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# Political Thinking of Marx and Modern Indian Literature

## Abstract

The period of the modern Indian literature starts with the first movement for independence in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The early modern Indian literature, however, was greatly influenced by both adoption of the Western thoughts and ideas on the one hand and their rejection on the other. Marxism in Indian literature was first noticed during the Indian Independence Movement, when the theories of Communism and Socialism had entered the pre-Independent scenario in an overwhelming manner. Marxism is the political doctrine and practice that has been derived from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. "Marxism" essentially represents an economic political theory, under which the eye of law is considered a tool of tyranny and dominance and which the "ruling class"-the heavyweights in power-utilizes against the "proletariat"-the blue-collared servants. The Marxist movement was especially conspicuous in Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Telugu and Malayalam, but its impact was felt all over India. The literary works of P. Y. Deshpande, V. S. Khandekar, V. V. Hadap, G. T. Madkholkar and of Kusumagraj, Anant Kanekar and V. R. Kant, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Sahir Ludhyanvi, Krishna Chander, Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Bishnu Dey reflect the influence of Marxism upon Indian literature. This article represents development of modern Indian literature and impact of Marxism in modern Indian literature.

**Keywords:** Marxism, Political thinking, Modern Indian literature, Revivalism, Progressive literature.

## Introduction

Political Thinking is reflective thinking focused on deciding what can reasonably be believed and then using this information to make political judgments. India has a distinctive tradition of modern Indian political thought dating back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first modern Indian political thinker of India was Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1832) who laid the foundation of the tradition in a synthetic manner by defending many modern western modes of thinking such as rationalism and reason as well as ideas such as liberty and liberalism without delivering a full-blown attack on traditional social order in India that was based on different paradigms of thought. Modern Indian philosophy was developed during British occupation (1750-1947). The philosophers in this era gave contemporary meaning to traditional philosophy. Some of them were Swami Vivekananda, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, Kireet Joshi, Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan, M. N. Roy, Subhas Chandra Bose, Indra Sen, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Ananda Coomaraswamy, and S. Radhakrishnan. Pandurang Shastri Athavale, U. G. Krishnamurti, Acharya Rajneesh (Osho) and Krishnananda are other prominent names in contemporary Indian philosophy. Indian thinkers since Roy, including Mahatma Gandhi, have had to grapple with India's pre-British political thought which was rich, diverse, often synthetic in nature, and powerful. Modern Indian political thought is based on India's ancient civilization and its capacity for accommodation of various foreign elements and ideas brought in by successive foreign political invasions. This has served to give complexity and variety to Indian political thinking as well as some uniqueness.

Modern Indian political thinkers were social and political activists engaged in reforming their old society by engaging in political dialogues with the British colonial rule or acting against it. They were not systematic like western thinkers Hobbes, Locke, Green, Hegel, etc. It is true that the idea of a modern state took root in Indian society because of India's contact with western ideas but very soon, 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 soil. Bankim Chandra wrote many historical novels like *Durgesh Nandini* (1965), and *Anand Math* (1882), acquired a pan-Indian popularity and made nationalism and patriotism a part of dharma. This alternative was a distinctive civilizational concept of universalism that was accepted by many as a reply to western colonialism. Revivalism and reformism were natural corollaries of the newly emerging idea of nationalism. Rabindra Nath Tagore (Bengali, 1861-1942), the greatest name in modern Indian literature, made federalism an important part of his concept of national ideology. He said that the unity of India has been and shall always be a unity in diversity. The foundation for this tradition had been laid in India at the social level, not the political, by saints like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others. It is this solution-unity through acknowledgment of differences which India has to offer to the world. As a result, India's nationalism is mingled with its spiritual tradition, with truth and tolerance preached by Mahatma Gandhi, and non-alignment advocated by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, showing India's concern for its pluralism. Modern Indian pluralism is multi-lingual, multi-cultural, secular, national-state concept. The advent of Marxism on the Indian literary scene in the thirties is a phenomenon which India shared with many other countries. Both Gandhi and Marx were driven by opposition to imperialism and concern for the dispossessed sections of society. The Progressive Writers Association was originally established in 1936 by some expatriate writers in London, like Mulk Raj Anand (English). However, soon it became a great pan-Indian movement that brought together Gandhian and Marxist insights into society. The movement was especially conspicuous in Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Telugu and Malayalam, but its impact was felt all over India. It compelled every writer to re-examine his/her relationship with social reality. In Hindi, Chhayavad was challenged by a progressive school that came to be known as Pragativad (progressivism). Nagarjun was undisputedly the most powerful and noted Hindi poet of the progressive group. The Bengali poets, Samar Sen and Subhas Mukhopadhyay, added a new socio-political outlook to their poetry. Fakir Mohan

Senapati (Oriya, 1893-1918) was the first Indian novelist of social realism. Rootedness to the soil, compassion for the wretched, and sincerity of expression are the qualities of the novels of Senapati. Manik Bandyopadhyay was the most well-known Marxist Bengali novelist. Malayalam fiction writers like Vaikkom Muhammed Basheer, S.K. Pottekkat and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, made history by writing progressive fiction of high literary value. They covered fresh ground exploring the life of ordinary men and the human relations that economic and social inequalities fostered. Shivaram Karanath, the most versatile fiction writer in Kannada, never forgot his early Gandhian lessons. Sri Sri (Telugu) was a Marxist, but showed interest in modernism at a later stage in his life. Abdul Malik, in Assamese, writes with an ideological bias. The critical norms of progressive literature were established by the pioneer of this phase in Punjabi by Sant Singh Sekhon. The progressive writers' movement attracted the attention of eminent poets of Urdu, like Josh Malihabadi and Faiz Ahmad Faiz. Both imbued with the Marxist spirit, infused in the age-old love symbolism a political meaning.

## Objectives

- To explain development of modern Indian literature
- To analyze political thinking of Marx in modern Indian literature

## Modern Indian Literature

The period of the modern Indian literature starts with the first movement for independence in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The early modern Indian literature, however, was greatly influenced by both adoption of the Western thoughts and ideas on the one hand and their rejection on the other. The period between the mid-19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century thus saw the rise of a large number of literary works which often incorporated both the elements of Sanskrit and Western literature. 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 what was written during that time. Contact with the western world resulted in India's acceptance of western thought on the 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 19<sup>th</sup> century India. But it was a

renaissance in a country which was under foreign domination. So it was not that kind of renaissance which had spread in 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century Europe, where scientific reasoning, individual freedom and humanism were the dominant characteristics. The Indian renaissance took a different shape, in the context of the Indian race, moment and milieu, and as a result, nationalistic, reformistic and revivalistic 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 Mohun Roy (1772-1833), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Vivekananda, Madhav Govind Ranade, U.V. Swaminatha Aiyer, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, K.V. Pantulu, Narmada Shankar Lalshankar Dave and others. The leaders of the renaissance, in fact, succeeded in instilling nationalistic fervor in the people, and induced in them a desire for social reform and a sentimental yearning for their past glory.

The most important literary event that revolutionized literature was the emergence of literary prose in all the modern Indian languages, and the advent of the printing press, under the patronage of an Englishman, William Carey (1761-1834), at Serampore, Bengal. 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 birth of newspapers and periodicals in Indian languages between 1800 and 1850 was extremely important for the development of prose, and the missionaries of Serampore started off Bengali journalism on its career. The emergence of prose as a powerful medium brought a kind of change that coincided with the process of modernization.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw the emergence of the Indian English literature which refers to literary works that are written by Indian authors in English language. Most famous Indian authors of the modern era include the Nobel laureates Rabindranath Tagore and V. S. Naipaul, R. K. Narayan, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Salman Rushdie, Mahadevi Varma, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, etc.

### **Impact of Nationalism, Reformism and Revivalism on Indian Literature**

Patriotic writings proliferated almost spontaneously in different languages, as the resistance of a community against foreign rule. Rangalal in Bengali, Mirza Ghalib in Urdu and Bharatendu Harishchandra in Hindi expressed themselves as the patriotic voice of that era. This voice

was, on the 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. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) wrote the first modern epic in an Indian language, and naturalized blank verse in Bengali. 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), Bhai Vir Singh (Punjabi, 1872-1957), and others, with the express purpose of fulfilling the needs of the patriotic reader.

The birth of the novel is associated with the social reform-oriented movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 Tamil novel, Pratap Mudaliyar Charitram (1879) by Samuel V. Pillai, 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. In other first novels, like the Bengali novel, Phulmani O Karunar Bibaran (1852), by an English woman, H. Catherine Mullens, or the Hindi novel, Pariksha Guru (1882) by Lala Srinivas Das, one can discover shared patterns of response and articulation towards social problems.

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 fervor in her people. Novels were found to be the most appropriate medium to eulogize the intellectual and physical richness of the past, and reminded Indians about their obligations and rights. In fact, in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **Political Thinking of Marx**

Marxism is a method of socioeconomic analysis, which analyzes class relations and societal conflict using a materialist interpretation of historical development and

a dialectical view of social transformation. Marxists have always stood by the faith that economic and social circumstances have been forever determining one's religious beliefs, the nation's legal systems and a society's cultural frameworks. They are also of the view that 'art' and the aesthetic world should not only exemplify such conditions truthfully, but also seek to make them better. Such Marxist view of aesthetics is not although quite prospering in today's consumerist society, but stays on to enquire about responsible questions. Such high-flowing and ambitious thoughts, however, were not just built in a day; it did take a lot more of the most historical brains to make Marxism what it is today. Marxism is the political doctrine and practice, which has been derived from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. "Marxism" essentially represents an economic political theory, under which the eye of law is considered a tool of tyranny and dominance and which the "ruling class"-the heavyweights in power-utilizes against the "proletariat"-the blue-collared servants. According to Marxist perspective, class conflict within capitalism arises due to intensifying contradictions between the highly productive mechanized and socialized production performed by the proletariat, and the private ownership and appropriation of the surplus product (profit) by a small minority of private owners called the bourgeoisie. As the contradiction becomes apparent to the proletariat through the alienation of labor, social unrest between the two antagonistic classes will intensify, until it culminates in social revolution. The eventual long-term outcome of this revolution would be the establishment of socialism-a socioeconomic system based on social ownership of the means of production, distribution based on one's contribution, and production organized directly for use. As the productive forces and technology continued to advance, Marx hypothesized that socialism would eventually give way to a communist stage of social development, which would be a classless, stateless, humane society erected on common ownership and the principle of "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs".

### Marxism in Modern Indian Literature

Marxism in Indian literature was first noticed during the Indian Independence Movement, when the theories of Communism and Socialism had entered the pre-Independent scenario in an overwhelming manner. The arrival of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in India, severely oppressed under the British, was also that period during which the concept of the "middle class" had arisen, with every household including a man, was fueled with the principle to lash out against the tyrannical government

and everything that was being imposed by such an administration. And the British Indian set-up was just perfect to have provided a platform thus. Even the higher section of society had joined in this crusade of the proletariat and this "brave, angry young man" image was mostly mirrored and manifested through the most-accepted field of literature. With the tremendous and passionate propagation of pamphlets, newspapers, evening dailies, essays, articles in the short literary section and drama, poetry and short stories in the broader and more extensive section, Indian literature was doused in Marxism at a point of time, during which Marathi, Urdu, Hindi and of course, Bengali literature had come to most view and mass light. Mahatma Gandhi was a key turning point and decisive factor to the first uprising of the introduction of Marxism in Indian literature. Prior to the Second World War, the First World War had laid the foundation stone in Indian literature and the pre-Independent society in general, which was most intense in Maharashtra, particularly in Bombay, which was to some extent spearheaded by Gandhiji. A brief history is however required in this regard. Industries in Maharashtra had begun to grow on a large scale during the First World War. The labor class had come into existence already. Simultaneously, the Indian Communist Party was established in 1925 and the labor movement had begun to strike roots.

The new Marxist philosophy put forward a fascinated aspect for the then native youth. However, this did not help create a progressive literary movement during that time. The influence of Marxism did not extend beyond the delineation of occasional disagreements between the rich and the poor, slogan shouting by the hero about 'total revolution' and deriding down the tradition-loving class as 'the bourgeoisie'. The novels of P. Y. Deshpande (1899-1986), V. S. Khandekar (1898-1976), V. V. Hadap (1900-1960), G. T. Madkholkar (1899-1976) and the poems of Kusumagraj, Anant Kanekar (1905-1980) and V. R. Kant (b. 1913) reflect the influence of Marxism upon Indian literature to a certain extent. Marxism holds in its heart of hearts an analytical evaluation of 'capitalism' and a theory of vast social metamorphosis. Leaving out the socialist, economic and political fronts, Marxism is that domain which was tremendously propagated in India through the field of Indian literature. It can be quite comprehended by now that the period within the Partition of India of 1947 and the beginning of the reorganization of the states within the new geographical boundaries of India will be remembered for two reasons in the history of Indian literature and its connection with Marxism and the Marxist principles of life. First, there was witnessed a growth of new literature out of the experience of



Partition, i.e., the Marxist literature within the framework of Oriental Indian literature. Second, there was also a growth of a new literature from the sense of fulfilment that the Independence had ushered in. Most unfortunately, that 'fulfilment' was short lived. It had become a part of a larger experience of disillusionment as well as hope created by the changed political situation.

The Indian Independence on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947 had brought in a sudden overriding sense of emancipation and perfect and idyllic liberation from the imperialist tyranny, which was outstandingly mirrored in literature. However, this was just a momentary phase of happiness; the joy and hope of freedom had turned into unexpected disillusionment and frustration. The bleak and breakdown economy and its greater disorderliness and gloom in the country, the failure of the Congress and the decline of moral values, poverty, unemployment, social inequality and political corruption had begun to be once again upheld in Indian literature. And the essential balm and soothing consolation was once more provided through espousing Marxism, which was the true last resort of the writers who wished to voice out their hopelessness in every sphere of society. Marxism in Indian literature once more had begun to take its dramatic turn during the budding nation's flowering and a looking forward towards an unsure future.

Bengali literature, mostly Bangla poetry and poetic verses, had come to light during this rather metamorphosing phase, with other literary forms also assisting the writers. Authors from this period had outlived and survived the Independence and had considered themselves unlucky and misplaced in such a time, when the country was mostly once again disintegrating. Yet, at a more mundane level, the narratives of political struggles had projected the possibilities of a new society and had generated hope and conviction. The Bengali poems of Subhas Mukhopadhyay (Agni Kon, 1948) and of Sukanta Bhattacharya (Chad Patra, 1948), both Marxists, had articulated the determined voice of revolution. The silver lining of hope visible amidst this sinister grimness was the ideology inciting people to change the existing social order, i.e., indeed by the all-encompassing and accepted predominance of Marxist influence in Indian literature, precisely in Bengali literature and its poetry. The Marxist writers had extended their influence to a remarkable extent. Subhas Mukhopadhyay although had made his mark on Bengali poetry in the early years of 1940s, he had matured into an artist in the 1950s. Sukanta Bhattacharya, who had expired in 1947, had

turned into idol of the younger generation and had dominated Bengali poetry with his fresh approach and exuberance. The Marathi poets with pronounced Marxist inclination, Sharatchandra Muktibodh and Vinda Karandikar and the Malayalam poet Vayalar Rama Varma, the most admired poet of social revolution, whose *Kontayumpunulum* had appeared in 1950, have one thing in common- "robust optimism". The finest and the most illustrious work of this period, demonstrating the hold of Marxism in Indian literature, a work that had articulated the voices of the oppressed and had projected the dream of a social order free of exploitation and tyranny is the epoch-making Telugu poem *Mahaprasthanam* (1950) by Sri Sri. Narrative literature too had fearlessly upheld the struggle of the oppressed. Kishan Chand had portrayed the heroic uprising in Telangana, in his *Ajanta Ke Age* (1948) and *Jab Khet Jage* (1952). Most of the writings of Yashpal, Nagarjun and Rahul Sankrityayan, all of them penning in Hindi, also had shared an optimism and vision of a new society. Hence, Marxism and its control upon Indian literature, with particular stress upon the post-Independent India was most profound, which with time, has gained its generic foothold, to be remembered for centuries to come.

Kerala has an ancient history of Christianity. It came to Kerala several centuries before it reached Europe. Like Christianity, Communism also has its long tradition in Kerala. In 1957, Kerala became the first state to form a democratically elected Communist government headed by E. M. S. Namboodripad, as the Chief Minister. Kerala is, of course, a developed and politically conscious state. The Marxist government has taken proper care for all round development of the state. But women are not safe even at the police station.

It is evident in the novel *The God of Small Things*. When Ammu went to Kottayam Police station, Inspector Mathew called her 'Veshya.' Then he tapped her. Roy, there are some other literary and non-literary artists who have similar observation regarding the Marxist government of Kerala. Salman Rushdie, in his novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, has presented the similar social and political picture as it has been presented in *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy.

## Conclusion

Indian writers were deeply influenced with Marxist approach which was to hegemonies the social, economic and political structures by the workers and the peasants who form the majority of the population. They knew that only socialistic pattern of the society

would end all sorts of exploitation and class distinctions. Their publications confirm that they were deadly against the exploitation, oppression, inhumanism, bourgeoisie democracy, capitalism and evil designs of selfish nature. The life-work of a genius like Marx is always unfinished, and for the most part unplanned, but no philosopher ever gave his system to the world in as unsystematic a fashion as he did. Much of his writing was governed by accidents of the historical tides swirling round him. Marx's writings on Asia may often seem to throw more light on him than on it. But he was, after all, a pioneer in trying to look at Indian history scientifically; almost the first man to foretell an independent India, the first to see that its real emancipation must have come from industry. Indian socialists in our day have been inspired by the recollection that Marx tried so earnestly to understand their country.

They have still far to go in developing or correcting his rough ideas and the divisions and crises that have been overtaking them are not unconnected with a failure to strengthen their armory sufficiently in this way. Some of them, fortunately, have been growing aware of the need for a fresh and more thorough exploration.

The foundation of Marxist approach to literature is very strong in reality. There is no literature, where there is no subjectivity. Literary texts are woven around the experience of the human who exists and the existence of many things which human perceives. Our living world can be compartmentalized as society, history, culture, and politics under one big unstable compartment called time. And no literary text and writer can by-pass any of

these compartments. This is what a Marxist approach does and it is relevant today and will be relevant tomorrow also.

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