes like time-pass, entertainment, showmanship, or improving the skills of second language. Such a literature is written keeping in mind the masses as target audience whose language level is comparatively low. In this way, it helps the beginners with low language aptitude to build self-confidence to dare to read the second language literature. Such a reading gives temporary escapist entertainment to its readers from the drudgery of everyday reality.

Purnachandra Rao from Acharya Nagarjuna University, Andhra Pradesh (India) in his Ph.D. thesis uploaded on Sodhganga quotes observations of Michael Blowhard regarding popular fiction in his article *Taking Jackie Collins Seriously* as:

Popular fiction is fiction that doesn't hit you primarily through the intellect or through the finer-centres. It's more direct than that. It hits you through your funny bone, or it gives via your intellect-in gossip circuits, it travels directly to pelvis.

Amanda Credaro in his *Popular Books versus Quality Literature* conceptualises popular fiction by using some of the most authentic references as:

Popular fiction may be considered to be that element of literature which is popular in the sense that it is frequently 'requested or desired' (Roget's Thesaurus, 1980: 865) or it is 'favoured' by the users (*Ibid*: 897). Materials of this nature are not considered to be popular in the sense of 'celebrated'

(*Ibid*: 873) or 'approved" (*Ibid*: 931). Indeed, Foster (1995:188) notes that while it appeals to many readers, and may well contain a strong moral message; 'popular' fiction does not extend readers and is often poorly written. Although the pages in-between the covers were a dingy cheap quality, the covers were beautifully decorated, many times with lurid portraits of pretty women in various stages of trouble, and the handsome men attempting to rescue them.

The editors of *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction (2012)* David Glover and Scott McCracken define popular fiction on the very first page of the same edited book as:

Popular fiction is frequently thought of as those books that everyone reads, usually imagined as a league table of bestsellers whose aggregate figures dramatically illustrate an impressive ability to reach across wide social and cultural divisions with remarkable commercial success.

Matthew Schneider Mayerson in his *Popular Fiction Studies: The Advantages of a New Field* defines Popular Fiction as:

Popular fiction is defined by what it is not: "literature." Most critics openly or implicitly adhere to the following claims: Whereas "literature" is indifferent to (if not contemptuous of) the marketplace, original, and complex, popular fiction is simple, sensuous, exaggerated, exciting, and formulaic (for example, Gelder; Radway; Makinen; Warpole). "Real" writers spend decades agonizing over each sentence, while genre hacks produce a new paperback each year, to be "consumed" in airports and quickly discarded.

Popular fiction or pulp fiction is a sub-genre of popular literature. It is also called pulp fiction or genre fiction or quick-read fiction. The Vintage Library traces the origin of Pulp fiction in the magazines of the first half of the 20th century which were printed on cheap "pulp" paper and published fantastic, escapist fiction for the general entertainment of the mass audience. It further explains that the pulp fiction era provided a breeding ground for creative talent which would influence all forms of entertainment for decades to come. Dictionary.com defines pulp fiction as: 'Fiction dealing with lurid or sensational subjects, often printed on rough low-quality paper manufactured from wood pulp'.

P-Carson Newman College, defining various literary terms, explains pulp fiction as:

Mass market novels printed cheaply and intended for general audience. The content is usually melodramatic, titillating or thrilling. Examples includes westerns, Horatio Alger novels, soft science fiction series, murder mysteries in serialized format, and melodramatic crime stories. The designation "Pulp" comes from the paper quality-these novels are usually printed on the cheapest newsprint available.

Recently popular fictions are also recognized as paperback fictions because most of such books are published with a soft or foldable or flexible cover and not traditional hard cover. It gives good transport or carriage convenience as well as the advantage of cost cutting to even common people's affordability. Paperback fictions should be understood as an offshoot of pulp fiction. Dan Cavallari explains the concept of paperback fiction as:

Paperback fiction is any type of book with a soft cover and glued binding that contains a fictional story. Novels are very often printed as paperback fiction to keep costs to the consumer down, thereby encouraging more sales. Traditionally, a fiction novel would initially be published as a hardcover book with a sewn or stapled binding, and subsequent editions of the book would be published as a paperback. The paperback version would cost less than the hardcover version, though the type was usually the same size. The paper size and quality was often equivalent as well (. . .)

Many people prefer paperback fiction to hardcover fiction for several reasons, the most obvious of which is the smaller size and ease of transport. The books are, in fact, sometimes known as airport books because they are small, easy to tote around, and commonly found in airports for travelers who want a lightweight entertainment during flights.

(Source: <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-paperback-fiction.htm>)

Rise of Pulp or Popular Fiction in India

The rise of popular fiction or pulp fiction or genre fiction or say commercial fiction in India does not have a very long history. The beginning of such writings can be viewed in the beginning of the post-modern era in India English Literature. The first decade of the 21st century witnessed a whole brigade of new generation fiction writers with their whole set of creative range of fiction writing in Indian English literature. The new generation of popular fiction and their works include Aravind Adiga's Booker prize winning *White Tigers* (2008), Chetan Bhagat with his bestselling six fictions *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ the Call Centre* (2005), *Three Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *Two States: The Story of My Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), and *Half Girlfriend* (2014), Anurag Anand's *Tic Toc- A tale of love, hate and terror* (2009), *The Quest for Nothing* (2010), *Reality Bites* (2012), Rahul Bhattacharya's *The Sly Company of People who Care* (2011), Samit Basu's *The Simogin Prophecies* (2004), *The Unwaba Revelations* (2007), and *Terror on Titanic* (2010), Anuradha Roy's *An Atlas of Impossible Landing* (2008), and *The Folded Earth* (2011), Anil Menon's *The Beast with Nine Billion Feet* (2009), Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* (2005), *Six Suspects* (2008) and *The Accidental Apprentice* (2013), Mohan Deep's *The Five Foolish Virgins* (2013), Ira Trivedi's *What Would you do to Save the World?* (2006), *The Great Indian Love Story* (2009), Anita Nair's *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), and *Cut like Wound* (2012). (Source courtesy: M. Subha & T. Jayasudha, www.eltsjournal.org).

More to the above list, there are many authors and their creative works like Anuja Chauhan's *The Zoya Factor* (2008), Ashwin Sanghi's *The Rozabel Line* (2007), Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Mehula* (2010), and M.S. Someshwar's *The Long Walk Home* (2009).

The beginning of the new trend of such creative writing seems a need of the time as a huge young force of readership is getting more and more interested in reading books. Simon Montalake in his article '*The Rise of India's Pulp Fiction*' rightly points out the causes and reasons of rising of the pulp fiction in India as:

Known as quick-read novels, they tap into the aspirations of young Indians between the ages of 16 and 24, a bulging demographic in a country of more than 1 billion people (. . .). The rise in literacy means that India now has the world's largest circulation of daily newspapers, ahead of China. Books are also popular: A recent survey by the National Book Trust estimated that India has 83 million regular readers between the ages of 13 and 35. Seventy-five per cent of those readers read books at least once a week. Their favourite leisure activity, however, was watching TV. (. . .) Most quick-read novels take place in cities like Mumbai or on elite college campuses, far from the downtrodden villagers that fill the imaginations of other Indian writers. International publishers are also tapping India's youth market. British publisher Penguin sells a range of paperbacks at 150 rupees that promise "fun, feisty, fast reads for the reader on the go." Both HarperCollins and Penguin publish "chick lit," Indian titles for female readers. Indian novelists have joined the canon of modern literature, earning critical acclaim and topping bestseller lists. It's one of hundreds of similar English-language novels set in the offices, schools, and homes of India's booming cities. Known as quick-read novels, they tap into the aspirations of young Indians between the ages of 16 and 24, a bulging demographic in a country of more than 1 billion people.

(Source Courtesy: <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/1228/The-rise-of-India-s-pulp-fiction>)

Conclusion

To sum up, Dr. Dilip Barad is a Professor of English, in Maharaja Krishnakumarsingji Bhavnagar University, Gujarat (India). He launched an open discussion on 5th January 2014, on his BLOG with the topic title *Chetan Bhagat: The Writer*. Dr. Barad blogged:

Popular fictions represent contemporary taste. If we deny its study, we will fail to understand it in future. They are cultural artefacts which require serious attention. They have an appeal to the readers/viewers/audiences, which cannot be asked to abstain from. One should make a genuine attempt to understand it. We should not forget that it was Aristotle's study of popular Greek dramatists and it was Dryden's study of popular English dramatists, which they are with us. We have glaring examples of writers like Wordsworth, who was considered as childish and his poem, nursery

rhymes by elite critics. Today the critics are dead and Wordsworth is remembered as epoch-maker in the history of Literature.

Samuel Beckett's 'absurdity' has an appeal to the people - and after the bashing from elite critics, people started giving serious consideration- and Martin Esslin termed 'theatre of absurd'(. . .) But the important point is to give serious reading with scientific inquiry, objectiveness, systematic analysis, relevant hypothetical question.

(Source Link: (<http://dilipbarad.blogspot.in/2014/01/chetan-bhagat-writer-prof-om-juneja.html>))

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