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NATIONALISM AND COLONIALISM: CONCEPT OF KARMA IN MODERN INDIAN
LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

In this world, Karma plays a pivotal role. Many Indian writers, irrespective of their languages write about Nationalism. Colonialism is a concept where people from one country dominates and rule other country. This concept has been there from many centuries. Nationalism and colonialism are directly proportional to each other. If the people are under the hands of colonial society then nationalism is highlighted in the form of novels, stories, plays, songs, etc. People without nationalism are not eligible to live in a country. This paper focuses mainly on the concept of Karma in various novels in different Indian languages like Sanskrit, Hindi, Telugu, Bengali, Tamil and English.

Keywords: Sanskrit epics, Transition, Independence, colonial rule, Nationalism, translation of Sanskrit epics, future literature.

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The objective of this paper is to focus on the structurally defined roles of the marginalized people in India since time immemorial by making a literary analysis of few works by Indian authors redefining the role of karma in colonial society and gradually highlighting the nationalistic approach in India.

Indian literature includes everything which is included in the word literature in its broadest, sense: religious and mundane, epic and lyric, dramatic and didactic poetry, narrative and scientific prose, as well as oral poetry and song. In the Vedas (3000 BC- 1000 BC), when one finds such expressions like I am standing in the water but I am very thirsty, one marvels at the continuity of a rich heritage which is both modern and traditional. It is, therefore, not right to say that ancient Indian literature includes only the religious classics of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Jain narrative literature in the Prakrit language is full of erotic stories and realism.

Vedas are not a series of sacred texts used in religious rituals and sacrifices. They are essentially archetypal poetry of high literary value. The great epics, like the Ramayana (1500 BC) and the Mahabharata (1000 BC) are the repositories of the ethnic memory of the Indian people, which have been translated in modern Indian literature by many writers like Pullela Sri Rama Chandrudu,

Valmiki, who is known as Adikavi, wrote *the Ramayana*, in which the story occasionally referred to the Mahabharata. But both these epics were composed over a long time. Both are epics of the people, and as

such, reflect the ethos and the psyche of a group of people, not only in a given temporal frame, but have a universal human context.

The Ramayana tells us about a human being, Rama who achieves divinity through righteous action. It reflects how a human being faces Karma in the form of sufferings, tensions and agitation. Inwardly it is a quest to know oneself. The king Rama fights a battle against the demon king Ravana, who took his wife, Sita, and holds her captive in his palace at Lanka (now Sri Lanka). Rama, with the help of Hanuman and his army, rescues Sita. His triumph over Ravana symbolizes the victory of virtue over vice. This pattern, at the individual level, is a fight going on within the self between vice and virtue. With the change in the social structure at the time of the Mahabharata, the fight is between the Pandavas and the Kauravas of the same royal clan, over succession to get the throne. Written by Vyasa, Mahabharata is a mythical history, because history here does not denote merely an event, but a series of events that will always happen. The Pandavas are being assisted by Lord Krishna, who is metamorphosed into a god, and is shown as descending into the cycles of cosmic history to assist man in his struggle against the forces of evil.

He recites *the Bhagavad-Gita* (the song of the lord) just before the war to Prince Arjuna, who is unwilling to fight as he feels that he is fighting with his teachers, relatives and so-called friends in that battle.

“Karma Nye vadikaraste maa phaleshu tada chana Maa karma phalahe durbu maate sangosva karmani”¹-Bhagavad-Gita

This means every incident in this life is predestined. That is called as fate (Karma) accept it silently. Thus begins the debate on an epic scale regarding the problems of action versus non-action, violence versus non-violence, and ultimately about Dharma. The Gita is incorporated in the Mahabharata primarily to give an integrated view of Dharma. Dharma means to perform righteously one's duty in a selfless way (Nish Kama Karma) with complete dedication to the will of God. The survivors of the epic war discover that public esteem and power are not more than hollow victories in an illusory struggle. It is not bravery but knowledge which is the key to the mystery of life.

In devotional poetry, God descends on this earth as a human being to share with us our suffering and turmoil, our happiness and prosperity. In Indian literature the effort has been made to find out how a man achieves divinity by serving mankind.

In fact, epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata received a rebirth in the new languages. These languages gave a fresh life, a renewed relevance, and a meaningful reincarnation to the great Sanskrit epics, and these epics in their turn provided substance and style to the new languages.

In almost all the Indian languages, the modern age begins with the first struggle for India's freedom in 1857, or near that time. The impact of western civilization, the rise of political consciousness, and the change in society could be seen in the works written during that time. Contact with the western world resulted in India's acceptance of western thought on one hand, and rejection of it on the other, and resulted in an effort made to revive her ancient glory and Indian consciousness.

A large number of writers opted for a synthesis between Indianization and westernization, in their search for a national ideology. All these attitudes were combined to bring about the renaissance in 19th century India. The Indian renaissance took a different shape, in the context of the Indian race, moment and milieu, and as a result, nationalist, reformist and revivalist thinking found its way into literature, which slowly turned itself into a pan-Indian movement, spearheaded in different parts of the country by renaissance leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Vivekananda, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu, Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K.Narayan, Prem Chand, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and others. The leaders of the renaissance, in fact, succeeded in instilling nationalistic fervour in the people, and induced in them a desire for social reform and a sentimental yearning for their past glory.

It is true that Sanskrit and Persian had a vast body of prose, but the necessity for prose in modern Indian languages, for use in administration and higher education, led to the emergence of prose in different languages at the beginning of the modern period. The emergence of prose as a powerful medium brought a kind of change that coincides with the process of modernization.

Indian writers like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (Bengali, 1838-1894) and others made use of this newly acquired concept of nationalism to attack colonial rule, and in the process created their own brand of nationalism, rooted in the native land. Bankim Chandra wrote many historical novels like *Durgesh Nandini* (1865), and *Anand Math* (1882), acquired a pan-Indian popularity and made nationalism and patriotism a part of dharma. This was a distinctive concept of universalism that was accepted by many as a reply to western colonialism.

Revivalism and reformism were natural corollary of the newly emerging idea of nationalism. Rabindra Nath Tagore (Bengali, 1861-1942) said that the unity of India always be in the diversity. The foundation for this tradition had been laid in India at the social level by saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others. As a result, India's nationalism is mingled with its spiritual tradition, with truth and tolerance preached by Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, showing India's concern for its pluralism. Modern Indian pluralism is multi-lingual, multi-cultural, secular, national-state concept.

Patriotic writings proliferate almost spontaneously in different languages, as the resistance of a community against foreign rule. Rangalal in Bengali, Mirza Ghalib in Urdu and Bharatendu Harish Chandra in Hindi expressed themselves as the patriotic voice of that era. This voice was, on one hand, against colonial rule, and on the other, for the glorification of India. Besides, Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869) wrote ghazals in Urdu, about love, with unusual imagery and metaphors. He accepted life both as a joyous existence and as a dark and painful experience. Subramania Bharati (1882-1921) was the great Tamil patriot-poet, who revolutionized the poetic tradition in Tamil. Themes from mythology or history were taken to write epics, by Maithili Saran Gupta (Hindi, 1886- 1964), and others, which express the purpose of fulfilling the needs of the patriotic reader.

The novel is associated with the social reform-oriented movement of the 19th century. This new genre, borrowed from the West, is characterized by a spirit of revolt, right from its adoption into the Indian system. The first Telugu novel, *Sri Ranga Raja Charitra* (1872) by Krishnamma Chetty, and the first Malayalam novel, *Indu Lekha* (1889) by Chandu Menon were written with didactic intentions and to re-examine evil social customs and practices like untouchability, caste distinctions, denial of remarriage of widows, etc. Historical novels were written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (Bengali), Hari Narayan Apte (Marathi), and others, to describe the glorious past of India, and to instill nationalist fervour in her people. Novels were found to be the most appropriate medium to extol the intellectual and physical richness of the past, and reminded Indians about their obligations and rights. In fact, in the 19th century, the idea of national identity emerged from literature, and most Indian writings turned into the voice of enlightenment. This paved the way for India to understand the real, factual position by the time it reached the threshold of the 20th century. It was during this time that Tagore started writing the novel *Gora* (1910), to challenge colonial rule, colonial criteria and colonial authority, and to give new meaning to Indian nationalism.

The emergence of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (Gujarati, English, and Hindi, 1869-1948) and Tagore, influencing Indian life and literature, were quite often complementary to one another. Gandhi spoke the language of the common man, and was for the outcasts. His weapon was the weapon of truth and non-violence. He gave importance to traditional values and he is against industrialization. He turned himself into a medieval saint and a social reformer. Tagore called him Mahatma (saint). Gandhi became the theme of both poetry and fiction of cultural nationalism. He became an apostle of peace and idealism. Mulk Raj Anand(English), Raja Rao (English), Tara Shankar Bandyopadhyay (Bengali), Premchand (Hindi), V.S. Khandekar (Marathi), Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (Bengali), Lakshmi Narayan (Telugu) all created Gandhian protagonists as rural reformers or social workers with moral and religious commitments. It was not the writers, but the people created the Gandhian myth, and the writers, in their turn, used it effectively to mark a period of great awakening.

Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) was one of the most popular Bengali novelists, whose popularity continues unabated even today, not only among Bengali readers, but also among people in other parts of India, by means of the numerous translations of his books, which are available in various Indian

languages. His pet theme was the man-woman relationship, and he was well known for his portrayal of women, their sufferings and their often unspoken love. He was both a Gandhian and a socialist.

Premchand (1880-1936) wrote novels in Hindi. He was a true son of the soil, deeply attached to the Indian earth. He was the finest literary exponent of the Indian peasantry in Indian literature. As a true Gandhian, he believed in the idealistic theory of "a change of heart" in the exploiters. But, in his magnum opus, "Godan" (1936), he becomes a realist and records the suffering and struggle of the Indian rural poor.

As Jawaharlal Nehru quoted

"A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance."2

Many Indian writers, irrespective of their languages write about Nationalism. Colonialism is a concept where people from one country dominates and rules others. This concept has been there from many centuries. Nationalism and colonialism are directly proportional to each other. If the people are under the hands of colonial society then nationalism ooze out of the colonized in the form of writings.

The British had followed divide-and-rule policy in India. Even in the census they categorized people according to religion and viewed and treated them separately. By the end of the 19th century several nationalistic movements had started in India. Indian nationalism had grown largely since British policies of education and the advances made by the British in India in the fields of transportation and communication. However, their complete insensitivity to and distance from the peoples of India and their customs created such disillusionment with them in their subjects that the end of British rule became necessary and inevitable. At midnight the next day India won its freedom from colonial rule, ending nearly 250 years of British presence in India.

A large number of writers are in the process of identifying a pattern of problem- solving within the traditional system, enthusiastic enough to generate and sustain an indigenous process of modernization, which does not need readymade external solutions, and is in accord with indigenous needs and attitudes. The new crop of writers is concerned with truth as they see it in life around them. Many of them throws light on the colonial, post colonial, psychological, social, regional, realistic problems where the central figure in the novel became a victim to the society. If we see the literature from past many years, we find a drastic change from ecstasy to agony and history to mystery. What happens in the future literature-Still a qualm?.

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