

## Literature as a Prevailing Tool of Social Change: Mirror Image of Indian Social Milieu pronounced in Indian Literature

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### Abstract

*Writing for Social Change is based on the longstanding tradition in Western culture of using literature as a tool for social critique, as a means of calling for social change and justice, and as a tool for social transformation. Socially responsible literature may describe categorical human transgressions in a way that compels readers to examine their own prejudices. It may invoke the necessity for economic and social justice for a particular ethnic or social group, or it may explicitly examine movements that have brought positive social change. Or, it may advocate the preservation of nature by describing and defining accountable relationships between people and their environment. Indian English Literature is not an exception to the aforesaid views. It has brought numerous far-reaching changes in social, political, economic, religious, etc. fields in post-independence era. To understand the multiple strands in Indian Literature in term of new literary styles, new criticism and movements ... it is necessary to place it against the backdrop of the socio-political conditions of Indian society in contemporary time. Hence, the present research paper attempts to throw floodlight on socially committed writers and their respective literary works which caused to bring forth the discernible and sagacious changes in Indian Social milieu.*

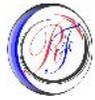
### Key Words

Reformation, Revivalism, Casteism, Communalism, Religiousism, National Unity, Democracy and Secularism, Urbanization, Industrialization, Cultural Changes, , Internal Conflict, Rural-Urban Transition; New Criticism and Modernism; Women’s protest etc.

### Introduction

Writing for Social Change is based on the longstanding tradition in Western culture of using literature as a tool for social critique, as a means of calling for social change and justice, and as a tool for social transformation. Socially responsible literature may invoke the necessity for economic and social justice for a particular ethnic or social group, or it may explicitly examine movements that have brought positive social change. Or, it may advocate the preservation of nature by describing and defining accountable relationships between people and their environment. In this regard James T. Farrell observes,

“I think that literature must be viewed both as a branch of the fine arts and as an instrument of social influence. It is this duality, intrinsic to literature that produces unresolved problems of literary criticism.... I suggest that in the field of literature the formula “All art is propaganda” be replaced by another: “Literature is an instrument of social influence”.... [Literature] can be propaganda—in the more limited sense of my definition of propaganda; and it can sometimes perform an objective social function that approaches agitation. However, it often performs neither of these



functions and yet does perform an objective social function...” (“A Note on Literary Criticism- Literature and Propaganda,” 1936)

Indian English Literature is an offshoot of the aforesaid views. One often finds the diverse Indian literatures lumped into the unified category of “Indian Literature”. Given that Indian has 17 official languages, each with its own scripts and body of literature, such a categorization is rather simplistic, erasing, as it does, differences in the various literatures. Each language based literature is shaped by its own region, politics, cultural traditions, geography, gender and class and has its own genealogy. Indian literature is not an undifferentiated phenomenon but is polytonal in expressing a range of ideas related to the social fabric from which it emerged.

Indian authors use literature as a prevailing tool of social change. Their thought provoking literary contribution has brought numerous far-reaching changes in social, political, economic, religious, etc. spheres in post-independence era. To understand these multiple strands in Indian Literature in term of new literary styles, new criticism and movements ... it is necessary to place it against the backdrop of the socio-political conditions of Indian society in contemporary time.

### **Literary Expressions of Social changes in India**

Indian has witnessed important political changes during the period after 1947 has been under consideration. Such sociopolitical ferment has played a definite role in the shaping of Indian literature. We find its manifestation in Indian literature’s multifaceted character, representing a variety of themes. It contributed to the process of nation building and addressed, at the same time, the sociopolitical problems within Indian society.

Since the survey traces the thematic trends against the backdrop of socio-historical developments, it is broadly divided into many parts: the partition, the urge for national unity, democracy and secularism in the 1950s; social issues related to village economies and continuing problems of peasants, workers, women, and other marginalized groups constitutes.

### **Literature of Partition as an Outcome of Contemporary Social Changes**

Although the proposal for Pakistan was placed before the country in the 1930s and pressure for the bifurcation of India mounted up in the 1940s, the very reality of the division of the country in 1947 came as a rude shock. It kept the Indian writers completely bewildered. The partition of the country was a political action overriding pious thoughts and prayers of the common man. A new corpus of literature grew out of the immediate experience of the partition in several Indian languages but mostly in the languages and in the language-areas directly affected by it. Thematically, these writings are culmination of the communal discourse in the colonial period but so conspicuous are they by the immediacy of the response to the massacre and suffering and degradation of all human values that they deserve special attention and need treating as a separate category.

The major aspects of the partition of the country that concerned the people are the brutalities perpetrated by both religious communities- Hindus and Muslims- against each other and the agony and suffering of leaving one’s home and familiar surroundings forever. Among the well-known works of Participation Literature is Khushwant Singh’s novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956). *Ag de Khed- The Play of Fire* (1949) written in Punjabi by the reputed novelist Nanak Singh and *Khun de Sohile-Peans of Blood*, 1948 are the twin novels dealings with the people caught in the net of communal politics. Gobind Malhi portrays the life in a refugee camp in his Sindhi novel *Ansu* (1952). Vinod Rastogi’s Hindi play *Azadike Bad* focuses on the problem of the refugees and the extent of exploitation that they were subjected to. The general thematic outline of this narrative is more or less identical and their modes of narration follow a similar pattern. However, there are some differences. For example: the literature produced in the areas directly affected by the partition has a most



important scent of a nostalgia for the lost home; the trauma of Bengal is depicted differently; the communalism and the writers' dilemma and one of the major events of free India affecting its culture and politics is the growth of regionalism. And among the hatred raised deliberately, we still see some rays of hopes by other writers who welcome for a brave new world in the last few years such as *A Strip of Land Two Yards long*, Urdu by AbdusSamad, SahityaAkademi Award 1990.

### The ideas of India

Rather more expensively, the period of India since 1947 might be seen as the adventure of a political idea: democracy. From this perspective, the history of Indian independence appeared as the third moment in the great democratic experiment launched at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the American and French revolutions. Each of these experiments released immense energies; each raised towering expectations and each has suffered tragic disappointments. One of the more arresting and troubling media images of India shows Hindu religious devotees, swathed in saffron robes, tramping the dunes surrounding the site in the Rajasthan desert where in 1988, India exploded five nuclear devices. To observers in India and abroad, this was symptomatic of a profound change in India's sense of itself. A country built on a commitment to religious pluralism and to pacifist principles seemed to have fallen to a baser mix of crude militarism and strident religious chauvinism.

Just a few years earlier, at the beginning of the 1990s, it looked like India was opening itself up to the world. Liberalizing reforms in the economy, new styles of coalition politics, the calming of secessionist ambitions, efforts to mend relations with neighbors-India finally seemed to be ready to take its part in a 21<sup>st</sup> century that was supposed to be Asia's. By the turn of the century, however, a darker, more inward mood dominated. Would India enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century with a decisively different idea of itself?

The idea of India almost reflects in the Indian authors abroad or domestic such as Raja Rao with; *The Knight's Move*, Giriraj Kishore, Hindi, SahityaAkademi Award for 1992, set in the feudal setting of the rural western Uttar Pradesh in its pivotal the attainment of political freedom. The taste of nostalgia was very deep in their works. But others also talk about the problem of the old face in society in transition from a tradition to a modern way of living, the urge for national unity, democracy and secularism such as *Astorag-The Sunset*, HomenBorgohain, Assam in 1986; *Churning of the City*, O.P. Sharma Sarathi, Dogri, 1978, SahityaAkademi Award for 1979; *Neighbors*, P. KesavaDev, Malayalam, SahityaAkademi Award for 1964 deals with the changing social scene in Kerala; *Upura-An Outsider*, by Laxman Mane, Marathi, depicts the life of the downtrodden and forceful style, authenticity of experience and its strong plea for social justice, SahityaAkademi Award for 1981 and so on.

### Rural-Urban Transition and Social Changes

The variety of nature and social traditions and rituals was partly minimized by the writers' growing interest in urban themes which provided those alternative locations and institutions-offices, courts, railway platforms, post offices, colleges, etc. The process of urbanization initiated by the colonial rule was accompanied by the technological intervention in the rural space. Indian literature presented both the rural and urban India quite often as contrasting and hostile areas of habitation.

The rural-urban opposition was further extended into nature and artifact. Most of works are critiques of mechanization, exploitation of labor for the profit of the few and also of the technology leading to dehumanization. It took a long time to exploit the technology and the machine civilization as possible store-house of new linguistic expressions. We can say that the process of the new urban-technical civilization making a place for it within the Indian consciousness dominated by the perception of a rural and a spiritual space has to



struggle to find its way because the portrayal of the city with its increasing power to dehumanization is entirely different from the earlier concerns of writers who created *graminsahitya* to uphold the importance of the village in Indian life.

There are three important aspects that Indian writers have tried to create when they talked about the rural-urban opposition of the growing urbanization as well as the breaking up the rural society particularly its structure : *Firstly*, a threat to Indian culture and they looked back towards it with nostalgia; *secondly*, they consider the rural society as the center of Indian life, the most authentic representatives of Indian life in contrast to the urban centers which stand for individualism and alienation; *thirdly*, they associated with this theme the perception of time giving the narratives a quality of vastness. We can find out these features through many works such as Premchand's *Godan*; *Chemmeen* by Thakazhi; Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja*; *Thalayodu-Skull* by Thakazhi, 1947; *Hypocrites* by Anna Ram "Sudama", Rajasthani, Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978.

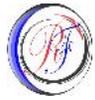
### **Emergence of Dalit Sahitya and Social Changes**

The realization of the educated middle class about the social privileges enjoyed by them at the expense of the people located within a hierarchical structure fixed forever became embarrassing as well as challenging. It was embarrassing because the writers found it extremely difficult to reconcile their pride for Hindu social organizations with the ideas of equality. It was also challenging because it prompted the writers to take a definite ideological position. Whatever be the objectives of a few social reformers, the majority in the literary community did not adopt any radical posture. Even their reformatory zeal was motivated by a general humanitarianism rather than by any concrete ideas bringing a real change in the caste hierarchy. Scholars defending the system always argued that the caste system in its original form was not hereditary but based on psychological foundations; division of the society according to different occupational groups was in fact an exercise towards the recognition of the innate psychological inclinations of men. Some of them agreed that the complete stratification of the society, denying the lower groups any opportunity towards vertical mobility, was unjust and inhuman. And some condemned it severely. But all writings on caste-inequality failed to create any significant impact until the movement against the system emerged from the oppressed themselves.

In 1920, Gandhi emphasized that removal of untouchability must be considered a major program of the Congress. And it was the year when B.S. Ambedkar (1891-1956), the greatest leader and spokesman of the Harijians, published the Marathi fortnightly *MukNayak* (1920). Gandhi and B.S. Ambedkar have a completely different understanding of the caste system. They opposed one another and the latter demanded a separate homeland for the Harijians. And in 1947, when B.S. Ambedkar was invited to be the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian constitution, Article 17 of which abolished untouchability, the conscience of the Indian elite was partly relieved.

Writers played a significant role in combating the prejudices and the tradition-bound perceptions. With a lot of writers such as Unnava Lakshminarayana (Malapalli- *The Village of the Untouchable*), Sivaram Karanth (*Comana Dudi-The Drum of Chomai*); Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay (*Kabi-The Poet*); Thakazhi (*Tottiyutemakan- Scavenger's Son*); Mulk Raj Anand (*Untouchable*), Premchand (*Sevasadan* and *Karmabhumi*); Indian literature discovered a new potentiality in the life of the low and the lowest, the deprived and the humiliated. The hero-centric world finally vanished, yielding the place to the anti-hero.

Right now, we found that the Untouchables of India had themselves chosen a new identity. The term Dalit with which they call themselves was not only to be interpreted as "the, oppressed" but also as "the proud, the defiant". Martin Macwan said "To me, Dalit is not a caste, but a moral position...one who respects all humans as equal is a Dalit". From the 1990s, a new area of publication has been that of Dalit literature. The first comprehensive



anthropology of Dalit writing was published. The first English translation of Dalit theatre, DattaBhagat's *Routes and Escaped Routes* appeared in 1994. Another first is a new Dalit journal in English begun by KashinathRanveer of the English Department at Dr. BabasahebAmbedkarMarathwada University. He has titled it *The Downtrodden India: A Journal of Dalit and Bahujan Studies*.

### Literature of Women's Protest

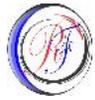
The challenging and protesting woman appeared in Indian literature by the second decade of the 20th century. The presentation of the woman continued to be one of the major concerns of the Indian literature in the 20th century as it was in the 19th century. The foregrounding of the woman began in the last century in the wake of various reform movements launched by the champions of the woman's emancipation. The problematization of the woman's role in the family and occasionally outside the domestic confined-such situations were more contrived than real and were generally part of historical novels and plays-was so intimately connected with the changes in the society, or at least in the social attitude, that the literature of this period, so far as the women's portrayals is concerned is as much a manifesto of social change as it is the record of these movements.

This century witnessed the growth of a large number of women writers in almost all the languages and despite some resistance from a small section, women writers enjoyed patronage and critical attention. All women writers, however, did not propose any radical change in the social structure or in the man-woman relationship. Some of them are so programmed by the existing patriarchal ideologies that their attitude towards women questions at its best was gentle and compassionate, and at its worst submissive and conservative. The Bengali women writers such as Annurupa Devi, Nirupama Devi, Giribala Devi; Prabhavati Devi Sarasvati...different in their styles and narrative power, sympathy and vision, hardly shared the critical temper of many of the "feminists" writers like Tagore, Sarat Chandra. But resistance to the existing tendencies of glorification of exclusive "feminine" occupations and assertion of women's professional ambition and emotional fulfillment appeared in the writings of Sailabala Shankar, better known as Triveni, in Kannada; K. SarasvatiAmmu in Malayalam; and VinhavariShirurka and Geeta Sane (*Aviskar*-1939 and *Bharatiya*-1985) both in Marathi. Another powerful writer is IsmatChuhtai - the first Indian woman writer to rebel against the feudal values and taboos jealously preserved by Muslim society.

In the last few decades, a lot of women writers have gained great achievements in Indian literature such as C. Sobti (*Listen, Girl !*-2004), Arundhati Roy, Indira Laxmi, or men writers also project a futuristic vision of the New Woman in the Indian context. Here are works asserting humanistic values over and above the taboos and superstitions of yester-years like those in *MarathandaVarma*, Malayalam by C.V. Raman Pillai.

### Conclusion

Literature has been used by Indian writers as a prevailing tool of social change. Socially responsible literature may describe categorical human transgressions in a way that compels readers to examine their own prejudices. It may invoke the necessity for economic and social justice for a particular ethnic or social group, or it may explicitly examine movements that have brought positive social change. Or, it may advocate the preservation of nature by describing and defining accountable relationships between people and their environment. Indian English Literature is not an exception to the aforesaid views. It has brought numerous far-reaching changes in social, political, economic, religious, etc. fields in post-independence era. The radical changes came into existence during pre-independence and post-independence Indian society became the thematic concern of the contemporary writers. That is why we observe the rapport between these entities. Social changes influence literature



and literature brings out various social changes. We find the same in Indian Literature irrespective of any language in which it is produced. Hence we can say: The causes of social change are diverse, and the processes of change can be identified as either short-term trends or long-term developments. Change can be either cyclic or one-directional. The mechanisms of social change can be varied and interconnected. Several mechanisms may be combined in one explanatory model of social change. For example, innovation by business might be stimulated by competition and by government regulation.

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