



Gujarat in Pre-Independent India: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

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Literature is the reflection of an age or nation, so no work can be scrutinized without a panoramic view of historical, political, geographical and social scenario of the age. During the Renaissance period, India had started to change very fast. Fundamental changes came with the higher education. The tempo of political agitation was admirably kept up after the war by Tilak, who emerged from temporary retirement after his release from prison in 1914, rejoined the Congress, and founded the Home Rule League in 1916; and Mrs. Anne Besant's own All India Home Rule league was established in 1917.

Introduction

Literature is the reflection of an age or nation, so no work can be scrutinized without a panoramic view of historical, political, geographical and social scenario of the age. The national poet Jhaverchand Meghani has been considered as one of the foremost poets voicing the spirit of the nineteenth century Indian Renaissance leading up to the Gandhian era. To justify Meghani's works as the miniature of his age, it is quintessential to evaluate the historical, political and social scenario from 1857 to 1947.

The aftermath of the Revolt of 1857 had left tell- tale marks on the political and social geography of India. Before 1857, most of the Indians had accepted generally that a British rule in India was a great boon divinely delivered. The Revolt ushered in new ideas. Winds of change soon began to blow over the land affecting accepted attitudes. The revolt and its aftermath led to several radical changes in the Indo- British relationship. They were all in the direction of widening the cleavage between the two countries India and Britain. The end of the East India Company played a pivotal role in effeminizing Britain's tyrannical approach towards India. The end of East India Company was declared very early but the company lingered on for a few years more, until its formal dissolution on 1 January 1874. The brutal suppression of the Revolt of 1857 was the cause of much enmity against the British. A certain dislike was felt even by those who admired British achievements and imitated British ways; for the rulers kept at a distance from their subjects, and rigorously excluded them from the circle. No Indian could enter an English club; Indians were rudely evicted from railway carriages by common British tradesmen and soldiers. The curt manners of English men in India were shocking even to English visitors. Once, a companion of the Prince of Wales accurately expressed the feelings of the Indian people towards their rulers when he said: 'I would long to be free of such contemptuous masters.' (Heehs peter 47)

After the Revolt of 1857, Indians' sense of nationhood grew stronger. The British government after the Great Revolt ceased its interference in the social life of the country. At this juncture the re-molding of India was undertaken from within, by Indians. The notion of the rediscovery of the truth of India's past, stimulated and the result was a broad movement of regeneration which is defined as an Indian Renaissance. There was a radical transformation in the outlook of Indians. Indians neither accepted nor rejected western ideas but started to examine skeptically and scrutinize them seriously. In the nineteenth century Indian Renaissance played an essential role in the creation of the Indian nation. It broke down age old rigidities and brought India into the modern age. The main impulse behind India's awakening had been education. Young Indians were attracted to the great ideas of European thinkers; they thought at first, that to implement their ideas meant to accept European ways. But the ideas were universal, and could be adopted without sacrificing one's nationality. One of the first Indians to realize this was Raj Narayan Bose. In 1866 he founded a society for the promotion of national feeling. In the manifesto of this organization, he wrote: 'without due cultivation of national feeling, no nation can be eventually great.' Under the inspiration of this society, Nabagopal Mitra founded a national press, national paper and national gymnasium.

During the Renaissance period, India had started to change very fast. Fundamental changes came with the higher education. The first products of higher education in India started coming out of the portals of the earliest Indian universities (established ironically enough in the year of the Revolt itself), the seeds of the ideas sown by Raja Ram Mohan Roy a generation earlier began to sprout vigorously. The gradual spread of the vast railway network, the growth of the native press in the bigger cities and the acquisition of a common language through English soon brought the new Indian intelligentsia close together. It was 'a new integrated all- India class with varied background but a common foreground of knowledge, ideas and values.... It was a dynamic minority. It had a sense of unity, of purpose, and of hope. It was the newborn soul of modern India. In time it was to infuse the whole of India with its spirit.' (Percival Spear 291)

This spirit soon began to express itself through movements like religious, social and political reforms. The movement of religious revival was initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1828, when he had established the Brahmo Samaj which was an attempt to reorganize Hinduism, to oppose idol worship and superstition. After Ram Mohan Roy's death, the movement was strengthened by Dwarknath Tagore. During 1838-84 with the participation of Keshub Chunder Sen came a period of expansion, because the movement assumed an all India character. In spite of schism in the Brahmo Samaj in 1866, brought about by the growing differences between the conservatives and the reformers, the movement continued to be vigorous, especially in Bengal, and influenced, in some measure, the thought of men like Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore.

In 1867 the Prathana Samaj was established in Maharashtra under the initiative of Keshab Chandra. The leaders of this group were the scholars R.G. Bhandarkar, and the many-faceted genius Ranade who himself became victim of social problem of child marriage. He got married at the age of twelve to a girl of nine. As he himself experienced the pangs of child marriage; he became an opponent of child marriage. His other efforts on behalf of Indian women included advocacy of female education and widow remarriage. Another spiritual personality who had helped to awaken national feeling was Swami Dayanand Saraswati. He convinced that modern Hinduism, with its priests and its multitude of gods, was a corruption of the original Aryan creed, Dayananda had appealed for a return to the earliest Hindu scriptures and the Vedas. In 1875 he had founded the Arya Samaj, which became a powerful agent for the spread of education and social reform. Swami Dayanand Saraswati rejected caste system along with idolatry, polygamy, child marriage, and the seclusion of widows. Ritual centered on the simple fire ceremony of the early Aryans and worship became congregational.

The Arya Samaj, which also started a number of educational institutions imparting both oriental and occidental knowledge, later continued its mission of militant Vedic Hinduism with renewed vigor under the leadership of Swami Shraddhanand and Lala lajpat Rai. The establishment of the Arya Samaj also saw the rise of another movement based on ancient Hindu religious and philosophical thought. This was the Theosophical Society founded in New York by Madame H.P. Blavatsky, Col. H.S. Olcott, and W. O. Judge and others.

All these movements aiming at religious reform had flourished. The appearance of a genuine Hindu saint and mystic showed how the ancient Hindu tradition, far from being fossilized, was still vigorous enough to produce new living manifestations. Swami Ramakrishna, who made his entire life an ecstatic pilgrimage of spirituality, cast a spell on the youth of modern Bengal. During the last year of his life, his disciples, led by Swami Vivekananda, formed a holy brother hood which finally took shape as the well known Ramakrishna Mission. Under the dynamic leadership of Swami Vivekananda, the Mission effectively carried the message of ancient Hinduism in abroad as well as India. Vivekananda represented India at the World Parliament of Religions in the United States. His fiery eloquence not only dazzled the west but also instilled a new self- confidence in the minds of his compatriots. Vivekananda did not preach a world to reject spirituality. He declared: 'What we want is strength, so believe in one oneself. It is a man- making religion we want.' Patriotism breathed in his every word. Thus this religious revival played a very vital role in the development of nationalism.

The new religious resurgence was accompanied by a political awakening. The first organized effort in this direction was the foundation of the British India Association in 1839 which was followed quickly by the Bengal British India Society in 1843 and the British Indian Association of Kolkata in 1851. Constitutional agitation did not really come into its own in India until Surendranath Banerjea began his public career. Banerjea passed into the ICS in 1869. He entered the service, but was dismissed in 1874 on a trivial pretext. English civilians were evidently not happy about having a talented, independent- minded Indian as colleague. In 1876 Banerjea set up the Indian Association in Kolkata. In 1876 the maximum age for ICS competitors was lowered from 23 to 19. This made it almost impossible for Indians to enter the service. Under the sponsorship of the Indian Association, Banerjea undertook a tour of northern India to demand more favorable Civil Service regulations. His campaign was an epoch making event. For the first time political activity in the country was conducted on a national basis. Agitations against the lowering of the age limit for Civil Service examinations, the Arms Act, the Vernacular Press Act and the Ilbert Bill accelerated the tempo of Indian

political activity. Hostile Europeans kept Indians bereaved from legal privileges. As a result, rebellious actions against the British Government became dire need. In 1885, the Indian National Congress was established, with the support of liberal-minded Englishmen like A.O.Hume, Sir William Wedderburn and Sir David Yule. In the beginning it was mostly a body of Moderates, who had unshakable faith in the British sense of justice and fair play, and who pledged complete loyalty to the King Emperor. It passed courteously worded resolutions requesting the Government for political and social reform. Most British administrators refused to take it seriously. The Moderates desired India's freedom and greatness, but they were not in a hurry to have it. They believed that Britain's mastery over the Indian people had been brought about by the workings of divine providence. Government's indifference gave rise to Radicals/ Extremists. The leaders of Radicals/ Extremists were B.G. Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose. The rise of Radicals led to the eclipse of the moderates and the Congress increasingly became a more militant body.

III advised partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon was not appreciated by Indians. To Indians the partition appeared to be not so much administrative necessity. It seemed as a planned attempt to weaken the Nationalistic movement. Lord Curzon's strategy of the Partition of Bengal was a concealed attack on Indian Nationalism. The presidency of Bengal was the most populous province of India. It included not only West Bengal and the eastern part of the region, but also Bihar and most of Orissa. According to the scheme the Bengali speaking majority of the province was divided into two parts. One of them was grouped with Bihar and Orissa, the other with Assam. The new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was specially constituted so that Muslims would outnumber Hindus. This deliberate setting of one community against the other had its inevitable result that is increase in communal tension. A popular agitation set in, which, started as a purely local movement, which later on merged itself in a national struggle of All India character against the British, which had never ceased till India won her independence. When the government plan's was announced in 1903 it met tremendous opposition. The proposal was shelved, but then in 1905 it was pushed through without warning. The people of Bengal did not accept it. Hundreds of protest meetings were held, where Muslims as well as Hindus crowded to hear speeches by Surendranath Banerjea, Liakat Husain, and other leaders. Scores of petitions were sent to the government. But this time the people realized that constitutional agitations were not enough so they resolved to boycott British goods and to rely on Indian products. This was the start of the Swadeshi Movement, which within few years transformed totally the political scene of India.

The Swadeshi Movement quickly gathered force. Bonfires of British cloth demonstrated the peoples' determination not to rely on foreign products. The sale of English goods fell dramatically as Bombay mills worked overtime to meet the demand for swadeshi textiles. It became a matter of pride to wear coarse dhotis woven on local handlooms rather than fashionable Manchester cottons. Student volunteers encouraged people to use Indian products. People's enthusiasm was sustained by songs written by Rabindranath Tagore and others. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's 'Vande Mataram' became a national anthem, and its opening words a sort of battle cry. The Swadeshi Movement gave tremendous impetus to Indian industry. Beginnings were made in the manufacture of swadeshi salt; the movement gave a stimulus to Prafullachandara Ray's Bengal chemical works, and encouraged Jamshedji Tata of Bombay to open his famous steel plant in Bihar. At the same time, Indian labor took its first real steps towards organization. The increasing self-confidence generated by the re-discovery of the Indian identity received a further boost with the revolutionary movements in China and Turkey in the first decade of the twentieth century. The conviction that India and the East might look forward to independent life again was strengthened by the impact of World War I and its aftermath. As Europe was seen to be no longer invincible, Britain was realized to be less powerful in the European system than had previously been thought. This new evaluation of Britain and the West encouraged the organizers of anti-government movements. The end of the first world war in 1914 a watershed in European history, proved to be an equally significant period in Indian life, when the Gandhian whirlwind began to sweep over the length and the breadth of the land, upsetting all established political strategies and ushering in refreshingly new ideas and methods which shook Indian life in several spheres to the core.

The tempo of political agitation was admirably kept up after the war by Tilak, who emerged from temporary retirement after his release from prison in 1914, rejoined the Congress, and founded the Home Rule League in 1916; and Mrs. Anne Besant's own All India Home Rule league was established in 1917. Mahatma Gandhi who boosted the spirit of Nationalism from his Satyagraha triumph in South Africa returned to India in 1915. After undergoing a year's probation prescribed by his mentor Gokhale, Gandhiji successfully tested his new weapon of non-violence in the Champaran campaign against the exploitation of the tenants of the Indigo- planters in 1917. Gandhiji wielded the weapon of non-violence in the Kaira Satyagraha against unjust land assessment demands during the famine of 1918 and the Ahmedabad Labour dispute in the same year. In 1919, agitation against the Rowlatt bills led to the Jallianwala Bagh slaughter which had remained a black blot in the history of the British.

During this epoch Gandhi's leadership had already assumed an all-India character and on the 1 August 1920 Gandhiji launched the first country wide Non- Co-operation Movement. The movement had created an unprecedented awakening. The movement proved to be: 'a baptism of fire which initiated the people into a new faith and new hope, and inspired them with a new confidence in their power to fight for freedom' (Majumdar 368)

Ten years later, Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930, which differed substantially from the earlier Non- co-operation movement, though the goal remained the same. The first was passive and the second was revolutionary. The first hoped to bring government to standstill by withdrawing from the administration; the second sought to paralyze the government by mass's opposition of specific illegal acts. Among these acts, the one illegal act that was opposed by the people under the leadership of Gandhiji was the illegal making of salt. Gandhi's twenty four day march, with seventy nine chosen followers from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi to break the salt Law in March 1930 electrified the entire civilized world. The salt Satyagraha roused India to action as never before. The historic 'Quit India' resolution of 9 August 1942 and the end of the World War II and the political and economic imperatives of the day compelled Britain to concede independence to India on 15 August 1947.

The entire period of nearly three decades of the Gandhian, age brought changes not only in the political scene but practically in all areas of Indian life. In the political sphere, there was great mass awakening. In the social sphere, the Gandhian movement led to an unprecedented awakening among women, who responded whole-heartedly to Gandhi's call. This was unique in the entire history of India, the spectacle of hundreds of women taking part in political mass movement, picketing of liquor shops, marching in demonstrations, courting jails, facing lathi charges and bullets. Their narrow domestic walls had given away to open a new wide world in which they had a high place. The pioneering work was done in the field of female education and emancipation by organizations namely Bharat Stri Mandal, the first women's organizations on an all India basis was founded in 1910 by Sarladevi Chaudhurani; establishment of D.K. Karve's Women's University in 1916 and the Women's India Association of Madras in 1917.

Salient Features, of Gujarati Literature of the Pre - Independent Era

Political, historical and religious evolvement of Pre-Independent era had influenced Gujarati Literature of the epoch. The ordeals of the freedom struggle, East- West relationship, the plight of the untouchables, the landless poor, the down trodden, the economically

exploited and the oppressed- no more remained aloof from writers' pen. During Pre-independent era learned in Gujarat like Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Sukhal, Muni Jin Vijay, Kaka kakekar, Kishorlal Mashruwala, Vishnu Prasad Trivedi, Vishwanath, Vijayrai Vaidhya, Ramlal Modi, Umanshankar Joshi, Ramanlal Deasai, Bhoghilal Sandesra, Keshavram sastri, Jhaverchand Meghani, and many other contributed mighty yet humane thoughts through their works in simple and lucid style. Salient features of Literature of pre-independent era are as under:

Uniformity in spellings of Gujarati words and lucid style of writing

The first time uniformity came in Gujarati spellings. Chaos and heterogeneous quality dwindled forever. Mastermind behind composing the dictionary with uniformity in spelling was Mahatma Gandhi. In contrast to the opulent rhetoric, many writers used a spare and simple, transparent and energetic style, which eschewed all oratorical flourishes and communicated with the directness of an arrow hitting its mark. Gandhi, Goverdhan Tripathi, Kanayalal Muni, Anand Shankar Dhruv, Meghani Chunilal Madiya, Ishwar Petliker and many other stalwarts of literature brought fineness and accuracy through use of simple language.

Alliance with Nature and Reality

Literature of Pre-independent era drew towards natural life of common people rather than materialistic or artificial life full of pomp and show. Scholastic attitude vanished from literature during this epoch. The concept of considering simplest script understood by the people of grassroots level; directly or indirectly contributed in making of literature. The trend of projecting educated and rich characters breathing artificial life of metropolitan cities faded. Illiterate, down trodden, farmers, mill workers, prostitute, untouchables and many others who overlooked for many years found vent to their feelings in literature. During this period, there was a transition from choking artificial life of metros to natural life of village. Village came into literature as well as literature reached village. Dhumketu, Meghani, Panalal Patel, Chunilal Madia, Ishwar Petlikar, Pushkar Chandravakar and many other writers breathed and lived village life. All these writers helped the current of promoting reality in literature.

Reformation and Religion

Dalpat, Narmad employed reformative subjects in their works during the age of Reformation. During the 'Gandhi Yug', the theme of reformation was prominent. Goverdhan

Ram's 'Sneh Mudra', and 'Saraswati Chandra', Ramlal's 'Bhadra Bhadra' and 'Ray no Parvat', Bhogindra Rao's novel, Nanalal's 'Vasant Utsav', 'Indu Kumar', and 'Jaya and Jayant', 'Munsi's Novelette and 'Ver. ni Vasulat', 'Kana Vank', and Meghani's '*Chita ane Angara*'- all these works are packed with revolutionary thoughts and aimed at reformation. The awareness created by Prathna Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Theosophy also continued during this period. 'Gyan Sudha' by Bholanath Divetiya and their sons and Raman bhai's literature shows effect of Prathna samaj. Manilal and Krant were attracted by Theosophy. Gandhi not implemented life of *sanatan* dharma but also shows effect of it in his writing. Sundram and Pujajal did research in religion.

Journalism

During Pre-independence days, journalism was inevitably an effective weapon of the nationalist effort and the ranks of journalists included men like Tilak, Gandhi, Subhash Chandra Bose and Motilal Ghosh. Another distinguished editor and journalist was Jhaverchand Meghani. In fact, the career of the 'national poet', Jhaverchand Meghani began as editor of 'Fulchhab'. Meghani's articles in newspapers reflected political, social and cultural ethos of pre-independence era. Many institutions and magazines also played pivotal role in circulating revolutionary thoughts like: Gujarati Shatiya Parishad, Gujarat Vidhya Sabha, Forbes Gujarati Sabha, Literary parliament, Gujarat Vidhya pith, Dakshina Murti and many other institutions 'Buddhi Prakash', 'Gyan Sudha', 'Vasant', 'Sundri Bodh', '20th century literature', 'Gujarat', 'Kumar', 'Komudi', 'Yug dharma', 'Prasthan', 'Mansi', 'Urmi', 'Forbes meeting timothy', and 'Sanskriti', 'Navjivan', 'Saurashtra', 'Prajabandhu', and 'Fulchhab' and many other magazines made remarkable role in the development and achievement of this period.

Rise of Folk literature

The Political agitation, which initially confined to the intellectuals, soon spread to the masses. Consequence of this political agitation was the revival of the study of ancient Indian culture and Sanskrit works. The political climate at that time was conducive to a return to the ancient store of legends and tales of heroism and nobility. These tales exploited to whip up the patriotic fervor of the people. The University scholars delved into the ancient Indian myths to discover themes and visions of a glorious age of the past and to seek solace and take pride in an ancient treasure. Alexander Forbes, Kava Dalmatian, Koradji Himeji, Framing Bamganie, Narmad, Mahipatram Rupram Neelkanth, Govardhanram Tripathi, Ranjitram Vavabhai, Gijubhai Badheka, Nanalal, Umashankar Joshi, Meghani, Kaka Kalekar and many other

endeavored to reveal rich cultural heritage of Gujarat by giving spur to, writing, publication and edition of Folk literature. Jhaverchand Kalidas Meghani made path-breaking work in the field of folk literature. Apart from his predecessors and followers Meghani did not study folk literature superficially or any particular genre or a particular aspect of folk literature. In fact, he studied it as whole.

The Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century produced prose of many types. The two most prominent types of prose which developed during this era were historical- political and religious-cultural prose. The prose was prompted by the twofold impulse of the re-discovery of the Indian past and a strong awareness of the problems of the day. Biography, autobiography, Short stories, essay, travelogues, criticism, comic literature, children-literature, edition, publication, and critical appreciation of folk literature, Linguistic, History, and Archaeology etc evolved. Thus, during the pre-independent era, the Indian ethos gradually underwent a sea change from the shock of defeat and frustration and the trauma of inferiority feeling to a new- found self- awareness and self- confidence. The rediscovery of the Indian identity was further boosted by Gandhian whirlwind. The rise of non-violence, nationalism and the spirit of unity, fraternity and equality pricked the bubble of Western superiority and made the rediscovery of India's identity vigorous.

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