

History of Marathi Literature: Contemporary Perspective

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Marathi can be traced back far beyond the 10th century. It descends from Sanskrit through Pali, Maharashtri and Maharashtra - Apabhramsa. A gradual process of change and modification in the spoken language has led to the present Marathi. The origin and growth of Marathi literature are indebted to two important events. The first was the rise of the Jadhav dynasty whose capital was Devgiri. The Jadhava's adopted Marathi as the court language and patronized Marathi learned men. The second event was the coming of two religious sects known as MahanubhavPanth and WarkariPanth, which adopted Marathi as the medium for preaching their doctrines of devotion. Writers of the Mahanubhav sect contributed to Marathi prose while the saint-poets of Warkari sect composed Marathi poetry. However, the latter group is regarded as the pioneers and founders of Marathi literature. Marathi literature first made its appearance in the 10th century AD and can be grouped into two ages: Ancient or Old Marathi literature (1000-1800) and Modern Marathi Literature (1800 onwards). The former consisted mainly of poetry composed in metres and restricted to the poet's choice of words and rhythms. It was particularly devotional, narrative and pessimistic for old Marathi poets hadn't been able to develop satire, parody, irony and humour into their poetry.

Old Marathi Literature covers about eight centuries. Its pioneers and founders were Mukundaraj (Vivekasindhu) and Dnyaneshwar (Dnyaneshwari) whose younger contemporary Namdeo (1270-1350) wrote devotional verses in a simple language for the people. Two centuries later came the great saint and greater poet Eknath whose Ekanathi Bhagavata is a literary masterpiece of Marathi literature. Eknath had a simple and attractive style of composing poetry and was the founder of secular poetry in Marathi. Mukteshwar (1574-1645) later developed this style, and his version of the Mahabharata is the best example of a great narrative poem in Marathi. In the history of Marathi literature, Tukaram (1608-1651) has been given a unique stature. A real genius, Tukaram's poetry came forth from his wonderful inspirations. He was a radical reformer and is called Sant (saint) Tukaram. Terseness, clarity, vigour and earnestness were found in every line of his poetry.

Tukaram's associate Ramdas' (1608-1681) Dasabodha is an inspiring and impressive piece in Marathi. 18th century Marathi poetry is well represented by Vaman Pandit (Yathartha Dipika), Raghunath Pandit (Nala Damayanti Swayamvara) and Shridhar Pandit

(Pandavpratap, Harivijay and Ramvijay). However, the most versatile and voluminous writer among the poets was Moropanta (1729-1794) whose Mahabharata was the first epic poem in Marathi. The historical section of the old Marathi literature was unique as it contained both prose and poetry. The prose section contained the Bakhars that were written after the foundation of the Maratha kingdom by Shivaji. The poetry section contained the Padavas and the Katavas composed by the Shahirs. The period from 1794 to 1818 is regarded as the closing period of the Old Marathi literature and the beginning of the Modern Marathi literature.

The modern period has been divided into four ages. The first period starts from 1800 to 1885, the second from 1885 to 1920, the third from 1921 to 1945, and finally the last period continues till now. In this period, almost all forms of literature in prose and poetry were developed and even scientific literature was produced. Under British rule, attempts were made to enrich both the language and literature. The Raja of Tanjore got the first English Book translated to Marathi in 1817. Several more such attempts were made and translation work was encouraged a lot. Chhatre, Bal Shastri Jambhekar, Lokahitavadi and Jotiba Phule wrote on various topics in Marathi. The first Marathi newspaper was started in 1835 and Baba Padamji's Yamuna Paryatan was the first Marathi novel written on social reform in 1857. However, this period was a lean one for original poetry and only translations of Sanskrit poems were produced. Establishment of the University of Bombay in 1858 and the starting of the newspaper Kesari in 1880-81 gave a boost to the development of Modern Marathi Literature. Keshavasuta (1866-1905), the first Marathi revolutionary poet, launched Modern Marathi poetry with his first poem. In this period two groups of poets, Ravikiran Mandal and Kavi Tambi, together encouraged some great poets like Ananta Kanekar (Chandarati), Kavi Anil (Phulwat) and N G Deshpande. Poetry after 1945 explores human life in all its shades. B S Mardhekar set the fashion of this trend for P S Rage, VindaKarandikar, Vasant Bapat and Shanta Shelke.

VishnudasBhave was the pioneer of Marathi drama which was born in 1843. Other great dramatists were BP Kirloskar (Saubhadra), G B Deval (Sharada), R G Gadkari (EkachPyala), Mama Varerkar (Apoorva Bangal) and P L Deshpande (Amaldar). Marathi stage is still following its rich tradition and is a very popular form of entertainment. Novels were not far behind, and the first to be published was 'MadhaliSthiti' by Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919). Natha Madhav, CV Vaidya, Prof V M Joshi, V S Khandekar, Sane Guruji, Kusumvati Deshpande, Kamalabai Tilak are the prominent novelists of the Marathi language. The short story and essay forms came into existence in this period through Diwakar Krishna, H N Apte and V S Gurjar. S M Mate, Durga Bhagwat, N S Phadke are well-known essayists in Marathi. Marathi occupies a distinct position in the field of Indian Literature and will continue to do so in future.

It is usually taken for granted that Marāṭhī literature begins with Mukund Rāj, Jñāneśvar and Nāmdev. These are likely to continue to hold their position as the real inaugurators of the

intellectual awakening in Mahārāshṭrā which broke away from Sanscrit and made use of the vernaculars as the literary medium. The recent research which has revealed the fact that these outstanding personalities were not alone in this new departure, has yet to be fully investigated, and the value of the earlier literature which has emerged has to be determined. That the Mānbhāū sect with which this newly discovered literature is associated had a very long and curious history has been known for a good many years, and Sir Eamkrishna Bhandarkar and others had become interested in it, but it is to the late Mr. Vinayak Lakshman Bhave that we owe the discovery that this sect were the guardians from the twelfth century at least of what he calls "an unknown chamber in the palace of Marāṭhī literature". Of the 500 hitherto unknown authors whose names, he tells us, he has catalogued, and whose works number five or six thousand it is not likely that many will take high literary rank. But to the followers of the Mānbhāū sect who wrote or translated these Gitās and Bhāgavatas so long ago, and who carried the Marāṭhī tongue and their books in old Marāṭhī to Peshawar and beyond, so that to-day in these far-off Maṭhs one can talk to their inmates in that language—to them Mahārāshṭrā owes a real debt. The members of this remarkable sect did more, it would appear, than anyone has hitherto dreamed of to shape the language for literary expression and to make it the channel to its followers of the ancient Sanscrit lore.

If one has to think with reference to the Goan literature, then one needs to underline the close ties existing between the generation of literature in this region and the local cultural inheritance. One also needs to keep in mind the references pertaining to the cultural environment in which the Goan literature was d, the aspects which were responsible for nurturing of the creativity and conflict faced by Goans in adverse conditions. This evaluation cannot be done solely on literary basis. One has to necessarily analyse the socio-cultural aspects. Just as the evaluator has to take into account various aspects linked to the Goan land, he has to also consider gamut of many references pertaining to the comprehensive Indian lifestyle. In a way, this is a self-search undertaken through impartial approach. This process continuously runs in the human psyche. Imparting a concrete form to this process from time to time is necessary in view of the future development. Dr IravatiKarve has termed culture in the following way, "Culture is a picture of progressive life of the motivated and enthused man on this planet." "Culture is physical, material creation of human civilization visible to the eyes, as also abstract world appreciated by the mind but invisible to the sight." In a nutshell, culture is the consequence of human endeavour from ancient age to the present times. The inheritance of Goan region has been generated through the Indian lifestyle. The derivative of the unified Indian culture can be observed in Goan culture. The four-and-a-half century old prolonged Portuguese regime in between, was a major blow on the traditionally continuing Indian values of our existence. It was a dark era in all respects. It naturally echoed on the public life. In such adverse condition too, the Goan society maintained its identity and spirit. The reflection of aspirations and very existence from this land can be seen in the local literature.

In a way, the picture of prosperity as well as penury of the culture is visible through the literature. The world of literature is the creative upsurge of culture through the generation of letters. Here, we need to have a panoramic view of the Goan literature through this very

perspective. We need to mainly focus on the post-Liberation modern period in order to record the same. However, it is also important to narrate the background of the topic by following its pivotal point. The generation of creative and intellectual literature in Goa has been taking place in Marathi since long time. Goans received inspiration to face the adverse conditions and maintain their nationality intact through this proficient literary tradition. The Portuguese, after partial conquest of Goa in 1510 began religious inquisition of Goans. They made heinous efforts to destroy the cultural roots. The authors of that period, paying no heed to these efforts drew inspiration from the Marathi Saint Literature as well as Pandit Literature, and carried passion for literary creation. KrishnadasShama, the founding Goan poet wrote 'SrikrishnaCharitrakatha', a text based on DashamSkandha of Bhagwat, in 1526, which presented diverse emotional aesthetics. The creation of this literary work was backed by the inspiration to maintain ties with the basic sources of Indian culture. Even before this literary event, literature must have been d here, in Marathi. The history of torture imposed by the Portuguese on the Hindu residents during the period of religious inquisition is simply horrifying. A number of books were burnt during this period. Some were taken to Lisbon. The objective of this repression was to force Goans to relinquish the Indian traditions. But it was just not possible. Like the phrase 'Trees, though they are cut and lopped, grow up again quickly', literary creation continued unabated in Goa. The Christian Missionaries and Jesuits learnt Marathi language, albeit for the purpose of spreading Christianity. They idolised ancient leading poets in Marathi while writing poetry. The verses at the beginning of the Christpurana have been largely influenced by Dnyaneshwari. Fr Stephans, in this text has skilfully narrated a number of incidents from Bible through emotional aesthetics. The Christian Marathi literature has primarily been d from the religious motivation.

The use of Prakrit words along with textual Marathi is found in abundance, in this text. The society faces material as well as spiritual degradation in political bondage. In such times, creative literature supporting self-potency has little scope. Moreover, the foreign regime tried to suppress expression of inner emotions from time to time. This demoralisation should have actually d awareness about new strength, here. However, it was not destined to be. In between, whatever poetry was born in Goa, had spiritualism at its core. The poignancy and compassion in the poetry of Sohrobanath touches the heart. The vision of worthy relationship between the soul (atma) and the supreme soul (paramatma) could be had in this era of existence of life. The poetry of Sohrobanath became radiant because of this very divine perception. The dawn of awakening arrived in Goa as late as the twentieth century. The sapling of progressiveness was rooted in Maharashtra during the second half of the nineteenth century. This very period witnessed circulation of thoughts touching the best parts of life. The process however, started a little late in Goa. After Portugal was declared a Republic nation, restrictions imposed by the monarchy on Goans were loosened. The doors of progressiveness opened a bit. The public established educational institutions. The organizations for social and cultural elevation were set up. Publication of magazines imbibing the mantra of nationalism in public also began. The then intellectuals carried this sacred task with dedication. During the pre-Liberation period, the local magazines provided a conducive atmosphere for creative literary pursuits. One can point at this luminous stream of thought as the source of the nationalism, here. The Gomantak Marathi Sahitya Sammelan

or Goan Marathi Literary Conferences held between 1935 and 1960 complemented provision of this conducive atmosphere.

It is also important to note that some of these conferences were held in incognito. The presidents of the reception committee as well as the presidents of these conventions, from the platform of the conventions instilled pride about our traditions, gave commentary on literary traditions, opened the threads of the fabric binding tenderness of the land and the creativity. They provided comprehensive guidance so that literary streams could uninterruptedly flow, here. The post-Liberation Marathi literature has been provided inspiration by the ancient cultural and literary tradition. The Goan masses experienced the moment of joy as regards Goa's Liberation on December 19, 1961. This historically important moment completed the Indian Independence. The experience of unexplainable happiness during the fulfilment of long-cherished dream mesmerised the hearts of Goans. While stepping from the four-and-a-half centuries old dark era into an age of glowing light, new spirit entered Goa. After 1961, conducive atmosphere for creative literature was made available in the newly liberated region. The public had an opportunity to breath freely in the liberated air. In the 36 years following Liberation, what are the attitudes, mind-sets one encounters? Which are the internal streams one witnesses? We mainly observe new heights in the creation of literature. We see new enthusiasm in the free atmosphere of Liberation. New cultural stream began to arrive in Liberated Goa – from which the Goan society was distanced for some period – and this mentality began to reflect in the literature. People could experience mellifluous notes flowing out from the pen of literary giants who has come back from the exile, and settled in the motherland. Goa could witness the creative upsurge of intellect and inherent talent, which followed the social stresses and strains during the evolution stage of the Liberated society. Soon after Independence of India, the inspiration moving forward along with creative literature so well linked to the dreams about the creation of a new society became visible through these literary works. In a way, this became the process for cultural brainstorming. One can observe in this period, the efforts to identify the signs of nationalism, providing modern context to traditional thoughts. The authors belonging to this period are found to have touched subjects like our history, our tradition, our freedom struggle, all of which were liked by as well as impressed the social mind-set. The social and cultural differences erupted during the post-1960 period. Also visible were strong ties. The structure of this realistic experience was laid through new sensitivity. The relationship between region and public life was rediscovered. Goa as a region is very small. It also provides limited scope for intellectual brainstorming. However, the turmoil and internal activities at the national scene introduced new streams of thoughts, here. The social change received orientation. With the propagation of education, the inner strength got opportunities of self-discovery.

The awakening of inner sense made the women come out with more writings, as compared to their predecessors. There were clear indications as regards the calm and secluded Goan society changing in a vibrant period. One could observe signs of increase in social awareness

at the urban as well as rural level. This new wave came only due to Independence. Any literary person goes on a trip of self-discovery during the process of creation of literature. He is also in search of relationships between himself and the society around him. The lifestyle of a human being changes along with the changing mindset of the particular period. This very process happened in the mindset of the Goan society. The post-Liberation literature reflects this mind-set and sensitivity. Besides, the world of experience of every writer-poet is different. Their lifestyles are unique. The reflection of the diverse lifestyles is displayed in the literature. The contemporary literature takes shape through the expression of experiences of such individuals. The pulses visible in the Goan literature have risen from the pulses of human existence during the post-Liberation period. Today, we are experiencing this contemporary stream of thought. Therefore, we cannot analyse this aspect today, with an unbiased mindset. The literary creations here have to some extent supported the social development and cultural growth. Similarly, one can see inter-forms of social activities and reflection of cultural inter-streams in this literature. It is very important to draw attention at this aspect. Although post-Liberation period witnessed creation of diverse forms of literature in Goa, the literary forms namely story and poetry has been handled more often than others. All inclusive literary form like novel, which is able to cover life in totality, has comparatively been less handled. After the Liberation, Marathi newspapers arrived in large numbers. The Sunday supplements as well as Diwali issues of these newspapers gave important place to stories and poetry in them. Feature essay, a literary form which encompasses various literary forms and is favourable for free self-expression was the much loved among both, the writers and the readers. This period also saw litterateurs contributing towards intellectual literature; writing on art, music, culture. Some of the senior freedom fighters also wrote their autobiographies. Such writings informed the new generation about important landmarks of the dazzling period pertaining to Goan freedom struggle.

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