

Analysing Socio- Cultural Dimensions in Building Literature And Society

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The usual definition of literature emphasises that literature has always played a vital role in changing the conventions and norms of society. History tells us that literary works can influence the minds of people to such an extent that the rules which have been established strongly can also be broken.

Literature, which may be in the form of prose or poetry, it may be a story or a song, it may be in any form, or it may be in any language that people can read and understand. There is always one thing common—it is always a reflection of the society. It talks and presents a picture of the world all around. It may be beautiful, it may be ugly, it may be true, or it may be imaginative. It acts as the mirror of society and moulds its actions and influences them strongly.

But as there is always the other side of a coin, so we cannot deny the truth that society and its actions also influence literature largely. Writers and poets can write only what they have heard, seen, and felt. They can imagine the dreams for the future, but that also will be based on the present and past that they encountered.

There have been literary works that always talk about something which should be brought into the notice of the world and enhance thinking as a result. There are thousands of examples, but we can discuss various incidents that gradually changed the making of history in India and also in shaping it. Change cannot be always for good. There are movements like freedom struggle and incidents like partition, that stalked lives of many and its grieving can be felt all around.

When we look at the division of literature of any country it has not been divided according to the years but broad division has always been made on the basis of the revolutions in the country, change of thoughts any reform or any new change that gives a new direction to the society. There are thousands of examples of great writers who have given a new line of thinking to the society.

Literature has massively created a separate canon to reach out to the minds that can work in creating a different history for us. As much as we can think of the incidents like freedom struggle and partition in India affected in making the country we have today, we cannot deny how it also led to the fate of oppressed and women to be left on their own.

Partition of the Indian subcontinent shocked the conscience of the civilized people in the whole world. It was massive breakdown in the whole social structure that made everyone shudder with anguish and dismay at the cruel behaviour that showed their beastly nature. Houses and villages were looted and shops were burnt down, small children dragged and killed, and many were left to be refugees. Reading various writings like *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam describe how women became a victim of communal fury; they were abducted, many were raped and many were paraded naked in the streets with shaven heads and breasts. These tragic descriptions are terrible to imagine and brings more pain because these were initiated and executed by the people of their own country and was not a natural calamity. We can feel the trauma of the victims of partition even in the writings based on tragic themes in the stories penned down by writers like Khushwant Singh and Manohar Malgonkar. Writings that are on similar themes are Raj Gill's *The Rape*, Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, H.S. Gill in *Ashes and Petals* and K.S. Duggal in *Twice Born Twice Dead*. These writings are dealing with multiple issues that were the outcome of partition, they also talk about how much suffering was caused at the social surface and how it was responsible for lifelong trauma for all the victims and their families.

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* is a heavy text that deals with empowered rulers and political

Manohar Malgonkar in *A Bend in the Ganges* concentrates upon the painful drama of the partition comprehensively and makes an entry into the theme of the novel that narrates the power and politics leading to the most horrible time when a situation of paradox occurred between celebration of freedom and tragedy of partition. This book was published in 1956. It was a very unfortunate and terrible situation that people were so much controlled by their communal identities that they could not understand their national freedom. His writings describe how victims faced the cruelty and killing which was beyond the human behaviour. The book describes how people were divided and were completely blind in their cruel and beastly actions. Reading these writings brings more pain but also describes how important it is to know the Indian history and the action that spreads more blood than before in the Indian soil. Partition was a decision that had extreme consequences but the people were blinded by their national boundaries so much that they couldn't see the massacre that was not supposed to be the outcome of freedom struggle.

Another significant writing was by Khushwant Singh *Train to Pakistan*. This novel describes the cruelty and massacre in the trains and on railway stations that travelled through the broken boundaries of India. The ruthless killing was not of the people who were enemies but their own people from the same country were brutally killed. Women were snatched away from their families and were raped and abducted. These trains became red with the blood of the people killed and even people hiding were pulled and killed. This writing also makes a strong comment on the political angle of the partition. No worry about the

implications of this major decision paints a painful picture of power and politics. Communal division of political leaders and their followers was strongly criticised by the writer. *Train to Pakistan* highlights how literature can mirror various historical actions and provide a perspective to understand a cruel blend of power politics and communalism in framing future of many. These stories are strong narratives that take us back to those horrifying days and forces the readers to understand implications of such decisions. The text also deals with the peaceful and harmonious rural life in India and how these are turned overnight to create communal animosity between people who lived like brother. Reading these stories also takes us to remember those painful situations where many readers go through their own haunting memories. Partition in India was more horrifying as people from both sides were butchered and brotherhood was ambushed under their feet.

Major themes in the writings of many writers have been around the horror accompanying the victimisation of population and these have been a major criticism to bring radical perspectives towards such politically dominated cruelties. Though they might differ in the treatment of their subject matter and incidents depicted to cultivate their writings, they all channelise an argument in highlighting such debates.

These all writers have made it clear that all the committees that indulge freely in the cruel acts must be ashamed for their actions. They all have tried to expose the vices of narrow communal considerations and have emphasized the necessity of having a wider and all-embracing attitude of love and sympathy.

The socio- cultural background post freedom also dealt with multiple issues. These were more related to now re-structuring the social set up. With the turmoil of the new political establishment and the new systems in place it was important to set new policies for the socially and economically deprived sections of the society. These were the times when many writings started talking about women in general and their upliftment. Parallely, many reformative movements started to discuss the life of the oppressed castes in the society. And with this the movement for Dalit reformation initiated by great leaders like Jyotiba Phule found a new fuel and with the radical movements started by B. R. Ambedkar, made a significant movement to give voice to the downtroddens.

Dalit struggle though started with the writings of Phule, it can be easily said that it got its formal face post freedom. In this class converted to caste society, a new class was born which was the class of literates. Human relations started looking at ethical values born through social reconstruction created by the scientific inquiry.

Many reformations started, which changed the orthodox social norms and led to abolishment of cruel traditions like child marriage and *sati pratha*.

Reformation for the oppressed sections of the caste system and for bringing in education as the primary need for everyone, was initiated by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his radical approach towards reformation. His writing, *Gulamgiri* in 1873, ruthlessly examined Hindu religion and attacked the superiority of a few classes over others. This attack was so strong that it gave strength to the backwards class who were also the untouchables. Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule aggressively worked towards empowering women through education. They assure that women should be freed from slavery and given life of dignity.

This ideology was later taken up by Dr. Ambedkar.

Basically, *Dalit* Literary Movement started with the voice of Saint Poet Chokhamela in 14 cent. who belonged to oppressed caste. This was taken up in the 19th century by Mahatma Phule and later on by Professor S.M. Mate in beginning of 20 century. The term *dalit* did not exist in this period but concerns of *dalits* were handled.

Gautam Buddha and Mahatma Phule, both revolted against unjust class structure historically.

Dr Ambedkar enabled factors in the *dalit* literature and gave outlook towards equality and fraternity. He started periodicals like *Mooknayak*, *Bahishkrit janta*, and *Prabudh bhara*.

His struggle was not limited to ending evil practice like Untouchability but he wrote against and fought against social inequality and economic inequality. His struggle was not limited to this, but he liberated Dalits from mental slavery and abject wretchedness. His radical movements were not only to end evil practices but also to create reformative movements to give them sense of self-respect.

Untouchability within caste became a system. It was a typical Indian phenomenon. It was derived from the pure and impure ideology rooted in caste system.

The most systematic presentation of this ideology was that given by Dumont. He assessed that the opposition between pure and impure forms the basis of the system and serves as the fundamental criterion of rank. His terminology- 'the whole caste system rests on the necessary and hierarchical co-existence of the two opposites. It is the opposition that accounts for all the social relationships found in Indian society. It is by implicit reference to this opposition that the society of castes appears consistent and rational to those who live in it.' (Dumont P81)

One can see that this opposition between pure and impure is first and foremost of a religious nature. These notions are found in the religious world as well but it forms base to the Hindu religion. To maintain a certain degree of purity is a constant concern for Indians. And division into endogamous castes is one way of processing the relative purity of a group.

The primary source of defilement is contact death and organic wastes.

Every area of social life is pervaded by this dichotomy: the type of food eaten, for instance, can be the strictly vegetarian diet associated with Brahmins and a few other high castes and then there is non-vegetarian food associated with lower castes.

Impurity, unlike purity, is contagious. An entire family can be contaminated as in the case of pollution stemming from contact of death. And then there are rituals that need to be performed to end that contamination. There are contaminations related to birth and menstruation also.

But the contamination that creates a permanent impurity is the impurity of caste.

Ambedkar had his own definition of caste structure. In his major writings like -

Castes in India Their mechanism, genesis and development(1916), *Annihilation of caste*(1936)

Who were the shudras (1948), Ambedkar describes the history and the roots of the caste system. Ambedkar emphasised that the Indian society got started years before on the basis of classes. These classes later became enclosed units that were accessible only by birth and were called castes. This hierarchical structure based on occupation and class gradually created a clear distinction between various castes.

Ambedkar analysed that in the beginning only the priests and brahmins functioned in enclosed castes structures. They did not participate in rituals like marriage with the other castes. Later on, other castes started following the same functioning of keeping their castes as the enclosed structures.

Ambedkar denied that castes were created by God or that the caste system evolved gradually with the evolution of the society. Common view was that castes were created scriptures but Ambedkar insisted that castes existed before the respective people who wrote these scriptures.

He insisted that there was no preaching that led to bringing caste into existence, hence, it is not possible to preach to remove the evils that are connected with the caste system. He wanted a solution to end evil practices like untouchability within caste system.

Ambedkar emphasised that class to caste shift was led by the scriptures written with a purpose where caste division was prominent.

Such theories were put forth and also laid restrictions which were religious, economic, political and social. These scriptures also laid obligations to the royal order which means they created systems to function from religion to state

And these obligations bound the lowest class into menial, mental, cultural, and social slavery leading to practices like untouchability.

Untouchability led to their treatment like animals, they lived apart from village, they had to accept leftovers, they were supposed to get engaged in endless labour. Not permitted to wear good clothes, to look smart, or even footwear, if violated, severe punishments were given.

As a result, Dalits lived life full of poverty, starvation and insults. They were forced to live life full of atrocities that were inhuman.

Ambedkar describes that during the British colonisation India went through industrialisation and also a new codified judicial system. There was a significant shift in the education system and with the new teaching learning method, literacy took a new shape.

Dalit literature as Baburao Bagul describes is the literature produced by Dalit consciousness.

It was a conscious rebellion based on the commitment born of the physical and psychological pressures. He describes this literature as a revolution that was born out of fundamental optimism. Where community oppression and individual suffering was common in the social caste-based framework and was well accepted. Dalit point of view came into forefront with Dalit expressions and this was essential for getting an insight into Dalit life. These expressions were meant to be made in all forms, speeches through the orators, writings through essayists and through various writings in different forms. Significantly, what actually gave strength to Dalit consciousness were the rebels and their movements in accumulating Dalit consciousness. As Bagul writes that point of view is an aspect of life that illuminates and elucidates.

Dalit consciousness was also born out of Dalit view that created a Dalit vision. We can understand it as Dalit point of view leading to understand and assess lived reality to form Dalit vision.

Bagul also insisted that original and important Dalit work would emerge only when Dalit point of view – visualize through concrete experiences. The narratives of lived experiences like Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* also gave a good amount of support to the voice of Ambedkar. This autobiographical expression highlights the struggle of the oppressed and how they find an inspiration in the speeches of Ambedkar in educating their children to overcome discrimination and their sufferings. Education was supported and emphasised to make it accessible to all castes and communities. With the new education system in place, reformative movements started to bring accessibility to education to the oppressed in the society. Varna system based on class leading to caste was strongly rooted and was challenged by *Dalit* leaders and writers to open doors of common facilities like free access to water and food were emphasised.

Literatures and their expressions affected the movements and their implications in many ways. Most of the writings in the post freedom era started framing the mind set of the intelligentsia to re-build the institutions in all socio- cultural aspects. Institutions like education, religion, economy, judiciary all have been depicted in various writings and widely researched by many authors and scholars. Literature has been rooted on the evolution and psychological journey of all fields, this will channelise once again a fresh debate to continue in future writings. Underlining the strength of writings, we can assess the expressions in all the above sectors through the depth the writers created in their writings. Readers have been looking at these expressions as the mirror of their contemporary world but these writings also cross barriers of multiple discourses and allow readers to engage in the discussions. Literature is sensitive and strong in its own expressions and derives its strength by dwelling and dealing with their respective themes in the nation building. Hence, it manifests the socio-cultural structures and its challenges through the minds of the writers successfully.

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