

Literature and Society

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The very first question is, what is Literature and what is society? According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Literature means, "Writings that are valued as works of art, esp fiction, drama, poetry, and society means," a system in which people live together in organized communities. Now the question arises, what is the role of literature in society? literature is the mirror of a society. In other words through literature you can judge any society. Literature and society is intrinsically related. Literature is inseparable from life alive, from living things which have such a close and deep relationship with their surroundings as they are sometimes invisible and go unmarked. As a work of art literature originates from man's emotional relationship with the world. As an artist, man perceives all, what is happening around him, under the compulsion of some force which works not only in him but in the entire universe he gives it expression into his work. Man's physical, Chemical and biological self as well as his personal self, strive for fulfillment by living in harmony with the variegated parts of the external world and with other human beings and literature provides this harmony. The Life-urges lives in ceaseless freedom of expression and Literature is a means to achieve it. The artist and the world around him is inseparable from each-other.

Forster is of the view that the artist has a certain duty to society. A writer or the painter or the musician is a citizen like everyone else and therefore has a duty to the community. Cary believes that "art is inalienable from life, for the artist invariably starts with life, and nothing else, and the deeper he can go into life the better it is, Carry also feels that" man is isolated and that art is his only means of communication.

So It is the writer, affected by his society its norms, ideologies, defects, customs, traditions, creates a work of art, and it is his work of art which brings some kind of awareness, reform in the society. In result society creates literature and literature creates society. In addition to it language also plays an important role in literature and society. Colonial intervention had in fact been a major blow to Indian literatures in that it privileged Sanskrit and Perso-Arabic over the modern Indian languages. Earlier a poet like Kabir had found Sanskrit "the stagnant water of the Lord's private well" while the spoken languages were "the rippling water of the running stream". But Lord Minto ignored all literatures in modern languages to assert that sciences and literature

in India were," in a progressive state to decay." The General council of Education in India found Indian literatures to be "Profane" and "Scanty" and "Obsolete". In fact British with their monolingual and monoreligious culture were unable to comprehend the multilingual, multireligious culture of India. Subie Tharu in her essay, "The Arrangement of an Alliance" has cited several examples to prove that a remarkable number of novels in the Indian languages were response to "an ideological ambience in which a totally new sense of responsibilities of the writer as well as the social function of literature and literary study featured prominently."

There are several writers and critics in India who argue that an Indian literature does not simply exist, since India does not have a common language. the famous scholar Critic Nihar Ranjan Ray once argued that literature is entirely language based and language as a cultural phenomenon is all but wholly conditioned by its locale and the sociopolitical forces that have been operating there. Each language, he argued, must have its own specific character of form style, images, symbols, nuances and associations, even its specific themes and contents. Literature of course has language specific qualities and language is a very decisive element of literature. However, language is not the sole identity of literature. It has other dimensions- aesthetic, ethical, cultural, civilization and historical. Several criteria other than linguistic have been applied to literature by critics and readers, of Class, gender, subalternity, of mythical and archetypal patterns, value systems, perceptual models and relationship between discourse and power. All these Elements that make literary translations, dialogues and comparisons possible also make literature a largely intertextual and even inter-cultural phenomenon whose writing and reading alike are controlled by historical forces. If language were the only criterion of literature, we would have to put all English writing together and call it English literature, but we speak of British, American, Australian and Canadian literatures- besides African, Indian, Pakistanior, Sri Lankan Writing in English.

Unlike in the west European countries where the nation-states and national literatures were constituted by the some historical movement, Indian literature had attained its civilizational and historical unity much before India attained nationhood. Indian literature also always transcended region and crossed linguistic boundaries. Multilingualism, as pointed out by Aijaz Ahmed, (Indian Literature in Theory, Classes, Nations, Literatures, OUP, 1993) has been the very stuff of our nationalism.

From Ancient India up to present India literature very aptly represented the society in which it was created and influenced by. Starting from the Vedas up to the modern literature presents a distinguish feature of Indian society and gives a true account of its custom, tradition, culture and civilization. Vedas are neither any individual religious work nor a collection of definite number of books compiled at a particular time. The vedic literature had grown in the course of many centuries and was handed down from generation to generation by words of mouth. It is from the vedas that we come to know that the society in that time was comprised four varnas, namely Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vairya and Surdra. The very seeds of Untouchability and communalism that were sown in that time became the cause of culmination so distinguish literature for example Mulk Raj Anand's UNTOUCHABLE and Tagore's

CHANDALIKA. These books arouse a feeling in its reader to do something for the welfare of, so called lower caste. In addition to this our great epics like MAHABHARATA and RAMAYANA is still a source of inspiration for an ordinary man. A common man finds his role model in these books and the ways in which a man should act. The works of Kalidasa, Bhasa, Bhavabhuti, Visakhadatta and others upto Jayadeva, the last great poet of classical Sanskrit (14th Century) do appeal to the essential passions of all human beings despite their class prejudices in the choice of themes and characters. ; We can not ignore two parallel streams that co-existed with Sanskrit literature – The Buddhist and Jain literature in Pali, Prakrit and Apabhramsa, language of common man in that time. Buddha and Mahavir wrote for ordinary man described way of life giving instructions and teachings and criticized the evil customs and traditions that were prevalent in the society. In addition to this sangam literature in Tamil, the second classical language of India, that produced great narratives like MANIMEKALAI and SILAPPATIKARAM, treatises of grammar like THOLKAPPIAN and the sensuous poems of love and domesticity and of war and politics collected in several anthologies, describes the society and atmosphere in which they are created.

The second collective movement that gave a solid foundation to the idea, that literature and society are inseparable, emerged in the medieval period when modern Indian languages other than Tamil also came into being with their specific creative geniuses. A new integrating factor began to shape the literature of this period in the form of the Bhakti movement. The poets of the Bhakti movement belonged to the lower section of society. They were weavers (kabir), Tailors (Nam-dev), Brick-layers (Chokkamela), small pedlars (Tukaram), Potters (Gora), tanners (Raidas), goldsmith (Akho), Women poets (like Lal Ded, Meerabai, Mahadevi Akka) also contributed in the movement. Some of them were muslims (kabir, Dedu, Rahim, Raskhan) and many belonged to the so called 'lower' castes. These poets rejected the customs and tradition like worship of vedic gods, idol worship and so on, that was prevalent in the society. In South Nayanmars and Alvars replaced the worship of the Vedic gods, Indra, Varuna, Agni. Many of these poets were hunters, washerman, barbers and poor peasants. The movement, spread over, three or four centuries, was inspired by a radical spirituality that scorned earthly power and rejected man made hierarchies of caste and creed. Most of the Bhakti poets rejected priesthood, did not acknowledge the GITA and also refused to use Sanskrit, they used the language of the common people. Bhakti became a great platform for Hindu-Muslim unity. Several Muslim poets translated the sacred books and epics of Hindus. Several Hindu poets studied Urdu and Islamic philosophy. Kabir synthesised both religions in his person and Nanak Dev included verses from sacred books of different religions in his GRANTH SAHEB. Oral traditions and folk performances became major vehicles for the message of Bhakti. Thus the movement really brought together people, religions languages and literatures, laying a solid multilingual foundation for Indian literature.

The next major phase in the making of Indian literature began with the anti colonial and reform oriented movements of the nineteenth century. On one hand the British had to be fought, for which the tradition was upheld, on the other the tradition

itself had to be re-examined as it also contained several reterogressive customs and practises like untouchability, caste distinction, denial of remarriage to widows, patriarchy that oppressed and dominated women and sati or window burning. The same concerns inspired the poets like vallathol, Kumaran Asan, Bhaiveer Singh, Jai Shanker parsed, sumitranandan Pant, K.V. Puttappa, Gulam Ali Ahmad Mahjoor, Tagore and Nazrul Islam. Which resulted in the creation of BANDEMATRAM, GODAN, UNTOUCHABLE, GEETANJALI etc.

These writers reflects a genuine respect for Indian cultural heritage and Indian values, protest against colonialism and articulate the common urge for social reform. Most of the writers positively responded to the new western literary gener like short – story, novel, biography, autobiography and literary criticism, and added them to their creative corpus by indianising them completely and relating them to India's own narrative and critical traditions.

Many writers acknowledge and deeply influenced by Gandhism and Marxism which co-existed in the 1930s since both were driven by opposition to imperialism and concern for the dispossessed section of the society. The progressive writers association which was originally established by some expatriate writers in London like Mulk Raj Anand, soon became a great Indian movement that brought together Gandhian and Marxian insights into Indian literature and society. The movement was especially conspicuous in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, Telugu and Malayalam, nonetheless its impact was felt all over India.

The Modernism of the fifties and the sixties was also a shift in sensibility and idiom as most Indian languages together experienced the taruma of development with its Urbanisation and the consequent alienation and loss of individual identity. The concerns now were more ontological than sociological and the forms was foregrounded in an attempt to subvert the existing canons and norms'. The opposition to the growing commercialisation of culture, the thoughtless globalisation that often looks like a re-colonisation and the erosion of values in public life make for a common agenda and a common plat-form for sensitive writers. That Plat form rooted inextricably in their social, historical and cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION :

The local traditions, the rythems of popular speech, the varying landscapes, ethnic communities with their life styles and styles of worship and celebration, folklores and forms of art, the general level of awareness, dissemination of diverse ideologies, different combination of external influences and native elements and the particular genius of each language have given our literatures specific tones, flavours, directions, cultural registars, semantic codes and individual histories that held a special relation to the general history of Indian Literature. Literature like life. "is born of its own impulse and man has sought immense joy in it". Hence, we can say that literature and society are inseparable, society is the life force of literature and literature is the mirror of society.

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