

The Region and the Nation in the Indian Fiction

Perspective- Sindhi Fiction

- Mohan Gehani

Dr. Radhakrishnan once observed that, “Indian Literature is one, though written in different Languages.” This continued to be believed as truism for quite some time till Mr. Nihar Ranjan Ray and others made it clear that the literature of Indian languages have their own distinct identity, their own unique literary traditions and they exist as individual entities in their own right. Therefore to club them under one umbrella term of “Indian Literature” would be untenable. Mr. Umashanker Joshi tried to tread a middle path saying that while speaking about “Indian Literature” the literary traditions of all Indian languages will have to be taken into consideration. This discussion has to be understood in the backdrop of multilayered and multi faceted book “An Idea of India” by Dr. Sunil Khilnani Professor at Kings College, London. It is a fact of History that the political boundaries have been constantly changing but linguistic and cultural territory remains constant. The political and geographical entity of India remained clearly defined during freedom struggle but the cultural and linguistic boundaries were defined with creation of states along linguistic lines. It should be noted that even the linguistic states were created on the basis of more than one hundred year old linguistic survey. The language is like a flowing river and the in the regional language itself sub regional dialects during this period have evolved and are asserting their identity, but this subject is beyond the scope of our subject which does not need elaboration at this stage. While at national level the cultural and literary identity remains amorphous at state level it assumes visible shapes and contours.

While speaking about “region” the Sindhi language finds itself in unenviable position as in ‘India’ Sindhi language does not own any “region.”

This situation further makes it important to delineate the peculiar limitations in Historical as well as contemporary context.

Sind was last part of India to be conquered by British in 1843. Sind was immediately annexed to Bombay presidency and its separate political identity was lost. Sindhi script was standardized by the board of East India Company in 1853 and modern education started only thereafter mostly in big cities and towns. As happened everywhere else the majority of the Muslim population went into sulk and shunned modern education for a long time and Hindus who were in religious minority till that time in Bombay presidency overnight became a majority and took to modern education in a big way consequently emerging as an educated middle class with professionals and a sprinkling of landlords in its fold. Sindhi students had to go to Calcutta or Bombay for higher education and they were influenced by the social reform movements sweeping across the country and on their return tried to emulate these movements as a result of which a spate of social reform movements started in Sind.

This had impact on Sindhi literature also and the first phase of Sindhi Prose literature was closely linked to social reform movements followed by movement of Struggle for freedom of India. During this period many literary books were translated and adapted. The first original Novel 'Zeenat' in Sindhi Language appeared in the year 1885 written by Mirza Kalich Beg. During the freedom struggle three All India congress sessions were held in Karachi, Sind a part from numerous provincial conferences. Shewak Bhaojraj produced two novels during this period "Ashirwad" and "Dada Shyam". Milieu and characters are Sindhi but thought content and treatment is not different from the novels written in other Indian languages. "Itihad" (Unity) a novel written by the first woman writer Guli Sadrangani stands out for its bold contemporary theme of inter-religious marriage between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy espousing the cause of communal harmony.

Under popular pressure Sind was separated from Bombay presidency in 1937. Partition of India into two states of India and Pakistan was done in 1947. Thus in 20th century the independent existence of Sind was for merely a decade.

Just before and during quit India movement many young students came under the Marxist influence and progressive trend of literature made its strong presence in Sindhi language also. We do have short stories and poetry but we do not have any novel of that period reflecting that trend till partition.

After partition of India a band of Hindu Sindhi population mainly consisting of middle class professionals and traders with some landowners, migrated to India and settled across the length and breadth of the country. However they settled in some clusters in various states with variety of Languages and traditions. It would be pertinent to observe that in India Sindhi community does not have any peasantry and working class in any significant numbers. The present endeavor will be to examine the literature produced in those Sindhi speaking clusters and how Sindhi fiction mirrors this changed and varied reality.

After partition of the country the Progressive trend of literature continued with full force for more than two decades. The trauma of partition and grim struggle for survival is material of many fiction produced at that time. In this grim situation for struggle for mere survival the writers found hope in changing social structure which could be possible only through revolution. In this the changed geographical and breakup of social fabric was depicted which context is unique only to Sindhi population. At the same time interaction with the people of that particular region is also depicted.

Sundri Uttamchandani's novel '*Kirandara Deewaroon*' (crumbling Walls 1953) was first significant Novel after partition. The narrative of the novel was along the Progressive trend that was dominant at time but it also emphasized the changed- liberated and economic empowerment of the women which was need of the hour in wake of partition of the country.

When Sindhis reached India as refugees they were stuffed into barracks left vacant by British Army after the Second World War. The most favored ones were at Kalyan near Bombay. At that time they were called Kalyan camps. Now this is called a thriving town of Ulhasnagar. Here the condition in which people were forced to live was sub human. Life in this town bereft of human dignity, stark poverty and unemployment forms the backdrop of early novels of Mohan Kalpana. He has penned

nine novels depicting the struggle of unemployed youth and consequent rejection in love life and changing values. Novels by other writers also depicted the similar reality with changed geographical background.

In 1952 the constitution of India was promulgated and it was found that Sindhi Language did not find mention in the eighth schedule of the constitution. Non inclusion of Sindhi language led to rampant discrimination against Sindhi Language. Educationists, writers, artists and Sindhi people of India were enraged and a strong movement all over India started to demand inclusion of Sindhi Language in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution. Sindhis felt that they had sacrificed their land for the freedom of the country but they were not prepared to sacrifice their rich cultural and literary heritage which constituted their distinct core identity. Later on this came to be identified as "SINDHIYAT" movement and was mainly led by writers and artists. Many writers and artists were thrown up by this movement who today are eminent names in their respective fields and many Sahitya Akademi Award winners came into literary field at that time.

It is a fact that during partition of India Sindh witnessed the least bloodshed. They left Sindh for safety and the loss accrued by the property left behind was perhaps the most. There were no wide spread riots in Sindh and there were many instances where after the influx of refugees from India when Sindhi Hindus were attacked they were rescued by their native Muslim neighbors'. Hindus and Muslim people had shared weal and woe together for centuries. Hindus of Sindh, mis- read the History and left their land thinking that partition would prove temporary and they would return back to their homes and hearths after the "bad winds" blew over. When the realization dawned that the partition was permanent and the doors to their homes were closed for ever and sunk in their psyche, the loss of inheritance and all that they held sacred and dear was immense. This led to nostalgia for the land, people and friendships lost found ample expression in fiction. This nostalgic trend has now changed into struggle to explore and maintain separate identity. These issues form the main thrust of fiction of that time.

Gobind Malhi's Novel "Pakhiara Valran Khan Vichriya" (1953). (Birds lost from flock) is about the village life left behind. The narrative is about the life led by Hindus and Muslims like members of joint family in rural Sind, except for last one or two years when the atmosphere was vitiated by bigoted political fringe. However the protagonist of the novel stubbornly refuses to leave the land of forefathers.

Gobind Malhi's Novel "Jin Suri Bhanyeen Sej" (Who took to gallows as to a bed) published in 1959 is a quasi Historical Fiction based on the first original short story of Sindhi Language written by Lalchand Amardinomal in 1914. It is an account of armed uprising of Hurs who at that time were called 'dacoits' but after the independence this is viewed as anti British crusade and a neglected part of war of independence. Hurs had their unique ethos in as much as they did not harm poor on the contrary their loot was mostly distributed among the poor and needy. The locale of this Novel is Makhi Lake in Sanghar district of Sind, spread over 1150 sq.miles with dense forests around and this novel has a strong flavor of the soil.

His Novel “Desi Sena Kajan” (Natives be made kin) published in 1982 takes the fisher-folks colony at Khar- Danda in Bombay as its locale. It narrates an intense love story between a Sindhi cloth hawker and a girl belonging to fishing community. Thus in this Novel the element of nostalgia about Sindh and Sindhi life is absent and acceptance of changed reality is accepted. This reflects the changed reality of life and its dynamism.

As Sindhis in India were struggling to maintain their distinct identity through language literature and culture across the border Sindh suffered a heavy blow to its existence as a geographical entity as all provinces in Pakistan were merged into one unit as West Pakistan. This created a popular upsurge and Jiye Sind Movement to free Sind from Pakistan came to the fore. In this way the Sindhi language and land itself were under threat and this common threat found echo across the borders.

Mohan Kalpna’s three novels “Jala Watan” (An exile) written in 1974, “Maa” (Mother) written in 1979 and his Novel “Kaaon ain Samundu” (Crow and the Sea) written in 1981 in a technique of flashback employed by him alternate between his childhood and early youth in Karachi and Ulhasnagar where he lived all his life in India. His Novels touch upon the travails of the Sindhis across the border and Jiye Sind movement.

Lal Pushp calls his trilogy “Autobiography- Novel and History” it also contains memories of his childhood in Larkana in Sind, though the treatment is fictional and his struggling days has Kalyan Camps (Ulhasnagar) as a backdrop. He also in his narrative often lapses from present to past keeping with his avowedly modernist style.

Krishin Khatwani’s Novel “Tarandar Badala” (Floating Clouds) Published in 1998 seriously deals with future of language without land. While intellectuals of the community were battling to retain their distinct identity Sindhi Community fell in pursuit of economic security, making money as its one point agenda, in the process leaving their language and way of life and old values. The values of globalization have hastened this process in all other languages also. In case of Sindhis they do not have their villages and this factor becomes critical. The writer is conscious of this situation and the dilemma confronting the community. It has a female character Sujata a Marathi journalist from western costal Maharashtra and a Sindhi intellectual and a journalist Hem in a relationship. Novel contains captivating pictures of lush green hillocks spread along the western coastal Maharashtra during monsoon. Ultimately his quest for his moorings leads him to a village in Sindhi speaking area in Kutch where he learns that on moonless night people cross the border with connivance of authorities of both sides and he slips into his native soil.

Sindhis have spread all across the globe and the fiction also has transcended national boundaries of nation and region. Kala Prakash’s Novel “Arsee a Aado” which won her Sahitya Akademi Award (In front of a Mirror) has Dubai as its background and her novel “Pakhan Jee Preet” is about a love affair between a Sindhi Muslim boy and Sindhi girl who go and settle in Sindh at a fictional place called ‘Mohabat Dero’ (Abode of Love.)

As it is often said that the concept of India as nation is still ‘work in progress’ in cultural and literary sense the interaction within the languages has remained constant throughout the ages, at deeper

level many currents and cross currents are evident. In fact historically the concept of nation state as it emerged in Europe in wake of post Political- cultural – Industrial revolution, presently with emergence of common European Market has been to a great extent diluted. It exists almost as a hangover.

Another significant ‘space revolution’ ushered in the last years of twentieth century has lent a new dimension to entire scenario. The internet and modern technology has rendered all borders meaningless. In social media every participant is a writer and a reader at the same time. This has led to democratization of medium of expression. Cyberspace recognizes neither borders nor distance. All this time the relationship between a region and language has remained intimate but does it matter in the cyberspace? We very soon will have E libraries and other platforms to have access to cultural treasures! In time to come will this not entire discussion about the region and nation be redundant?

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