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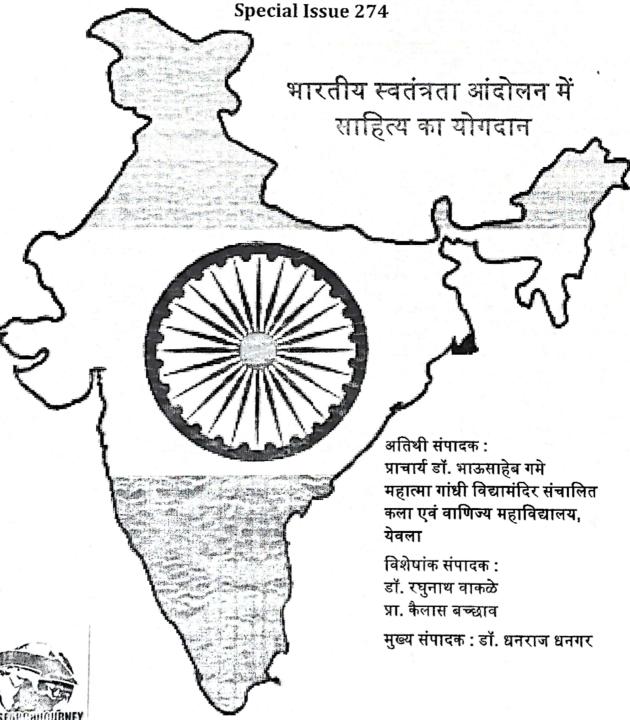
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Role of Pre-Independence Literature in Indian Freedom Struggle

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Abstract:

Literature played an important role in India's freedom struggle. It acted as a tool in India's freedom struggle against colonialism. It evoked emotions related to oppression or kind of injustice to people that they had been facing for a long time. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, K. S. Venkatramani, Rabindranath Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, K. A. Abbas, R. K. Narayan etc. depicted the dominant themes of freedom struggle, patriotic spirit, Gandhian ideology, social reforms etc. The ideology, thought and writings of these great writers shaped the freedom movement of India.

Keywords: freedom struggle, colonialism, oppression, injustice,

The American Revolution was influenced by pamphlets written by Jonathan Mayhew, John Dickinson and Tom Paine. Similarly, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau were contributory in sowing the seeds of French Revolution. One cannot ignore the role of pre-Independence literature in freedom struggle. Literature played an important role in India's freedom struggle. It acted as a tool in India's freedom struggle against colonialism. It evoked emotions related to oppression or kind of injustice to people that they had been facing for a long time. Fiction and poetry were used for a patriotic purpose and raised nationalist sentiments. Nationalist literature was in the local language helped common man to take part in India's freedom struggle. Newspapers like Bande Mataram, founded by Bipin Chandra Pal in 1905, Jugantar Patrika founded by Barindra Kumar Ghosh in 1906 and Harijan by Gandhi in 1932 aware the common people socially and politically as well as unite them for getting freedom to the country. Writers and poets such as Rabindranath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Mohammad Ali Jouhar etc. used literature as a tool to spread awareness against the British rule, encourage the people to fight for the country and provoke the thought of freedom among the people. Women leaders like Begum Rokeya and Sarojini Naidu encouraged women participation in national politics.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) is the one who used literature to spread patriotic feelings. He highlighted the idea of secular nationalism through his writings. His novel Anandamath published in 1882, set during the famine in Bengal in 1770, Chattopadhyay emphasized patriotic feelings and sacrifices made by the characters, common people who left their homes to fight against oppression. He used religion as a powerful tool against colonial rulers. This novel inspired many people to sacrifice their lives for the struggle of freedom movement. The novel was banned by British rule and the ban was raised by the Government of India after Independence. The national song, Vande Mataram was first published as a poem in this novel. This song used to give courage and to urge people to fight against the British people. In 1937, the first two verses of Vande Mataram were adopted as the national song by the Indian National Congress. Chattopadhyay published Devi Chaudharani (1884) became an inspiration to women in the freedom fighting movement. In this novel, a woman is a protagonist and a leader

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of the freedom struggle. Chattopadhyay know that without the cooperation of women, the freedom struggle could not be successful. Shanti says in *Anandamath* while making her case to join the cause that which hero ever became a hero without the cooperation of his wife?

During this period, Gandhi's popularity increased. Many authors used literature to portray Gandhi's ideals. K. S. Venkatramani (1891-1957) is the one who wrote two significant novels- Murugan the Tiller (1927) and Kandan, The Patriot (1932). These novels describe the influence of Gandhism and Civil Disobedience Movement. In Murugan, Venkatramani depicted the sacrifices of the villagers in their freedom struggle. Raghu, the protagonist, in Kundan joins the freedom movement despite his mother's angry protest. Soshee Chunder Dutt (1824-1886) is an early Indian writer in English and a fundamental anti-colonialist in his writings. His work Shunkur: A Tale of Indian Mutiny of 1857 is the fictional picture of the confrontation of 1857 struggle against colonial power. In this novel, he has provided a substitute myth to justify Indian's rebellion against the British Government and has condemned the British occupation of India. His The Young Zamindar (1883) also describes the anti-colonial feelings in various parts of India.

The ideology, thought and writings of these authors shaped the great freedom movement of India. During the freedom struggle several writers produced creative works which inspired nationalism and patriotism among the people. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) is the one among them who emphasized political as well as spiritual freedom. In his poem, "Where the Mind is Without Fear", he writes,

"Where the mind is led by three into ever-widening Thought and action into that heaven of freedom My father, let my country awake."

Tagore gifted the National anthem, "Jan Gan man..". The song created a sense of national unity and made India stronger than before. He suggested the people to get freedom on humanitarian ground. Anti-colonial nationalism came out in 1857 which greatly influenced literature, thought and psychology of Indian minds. Tagore's Gora (1909) represents the theme of anti-colonial nationalism. It raises controversial questions regarding the Indian identity. Self-identity, personal freedom and religion are developed in the context of the family story and love triangle. Tagore believes that every Indian must sacrifice his life for the attainment of freedom. His The Home and the World set on the same ideas of the anti-colonial nationalist struggle against the colonial rule. The novel through the lens of idealistic Zamindar Nikhil criticizes rising Indian nationalism, terrorism and religious zeal in the Swadeshi Movement. The novel ends in Hindu-Muslim violence.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) was also influenced by Gandhian thoughts. In *Untouchable* the protagonist, Bakha, a sweeper, treated unfairly because of his caste. It depicts a day in the life of a sweeper. He finds relief when he hears Gandhi's speech. The speech gives him hope for a better future. A lawyer Bashir and a poet Sarshar defends Gandhi's opinions and ideas. The arrival of flushing toilets would eradicate the need for humans. This machine could mean the end of untouchability. *The Village, Across the Black Waters* and *The Sword and the Sickle*, is the trilogy which centers on India's political structure specially the British rule and Independence Movement. Mulk Raj Anand displays Gandhian ideology and the freedom struggle in this trilogy.

Raja Rao's (1908-2006) involvement in the nationalist movement is reflected in his first two books. The novel Kanthapura is an account of an impact of Gandhi's teaching on non-



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violence resistance against the British rule. Moorthy, a brahmin, when discovers Gandhian philosophy, begins to wear khaki and fight for untouchability. The people of Kanthapura initiate to believe in Gandhian principles and Gandhi converts similar to a god to them. Gandhi became a hero for the people who were dealing with exploitation and help in a new era with a more equal society. The novel reflects Gandhiji's Swadeshi, anti-colonial protest and need of eradication of social evils like untouchability, casteism, women subordination, backwardness and wine addiction among people. Gandhiji portrayed as Lord Krishna and considered to be a saint, the Mahatma in the novel. All the villagers came to the temple regardless of their class division and took the oath unanimously to serve for the country. "My master, I shall spin a hundred yards of yarn per day, and shall practice ahimsa, and I shall seek for the blessings of the Mahatma and the gods, and they rose and crawled back to their seats (81)."

K. A. Abbas (1914-1987) Tomorrow is ours: A Novel of the India of Today (1943) depicts the issue of nationalism and untouchability. Bhabani Bhattacharya's So Many Hungers sets in the context of Quit India Movement of 1942 and the Bengal Famine. R. K. Narayan's (1906-2001) Waiting for the Mahatma describes Gandhian ideology and impact on the people of the nation. The protagonist Sriram in the novel is a blind supporter of Gandhiji. He joins the freedom movement. Narayan elaborates Gandhi's concept of non-violence as, "Before you aspire to drive the British from the country, you must drive every vestige of violence from your system...you must train yourself to become a hundred percent ahimsa soldier (52)."

He considers English as the language of rulers and it has enslaved us. Gandhiji introduced the national consciousness among the people and the writers through religious speeches, political campaign and brought realization of the need of unity against the British rule to fight for freedom despite of their class, caste and religion. He influenced every aspect of the society and became a source of writing in various fields like, history, politics, literature, sociology, philosophy etc. Nataber Jena rightly points out,

The major Indian writers in English like Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, Soshee Chandra Dutta and many others depicted the dominant themes of nationalist struggle apart from their civilizational, cultural and historical antecedents.

The characters portrayed in pre-independence literature were ordinary people. They were not intellectuals but they inspired and joined the freedom struggle movement and became heroes. They belong to different castes and creed, coming from different parts of India with different dialects. Though, despite of their differences, they believed in same philosophy which led them to good quality of life and independence. Pre-independence literature was contributory in uniting people to common cause. Consequently, Literature played an important role in India's freedom struggle. It gave birth to many nationalist writers who tried to inspire public psyche through their work. It acted as a force to unite people against colonial forces.

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