



# THE CONTEXT

*Quarterly journal of Arts & Humanities*

International, Indexed & Peer Reviewed / Refereed Journal

Publication details and instructions for authors:

[www.thecontext.in](http://www.thecontext.in)

This is an Open Access Journal<sup>#</sup>

## Socio-Cultural Theme in Indian Literary Texts

Chincholkar Bandopant B.

Head, Dept. of English, Rajarshi Shahu Mahavidyalaya Parbhani. MS.

### Abstract

Independence Movement constituted an emotional experience for all Indians in the nineteen-twenties and thirties. No Indian writer writing in those decades or writing about them could overlook this phenomenon: "Life could not be the same as before, and every segment of our national life-politics, economics, education, religion, social life, language and literature-acquired a more or less pronounced Gandhian hue." Once Independence was gained and Gandhi no longer on the national scene, there was a lull in the creative spirit. For a while on the one hand, there were no more immediate goals to strive for, on the other, the bewildering task of building a new nation faced everyone.

This research paper is an attempt to explore socio-cultural theme in select Indian literary texts in specific contexts.

**Keywords:** *Society, Culture, Politics, Nation, State of mind*



---

## Socio-Cultural Theme in Indian Literary Texts

Chincholkar Bandopant B.

The novelists writing in English became individualists rather than crusaders in their approach to the problem of the Hindu in his social environment, which led to a break away from the Gandhian depiction to a pluralistic attitude in novel writing. This plural approach had however one common factor; the acceptance of the social situation as it stood at the time of writing a particular novel, and thus the very opposite of the 'Heroic-Age' which stressed the non-acceptance of the social conditions in which the Hindu lives. The socio-cultural movements of yester-years like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society, and the Vedanta philosophy of Vivekananda helped to shape further the ground for modernism in social thought. An extended result of this was that man began to be conscious not only of the social reality outside him, but also of the pressures acting upon his psyche. "As a result of literacy, urbanization, speeding automobiles and huge constructions, the pace of life had become fast and the isolation of the individual almost inevitable." The joint family system eroded as people migrated from their villages to towns in search of jobs. This uprooting from cloistered homes into a world where challenges and values were all new, resulted in an initial fear-psychosis which in turn provided many interesting themes for novelists writing after Independence: Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), tells the story of a poor peasant family who have starvation, death, treachery and infidelity as their daily companions. With the building of the tannery in the village, whether peace remained is lost forever. Economic insecurity leads the hero of *A Handful of Rice* (1967) to migrate to the city to earn a living, only to discover that urban poverty is even more of a nightmare.

Various aspects of urban life, such as the dehumanizing element of large cities, are captured feelingly by Anita Desai in *Voices in the City* (1965), and earlier by Anita Desai in *Red Hibiscus* (1962). The clash between tradition, and queries against it, are the crux of Bhabani Bhattacharya's *He Who Rides A Tiger* (1954), and *A Silence of Desire* (1950) by Kamala Markandaya. The social change in the position of women, the gradual influence of education, and the slow death of a sonorous way of life, gives shape to Menon Marath's *Wounds of Spring* (1961), Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961), and Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1980).

This rich hybridization in the novels after 1950 compels Meenakshi Mukherjee to say: "The serious Indo-Anglian novelist no longer seems interested in simply documenting or hopefully improving the country, but in trying to depict the individual's groping towards self-realization." This gradual shift of interest from circumstantial reality to the mind of man had been evident in the literature of the regional languages as well. Commenting on this shift in modern Hindi literature,

Vatsayan says: "In a tradition where the age had always been concerned more with the creation of types rather than of individuals, and poetry tended to be the poetry of motifs and conceits rather than the expression of individual sensibility. As the Hindi writer discovered himself as an individual, he becomes aware that as a creator he was concerned with persons. The realization was as powerful as the discovery had been awkward and embarrassing."

Indo-Anglian fiction continued to grow with a variety of historical novels such as S. K. Ghose's *The Prince of Destiny* (1909) and S. K. Mitra's *Hindupur* (1909), both of which are entirely romantic with no actual historical facts. After a long gap during which practically no Indo-Anglian novel appeared, around 1930. We find some other historical novels appearing on the scene such as A. S. Panchapkesa's *Baladitya* (1930) and Ram Narayan's *The Tigress of the Harem* (1930). Then three years later Umraon Bahadur's *The Unveiled Court* (1933) was published which too was more or less a historical novel, exposing defects in the Government. But initial vogue of the historical romances, obviously associated with the awakening of Indian nationalism, soon started co-existing with the more recent social and political awareness which swept over other Indian literatures of the time. As nationalist feeling came to the forefront of Indian life, even purely social reform novels were inflamed by politics since any desire to improve the lot of people was bound to link with political independence. The appearance of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene, after the end of the First World War, influenced the educated and un-educated, the intelligentsia as well as the geniuses. Indians belonging to all religions, castes, classes, age-groups and language groups were influenced by him. M. K. Naik called him a whirlwind, that swept the social and political situation of India. His policies find the artistic expression in the novels by K. V. S. Venkataramani, such as *Murugan the Tiller* (1927) and *Kundan the Patriot* (1932).

The novelists and story writers such as S. K. Ghose, S. M. Mitra, Raj Laxmi Devi, Kshetrapal Chakarbarty, A. Madhaviab, S. B. Banerjee, Sardar Jogendra Singh, Bal Krishna, Sorabjee Cornelia, T. R. Krishna, K. S. Venkataramani were the writers who were experimenting to provide recognition to the Indo-Anglian fiction. They wrote social, historical and detective novels but historical romances were much popular. The period between 1920 to 1950 was dominated by novels with political and social themes. During 1950 to 1970 the next batch of Indo-Anglians like Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Mulkraj Anand, Kamla Markandeya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Bhabani Bhattacharaya, Manohar Malgaonkar, R. P. Jhabwala, Arun Joshi, Khuswant Singh, Nirad C. Choudhari and a host of others were trying their art of fiction writing with unlimited an unrestricted theme. The novels of Mulk Raj Anand and Bhabani Bhattacharaya deal with the themes of social criticism and political emancipation and are dedicated to India's quest for freedom from imperialism. The religious and mythical Indian traditions have been successfully presented in the novels of R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Sudhin Ghose. The psychological and social tensions are obvious in the novels of Anita Desai and



Nayantara Sahagal. The novelists like R. K. Narayan, R. P. Jhabwala, Arun Joshi, Ahmed Ali, Atti a Hussain, Balchandra Rajan, Santha Ram Rao and Nayantara Sahagal take their main characters from urban middle class. There is lively presentation of middle class manners and also the tension between tradition and modernity of the urban middle class. They expose the vanity, snobbery, hypocrisy, corruption and evils of society in the course of their presentation. The recent generation of Indo-Anglian novelists such as Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, V. S. Naipaul, Bharti Mukherji, Vikram Chandra, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Sobha De, Kiran Desai, Chitra Banerjee, Amit Chaudhary, Diva Karuni and others are expressing their creative urge in the form of fiction and earning world-wide reputation.

The novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan form a trilogy of early Indo-English fiction and their entry into the Indo-English fiction ushered a new era in the field of Indo-English writing. Mulk Raj Anand is not an armchair philosopher painting, the 'literary reality' while living in ivory tower. He is engrossed in the many 'underdogs' of Indian society, and his *Two leaves and a Bud* (1937), *Coolie* (1936), *The Untouchable* (1935) and *The Village* (1939) treat them not patronizingly but with the sympathy and even with the respect due to them as human beings. The sweeper, the peasant, the plantation labour, the city worker all emerge alive from his novels, anguished and hungry, yet human, in superstition and self-divided, vividly realized in spite of their sufferings.

R. K. Narayan, a south Indian, also started his career as a writer in the same year i.e. 1935 by publishing his first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935). He is the only writer whose literary career has been spread over 60 years from 1935 to 1999. K. R. S. Iyengar paid them tribute and said that of the Indo-Anglian novelists only Mulk Raj Anand and R. K. Narayan have shown anything like stamina and stern consistency of purpose. Narayan's novels have the credit of opening a typical 'Malgudi' venue for the Indian readers. His novels *Bachelor of Arts* (1936) and *The Dark Room* (1935) appeared in quick succession. But then we have to wait for some time till the end of Second World War, to welcome a new novel by R. K. Narayan. *The English Teacher* (1945), *Mr. Sampath* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *And Waiting for The Mahatma* (1955) are in the next phase. *The Guide* (1958), *My Dateless Diary* (1960), *Man Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of Signs* (1967) and *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) come in the latest phase.



---

### Works Cited

- Nayantara Sahgal, *From Fear Set Free*, Delhi, Orient Paper Backs, 1962, Preface.
- Robert, J. H., *Literary history as a challenge of literary theory, in towards on aesthetic of reception*, trans. Timothy Brennan, Brighton, 1982, 18.
- Rushdie, Salman, *Midnight's children*, London : Picador, 1981.
- Shashi Tharoor, *India from Midnight to Millennium*, New Delhi, Penguin India, 1997, p. 358.
- Singh, R. S., *Indian Novel in English*, Delhi, Arnold Heinemann, 1977, p. 9.

*#Copyright permissions and liabilities are the sole responsibility of the author(s). Association, Journal and all Editorial members are NOT responsible for any copyright infringement.*

