



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**History**

**THE DOMINANT GEOGRAPHICAL AND CULTURAL ENTITIES REPRESENTED IN INDIAN LITERATURE DOWN THE CENTURIES**

**KEY WORDS:** Literature, Languages, Aryan, Dravidian, British, Hindus, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic

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**ABSTRACT**

The variety and magnitude of Indian literature bring up a comparison of its magnitude with that of European literature as only appropriate and valid. There was the literary tradition in *prkrit* languages out of which engaged and developed Sanskrit literary tradition. Along with Sanskrit literature, language and literature connected with Persian, Urdu and Arabic also became part of the vast phenomenon of Indian literature. Tamil language and literature began to evolve and dominate south India from ancient days onwards. Malayalam, Kannada and Hindi etc are also rich in fine literary tradition. In modern times, English began to have its rich and constructive formative influence in the making of Indian literature. Hence in the context of the complexity, variety and uniquely composite character, the totality of Indian literature stands comparison with the magnitude and cultural eminence of European literature as a whole. The whole corpus of Indian literature can be seen as the literary representation of the present, social and collective hopes, aspirations, dreams and down to earth experience of the multi-linguistic, multi-racial and multi-religious people who make up Indian society. There is the presence and strains related to Aryan, Dravidian, Mongolian and Tibetan races and their collective literary impulses. Later, the advent of Semitic races and religions had its impact and role in the formation of Modern Indian literature. The coming of Urdu and the introduction of English contributed much to the making of modern Indian literature. The arrival of the British and their language brought in ideas like parliamentary democracy, social justice, world of science and technology with tools, gadgets and modern means of transportation. *saptarshi* All these have left imprint in the evolution of modern Indian literature. In classical Indian literature there are scintillating presence of Himalayas *mandala*, *hamsa* and historically famous places like Pataliputra, Ujjain, Madura, Jaipur etc. in modern period, there is the striking presence of new Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore etc. now that industrialization altered the geography and also slow pace of life, find their overriding formative presence in the Indian literary landscape also. It is obvious that Indian literature in its totality has been functioning very much like a mirror held up faithfully for reflecting the complexity, variety and ever changing totality of cultural currents relevant in India. The Indianans of Indian literature evolves out of the genius of Indian writers as and when their contact with what is essentially that of India saturates their creative consciousness leading to literary representation.

On account of its complexity, variety and unique composite character, Indian literature in its totality can be compared reasonably with European literature as a whole. At the same time, Indian literature can be compared to any individual component of the vast variety of expressions subsumed under the collective label of European literature. In terms of the nation's state status, Indian republic is one country very much like the United Kingdom, Germany, France, or Russia. Indian literature that flourished after the days of European Renaissance cannot be assessed as extremely developed as in the case of European literature owing to the fact that the life denying aspects of the middle ages continued for some more decades in India. In contrast, at present, modern Indian languages continue to be the proper vehicle of the full blooded vitality and innate relevance of India in terms of languages, races, religions, rituals, patterns of human interaction and problems and possibilities of the social formation. All these multifaceted aspects are represented in different regional languages making it a rich treasure house of the imaginative as well as real possibilities inherent in human condition.

When we focus on the 'Indianness' of Indian literature, we can form some ideas as to some salient characteristics of the collective body of the imaginative representations in different Indian languages.

In the light of history, the Aryan and the Dravidian are the two dominant races of people who have made up making of Indian people at present. There is the presence of other races like Mongolian and Tibetan in the north eastern provinces. Apart from these, in the later phase, Semitic and other races reached Indian sub-continent and made themselves a part of the fabric of Indian reality. Realistically speaking, the total corpus of Indian literature should be seen as the heightened representation of the personal, social and the collective hopes, aspirations, dreams and down to earth experiences of multi-racial and multi religious people who make the Indian society. Certain distinctive features characterize their dominant approach to reality.

Generally speaking, the Indian people belonging to the early period of history especially believed in the primacy of spirit over the matter. That led to the evolution of other-worldly attitude as part of the philosophy of life. It can be assessed as a form of transcendentalism as part of which the reconciliation of matter

and spirit is highlighted in diverse form of literature in different languages. At the philosophical level, the earth is seen in term of mother and the sun or heaven is seen in terms of father in the context of the possibilities inherent in life, both personal and cosmic. At the metaphysical level, there is the concept involving *prakriti* implying the created world with the multitude of forms and *purusha* pointing out the impersonal spirit or power that animate the entire world of creation. It can be easily understood that Indian people accepted life in its totality comprising both the temporal and the eternal, or to use another set of terms, the physical and the metaphysical and attempted to integrate all aspects and dimensions as part of a harmonious and self-luminous whole. In a sense, the collective wisdom embodied in the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* point to such a world view and its representation in language. In the art and literature of the Mauryan age and the Gupta age for which representative writers like Patanjali and Vatsayana can be cited as ideal examples, the readers and students of the respective creative expressions find the project of the fusion of the temporal and the eternal as part of the world view and actual practice. The epic imagination charged with the eternal and sublime dimensions enabled Indian literature to take up a theme like the churning of the ocean out of which all created beings come into existence. It is the symbolic representation of the emergence of planets, stars, life on earth and its evolution down the dimension of time. There is the story of love involving Shiva and Parvathi depicted in *Kumarasambava* by Kalidasa, one of the greatest writers in the world literature. Parables involving Satyakama in Upanishads and the heroic characters like Ravana in *Ramayana* point to the rich variety and the philosophic depth of meaning at the beck and call of Indian literature. In the rich and dense world of classical Indian literature, we come across lovely symbols like *agni* or fire, *ushas* the dawn of the day and spiritual dawn at the same time. All these richly point to the infinitive potential at the disposal of Indian literature.

During the latter phase of Indian history, semitic races and religions came to Indian sub continent and consequently a new language called Urdu evolved. As part of literature in this language, there is the highly musical poem on the one hand, the highly mystical poems on the other hand. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the British in particular and Europeans in general came to India as part of the historical process called colonialism. The arrival of the British and the Europeans brought new forces like new methods of

production and new strategies and spaces for distribution and consumption thereby making it more vibrant and quite favorably disposed towards the mundane aspects of life. The arrival of the British and the Europeans brought ideas like parliamentary democracy, social justice and whole new world of science and technology that made life more easy and comfortable. The radical changes in the structure of society and patterns of human life created a notable impact so that what is called scientific modernity began to make its presence felt in the social life of India and its figurative representation in all Indian languages.

The coming of the scientific, religious and social practices and its commingling with the various streams in Indian traditions like the Aryan and the Dravidian elements later led to the evolution of a new language called Urdu in which many monumental prose and verse expressions have been recorded by medieval *Sufi* saints. The coming of the British and the Europeans created an impact covering physical and social sciences as studied and applied in India. Also new ideas like parliamentary democracy, social justice and the presence of new technology radically altered the perception and thinking pattern of all people. The cumulative influence of all these played a central role in the emergence of a new category of Indian literature called Indo Anglian literature, more appropriately called Indian writing in literature.

The unique aspects of Indian setting marked its own signs and traces in Indian literature. In European literature in general and also in British literature, Venus is the morning star whereas in Indian literature there is *saptarshi* mandala. It is believed that watching the *arundhati* star on the wedding night is especially auspicious for the newly married Indian couple. In English literature we come across the nightingale, skylark and albatross whereas Indian writers picture *kokil*, eagle and the swan. The swan or *hamsa* is illustrious in Indian literature as the symbol of the soul. It is interesting to note that individuals having very high stage of spiritual evolution are referred using the idea related to hamsa. Sri. Rama Krishna, the master of Vivekananda is known as Paramahansa indicating that the master had attained the highest spiritual evolution. *Airavathi* or white elephant is the vehicle of *Indra* and *vrishaba* or the ox is the favorite animal of Siva. Down the centuries, the cow was regarded as sacred by the Hindus. When Christianity came to India, the lamb also began to be endowed with sacred quality as part of representation in language. In the world of plants, the *asvatha*, the deodar, sandalwood tree and the *tulasi* plant etc are names having sacred or dense literary allusions. With the Muslim rulers in India, the rose began to assume a special status whereas the daffodil flowers become notable with the coming of the British. Always the Himalayas have exerted a tremendous fascination in the minds of poets and the readers alike in India. Kalidasa spoke of the Himalayas as the measuring rod of the earth. With the coming of the Mughals and the British, the beauty and the ideal climate prevailing in hill stations began to find a special place in the realm of literature belonging to their period.

In ancient classical literature of India, we come across reference to cities like Pataliputra, Ujjain and Madura and during the medieval period there are references to Delhi, Vigayanagara and Jaipur. When we come to the modern period, cities like New Delhi, Bombay, Chandigarh, Bangalore etc assume a special relevance as the arena of modern life.

In sublime language, Indian poets have sung in praise of mighty rivers like the *Ganges*, the *Jamuna*, and the *Kaveri*. The *Ganga* is the incomparable sacred river and many stories and myths have been woven around it. The river is unique in the sense that it has association and counterpart in the milky way. In the underworld also there is another river having a parallel and mythical status. A modern Indian writer like Raja Rao and a modern western writer like T.S.Eliot referred to the mighty presence of the sacred river in their enactive writings.

The coming of the Europeans and the British created a new environment where industrialization altered the earlier slow pace of life. The pace of change gathered momentum after the independence of India. Factories, trains, aeroplanes, modern methods of communications like telephone, mobile phone and the presence of computers and the possibility of travelling down the information super highway, the space exploration and such

ambitious projects all have altered the mental space of modern Indians. These changes have its definite echo in the creative literature in different Indian languages.

In the distant past, poets like Valmiki and Vyasa celebrated the heroic age in India in their epics like the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. The Mauryan, the Gupta and Harsha periods have exerted their influence and left its impress in the realm of Sanskrit poetry and drama. The conspiracies in the court of Kashmir kings have been represented in a historical perspective by a master writer like Kalhana. In the modern period, movements for ideas like democracy, nationalism, humanism, socialism etc have been radically restructuring human mind as well as human society. These changes have been reflected in the different languages and literature during the modern age.

Hence, it is easy to come to the conclusion that Indian literature in its totality has been functioning very much like a mirror held up faithfully for reflecting the complexity and variety of India as a whole. As part of it, there are even satirical stories about rulers, religious men, soliders etc. In a sense such stories originated in India and travelled to the West and eventually influenced writers like Boccaccio. As part of foreign invasions and the coming together of cultures, notable incidents like the encounter between Alexander the Great and Porus, Prithvi Raj and Mohamud Ghuri et.al happened. These incidents inspired Indian imagination and have been depicted in the form of imaginative literature. Coming to Modern period, incidents like *Dandi* march of Gandhiji and the tragic partition of India have been treated in different modern Indian languages.

So far we have alluded to the salient features of the representation of the Indian people and of the cultural and geographic setting amidst which they lived, thought and wrote leading to the creation of immortal pages in the history of Indian literature. When everything is considered, it is to be noted that the Indianness of Indian literature evolves out of the genius of Indian writers as and when their contact with what is essentially that of India saturates their creative being.

Creative writers are to be seen as the nerve centres of the people and their culture. Naturally, the totality of the people's culture and aspirations speaks through the creative expression of writers. Racial and cultural imagination of the people and the collective memory of the society find its natural and creative outlet through the inspired and inspiring works of the creative writers. Sages from *epics* and *puranas* like Vishwamitra, Vasistha, poet-mystics like Valmiki and Vyasa, enlightened masters and teachers like, the Buddha and Mahavira, poets like Kabir, Tulasidas and Modern writers like Tagore, Sir Aurobindo, Prem Chand et.al. have a pride of place in the realm of Indian literature so that they deserve close study in order to comprehend the subtle as well as salient aspects of the 'Indianness' of Indian literature.

Through a sublime and heightened perspective, Indian literature should be regarded as one though it is written in many well developed languages. In the middle ages, it got one more language, i.e, Urdu and during the modern period, English also was added to the spectrum of languages through which its variety, complexity and unique essence have been translated and immortalized. The diverse traditions of the early Indian life flow along with other traditions and gradually, all these diverse traditions join together so that it becomes a mighty and impressive flow of human aspirations and dreams. From the survey and scrutiny outlined earlier, it is self evident that the emergence and vibrant growth of the collective body of Indian literature become figurative projection and representation of the essential aspects of Indian culture in its variety, complexity, depth and breadth with the result that it really deserve global acclaim.

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