

# Post Colonial Socio-Cultural Reflections in Telugu Literature

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**Abstract**—The Post colonial society in India has witnessed the turmoil to come out from the widespread control and influence of colonialism. The socio-cultural life of a society with all its dynamics is reflected in realistic forms of literature. The social events and human experience are drawn into a new creative form and are given to the reader as a new understanding and perspective of life. It enables the reader to understand the essence of life and motivates him to prepare for a positive change.

After India becoming free from the colonial rule in 1947, systematic efforts were made by central and state governments and institutions to limit the role of English and simultaneously enlarge the function of Indian languages by planning in a strategic manner. The eighteen languages recognized as national languages are having very rich literatures. Telugu language is one among the Dravidian language family and is widely spoken by a majority of people.

The post colonial socio-cultural factors were very well reflected in Telugu literature. The anti-colonial, reform oriented, progressive, post modernistic trends in Telugu literature are nothing but creative reflections of the post colonial society. This paper examines the major socio-cultural reflections in Telugu literature of the post colonial period.

**Keywords**—postcolonialism – culture – progressive movement – Telugu Literature.

## I. INTRODUCTION

**P**OST-COLONIALISM can be considered as an intellectual direction, referred widely to the modes in which traditions, cultures, and self identity are represented in the 20th century, after the countries under the imperial rule attained independence. Further, the term is used for mentioning the cultural products influenced by the imperialistic rule. Post colonial studies, a word coined by the academia, discusses the literature and art that has been produced after the attainment of independence by the colonial countries that were under the European colonizers. Post colonial literature is said to have gained its prominence with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). However, it should be remembered that the term "post colonial" gained a broader meaning with time. The post colonial socio-political issues are raised in postcolonial literature, where a dialogue is found to be happening between the colonizer and the colonized. This has been clearly picturised in the novels of Chinua Achebe, Frantz

Fanon, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Jamaica Kincaid, J. M. Coetzee, Derek Walcott, and so on. They raise the issue of 'decolonisation', a term defined as an intellectual method that steadily pours the idea of freedom into the minds of the people who were formerly colonized. The key thought of this progression is to demolish the construction of the ideas, attitudes and perceptions of supremacy and domination that were accepted under the imperialistic rule. The decolonization of the mind was a process, which can be said was initiated in independent India. The post colonial aspect deals with the conflicts of identity and cultural belonging – as it is clear from history that the colonial powers ruined the traditions and culture of the native and moreover substituted them with their own ones. This is found to have become a complicated situation to the identity of the nations. The colonial rule that has lasted for a long time made the colonizers to adopt Western traditions and culture. Here, the aspect of language became an important agency in the process of post colonial communication and further acted as a reflection.

## II. POST COLONIALISM AND TELUGU LITERATURE

Commenting on the nature of post colonial literatures depicted by the nationalist intelligentsia, T. M. J. Indra Mohan comments 'In an objective analysis, the theory of 'post colonialism' must be more than a chronological sequence of post independence literary experience. Any objective in-depth analysis of post colonial literature will reveal that it is a reaction to colonialism and it is a textual expression of resistance of colonialism. It also operates with an objective to elucidate the post coloniality, which gets in to certain texts and also to unveil and deconstruct colonialist power structures. The concept of post colonialism in political equations is based on binary oppositions such as First world and Third world 'White and Black', Colonizer and Colonized — Post colonialism taken up hitherto untouched issues like feminism and marginalization. The efficacy of post colonial literature is far reaching and has awakened its readers and people to show their place and prestige among the comity of nations. [1]

Here, let us confine ourselves to the literature produced in India, which was under the imperial gaze for more than a span of 200 years. The literature produced in English in the post colonial era depicts the 'colonial thinking'. The socio-cultural and political consequences that have taken shape due to the relation of colonizer and the colonized are portrayed, which are still seen today. The religious and ethnic concepts in Indian society played a major role in the early years of post

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colonialism. The Indo-Pakistan conflict is one major issue that generated a lot of literature, where feelings and experiences of immense social consequences, uncontrollable tragedies, genocide, irrational violence and hatred are depicted. The partition became an issue of Indian distress.

Here, we come across some major works of postcolonial literature like Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* (1981), depicting the multi perspective approach to the post-colonial complex. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), raising the partition issue. Sadat Hasan Manto's "Mottled Dawn", discussing the uncontrollable tragedies and irrational violence that were part of the post independent India. Ruth Praver Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*, depicting the intercultural contacts and relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. The Indian post colonial literature can be viewed as a discourse that is reacting to the depictions of the British Empire. Post colonial literature has become an issue of debate and has taken on many meanings. It has given scope to various subjects that question the idea of new cultural identity, the place where the individual has to fit himself in.

India is one among many countries that have struggled hard for raising their voices against the suppression, and control exercised by the colonial power over many socio-cultural factors before and after becoming independent nations. The writers who belong to the transition period from colonial to post colonial period have undergone the trauma of identity crisis. The decolonization process can be seen in all sectors of society and literature is no exception to this. The first generation writers from all Indian languages are aware of the colonial policies, which have marginalized and defamiliarized, Indian literature by propagating the supremacy of English language. Thus the colonial rulers have framed an invisible control over the Indian languages and literatures.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o writer and social activist has rightly pointed out the aim of colonialism. "The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth as well as culture. It involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of people's culture, their art, dances, religion, history, geography, education, orature, and literature; and the conscious elevation of the language by the languages of colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized". [2]

In this context we should remember the call given by Jawaharlal Nehru to India on August 15, 1947 with emotional poetic fervor: "we end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself". The post colonial writer has found a challenge before him to rediscover the Indian soul that was suppressed under colonialism. Colonialism in a way has done twofold activity on the Indian soil. The destruction of middle ages political, economic, social, cultural systems and constructing modern society with capitalist framework. In this context, it can be said that new social and political forces emerged and paved the way to the construction of modern India. These new social forces questioned the supremacy of colonialism and raised their voices against the imperialistic practices of developed nations. The Indian writers had experienced the coming up of new social, political, cultural

and literary ideologies, movements and trends. We can classify the first generation writers in Indian languages in two major categories: a) Pro Colonialists b) Anti Colonialists. Some writers remain as true products of colonialism while majority of Indian writers raised their voices against the control, suppression and sensorship of colonialists and imperialists. This struggle, unrest, can be recognized in their voices that are identical and subtle at their own pace and space.

After six decades of attaining the freedom the Indian writers are still feeling the threat of colonial control under the coverage of globalization which has been termed as recolonisation. The Indian writers therefore are constantly aware of the situation that they are living in and are continuing their protest against colonialism by bringing out their creative works with remarkable native sensibilities. K. Sachidanandam has rightly made a remark on this: "Rooted inextricably in their social, historical and cultural contexts, Indian writers therefore continue to be, first and foremost, Indian, whatever language they write in. This basic unity has in no way eroded the fascinating diversity of our literatures. The local traditions, the rhythms of popular speech, the varying landscapes, ethnic communities with their lifestyles, styles of worship and celebration, folklore and forms of art, the general level of awareness, dissemination of diverse ideologies, different combination of external influences and native elements and the particular genius of each language have given our literatures specific tones, flavours, directions, cultural registers, semantic codes and individual histories that hold a specific relation to the general history of Indian literature". [3]

### III. THE PROFILE OF TELUGU LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

India has 26 states. Many of them belong to separate linguistic entities. Around 1,652 mother tongues are spoken in India. They belong to different linguistic families as follows: Indo Aryan (532), Dravidian (148), Tibeto-Chinese (227), Austro-Asiatic (53), and others (91). Eighteen languages are declared national languages according to the VIII Schedule of the Constitution of India. They are: 1. Hindi, 2. Telugu, 3. Bengali, 4. Marathi, 5. Tamil, 6. Urdu, 7. Gujarati, 8. Kannada, 9. Malayalam, 10. Oriya, 11. Punjabi, 12. Kashmiri, 13. Sindhi, 14. Assamese, 15. Sanskrit, 16. Konkani, 17. Manipuri 18. Nepali.

After India becoming independent from the clutches of British tyranny in 1947, systematic efforts were made by central and state governments and institutions to limit the role of English and simultaneously enlarge the functions of Indian languages by planning in a careful and strategic manner. The 26 linguistic states formed are moving in this direction. About 72 languages—literary as well as non-literary—are used by the national radio broadcasting system.

All eighteen languages have rich poetic literature and fiction and many have been in use as a medium of instruction to the secondary level, even before 1947. The multilingual states in the union have been linguistically reorganized in stages from 1956 onwards. Regional languages developed rapidly since the formation of the linguistic states. These

languages acquired official language status in most states and have been widely used in print and electronic media. They have been introduced as the medium of instruction at degree level. Central Sahitya Academi recognises 22 languages including English for developing and popularising literature across the linguistic borders.

There is an opinion that several language mediums may lead to problems that may affect the integrity of the nation in the course of time. But this is not so according to Glyn Lewis, who quotes the Soviet Union as an example: "Where in any land different languages are spoken in different parts, those parts are not isolated because the people speak a different language, but they speak different languages to the extent that they are isolated. This is certainly true of the Soviet Union".[4] However, multilingualism can become an asset in social development. It is understood and practised without prejudice, in the context of linguistic and cultural variations in India.

In India, modern Indian languages are developing more or less at the same pace. Though Hindi has been declared the official language of the union, it is also undergoing the process of modernisation and standardisation at a slow pace in spite of efforts taken by the national government and language planners. Thus it also is one of the major Indian languages developing at slow pace with similar constraints at implementation level. All the major Indian languages, despite ethnic and cultural diversity, indicate a common trend of displaying a high degree of capacity to adopt and assimilate the expressive elements of Western languages. They are developing intertranslatability with other Indian languages as well as English. The complementary role played by the different languages in the modernisation process will contribute to national development.

Language planners have identified critical areas and functions of the languages and are trying to formalise the process of standardisation and modernisation. The focus is very much on lexical expansion and development of new styles in the languages. The media, mostly the print media (that is, newspaper journalism) has contributed much to the development and modernisation of Indian languages. The major Indian languages have developed registers, terminologies and neologisms in the media which contribute to the modernisation process of Indian languages over decades. Today it is found that more than 15 crores (150 million) of Telugu speaking population spread all over world are using their mother tongue in different areas.

The colonial rulers introduced modernity to the Indian society. Though in the beginning this modernity safeguarded the benefits of rulers in the process, it has given way to new social, political forces that emerged with native urge. The national, regional and sub-regional political and socio-cultural movements influenced the Indian writers and motivated them to create literature. The urbanization, liberalization, privatization, and globalization process, new innovations in science and technology were some of the main forces that influenced creative literature.

Along with other Indian literatures, Telugu literature also voiced the anti colonial ideology with strong native tone. New

forms and genres emerged in Telugu literature. The oral and written traditions in Telugu literature are as rich as their neighbour languages, Kannada and Tamil. In order to understand and assess the trends in post colonial Telugu Literature, one has to analyze the social process, since these trends are nothing but realistic creative reflections of the Telugu speaking society of a particular period.

It is obvious that the literary traditions, and major trends in literature are nothing but the result of interrelationship and interaction between social history and literature. The Indian society is found experiencing a tumultuous disturbance – an influence of the West for the past three centuries. The Portuguese, Dutch, the French and British traders and the Western missionaries in the first phase influenced the Indian society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Further, India was under the colonial rule and was largely influenced and controlled by colonial and imperialistic ideology. The national movement and English education have brought many changes in the mindset and the lifestyle of Indians. As a result, the literature in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, has been very much influenced by nationalist movement, reformist movement, and the westernization of Indian culture. The Brahminic tradition in Andhra Pradesh, the evils of child marriages, plights of widows, beliefs in astrology and alchemy, the tyranny of religions heads, the inhuman caste system, village politics – in one word the entire feudal system's ugly face was reflected in the writings of early Telugu writers. Gurazada's Kanyasulkam, Kandukuri Veeresalingam Panthulu's Rajasekhara Charitamu, Unnava Lakshminarayana's Malapalli, Jashua's Gabbilamu to name a few of this kind of literary works, which have reflected the then socio-cultural issues in that period. The changes in 'Man – Woman' relationships and human relations were also effectively reflected in literary works of Chalam and Kutumba Rao. The social reform movement and renaissance movement paved the way to progressive movement in Telugu society and it is reflected as a major trend in Telugu literature.

#### IV. POST COLONIAL SOCIO-CULTURAL REFLECTIONS IN TELUGU LITERATURE

The major trends in Telugu literature in the post colonial period from 1947 to 2010 are namely; a) Progressive, b) Feminist, c) Dalit, d) Minority, e) Regionalism, f) Globalization.

To understand the changes in post colonial literature, one has to understand the dialectical nature of socio political and cultural aspects in a particular society and which reflect the thought process of those people and ultimately emerge in various forms of literature and art,[5] opines K.K.Ranganadhacharyulu, an eminent critic of Telugu Literature.

The transition from feudal to capitalist social relations in all spheres was very well captured by Telugu writers. The Telangana armed struggle (1946-51) gave inspiration for the raise of peasants and workers unions. The political events that had occurred in Soviet Union and China have influenced the

intellectuals of Andhra Pradesh, and Marxist and Maoist ideologies gave way to social and political; agrarian as well as workers agitations and unrest in Andhra Pradesh. K. V. Ramana Reddy says, "Abhydaya Rachaytala Sangam followed the best traditions of the new epoch makers. Kandukuri, Gurazada, and Gidugu among others in Andhra history are considered to have recognized that the betterment of the society is the main aim of literature; and contributed to a lively literary scene. The drawing and conglomeration of the best qualities of ancient and modern literature created a new literary tradition in Andhra literature. In order to revive indigenous literary forms, it portrayed contemporary life in these forms, which simultaneously propagated these forms and attained Andhra people's appreciation. It gave up the literary forms alienated from the social life. The lives and problems of peoples, as subject matters, supported the progressive forces, have shown a bright path to the Telugu Nation". [6] The progressive writers in Telugu literature led by Sri Sri voiced the ideas and ideologies prevailing in this period. Social events that raised many aggressive outbursts and debates among people, became the subjects of writers, for instance, Twamevaham (long poem) by Arudra (1949) is an output of the agony of the poet against the incident of a rape of a woman by Razakars (a fascist like group led by the then cruel ruler, Nizam of Hyderabad) on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1948. The class struggle and socio-economic contradictions were symbolically portrayed in this long poem. Dasarathi's Agnidhara is also a mirror of the Telangana people's agony under the rule of Nizam. The rise of middle class, socio-economic cultural disparities between rich, middle and poor masses in the society were reflected in all genres like poetry, short story, novel and drama. Kodavaganti Kutumba Rao, Rachakonda Viswanatha Sastry, Chaganti Somayajulu, Kalipatnam Ramarao, Karuna Kumara, K. Sabha, Kethu Viswanatha Reddy, to name a few literati, who have depicted the Telugu society in a very realistic manner.

The progressive movement extended and paved the way for the emergence of revolutionary poets in 1970. This again is nothing but a result of Naxalbari armed movement in Srikakulam in the year 1967. Cherabanda Raju, Kalipatnam Ramarao, Bhushanam Sivasagar, Allam Rajaiah to name a few writers, have voiced the revolutionary ideology through different forms of literature. In the later years of post independent India, the national planners' vision of sustainable development remained a dream and the lapses in the development activities have led to social and political unrest. Communal caste based criminal minded politics and corruption, are the main culprits which have acted as blockades to the process of development. Migration to rich countries can be said has created diasporic problems. Disparities and problems related to ecology, politics, economy, education, culture resulted in unrest among the groups. Identity is the new crisis prevailing among different groups of the masses. The influence of post modernism, globalization, market economy driven attitudinal mindsets are vividly reflected in Telugu literature through various ideologies like; feminist, dalit, minority and regional identities

from 1980 to 2010.

Gender discrimination, dominance of patriarchal values, domestic, social and sexual violence and exploitation on woman are the main issues raised by feminist writers. In the process they also started questioning the role of state and central governments which are working still under patriarchal mindset. The participation of women in Chipko movement, movements against high prices, dowry, movements against multi national companies in Bhopal, the rape cases of Ramijabi, Shakeelabi, Dadar express incident, contemporary Telangana farmers movement, movement against the State violence on Rajavva, Sathemma and others – are only a few events that have provoked the women's struggles in the society of Andhra Pradesh in the past three decades. Anti liquor movement is one such movement in the current times. Apart from that the feminist movement in Telugu literature voiced the agony, unrest and rebelled against the gender discrimination in all social sectors in Andhra Pradesh in particular and India in general. Neelimeghalu (1993) an anthology of feminist poetry in Telugu literature marked the emergence of feminist ideology which was later reflected in short story, novel and the other genres of literature. Revathi Devi, Olga, Savithree, Vimala, Kondepoodi Nirmala, Jayaprabha to name a few writers who have vibrantly voiced the sufferings of women in Telugu Literature.

Another major literary movement in Telugu literature is the Dalit movement, which also has its origins in the violence and suppression of dalits by upper castes which is unique of the Indian Hindu system. The 1991 massacre in the village of Chundururu in Andhra Pradesh where some Dalit youth were brutally murdered by the upper caste is one among many incidents that inspired the dalit movement in Telugu society. Jyothiba Phuhle, Dr. B R Ambedkar and Karl Marx ideologies were the foundation for the dalit trend in Telugu literature. Several anthologies and individual works appeared in Telugu literature from 1990 onwards marking the movement. Jashua, Boyi Bheemanna, Kolakaloori Inoch, Satish Chander, Endluri Sudhakar are some of the eminent writers who have championed for the Dalit movement in Telugu literature.

In Andhra Pradesh, next to Telugu speaking people, the largest segment of population belongs to minority Muslims. The rights of Muslims were well protected in the secular state of Andhra Pradesh. But the poverty, illiteracy, the poor living conditions and less job opportunities are making the majority Muslim life miserable. The massacre of Muradabad (1980), Beharsharif (1981), Meerut (1989), Bhagalpore (1989), are some of the provoking incidents in recent history that have paved way to rise of 'identity crisis' of minorities. The Babri Masjid incident (6th December, 1992) shook the feelings of the entire Muslim community in the country, who were made to start doubting about the very safety and security of their rights. Khaja opines that the issue of 'Muslim as a minority' has strongly proved its existence in Telugu poetry both in content and form. [7] Khader, Skybaba, Khaja, Khadeer Babu, Salim, Sharif, Afsar, Mahjabeen, Shajahana are found voicing the identity problems of Muslims in Andhra Pradesh in particular and India in general.

The transformational issues related to agro-ecology, class, caste, occupation structures, political, cultural structures, of a particular region have become the major themes in literature. The identity voices are found to have changed their tone into separatist and started movements of separation confining to geographical boundaries. The regionalism consolidated the struggle and unrest of dominant and disadvantaged sections and formed separatist movements like 'Telangana'. This struggle also found place in Telugu literature and the reflections of separatist movements can be seen in all genres of literature particularly from the past two decades.

The third world countries especially India is noted to be suffering the ill effects of globalization. Arvind in his book *Globalization an Attack on India's Sovereignty* rightly pointed out, "globalization has had a disastrous impact on the living conditions of the vast masses of the people. An already impoverished country is being pushed deeper and deeper into abyss. The development of globalization is geared to extend the market, by enhancing the purchasing power of the already rich at the expense of the vast masses of the people. In addition foreign finance capital demands the maximum profits, achieved only by a massive attack on the conditions of working class. In its present aggressive form, it demands all concessions for itself and an end to subsidies for the poor and even the totally impoverished, thereby resulting in huge cuts to even the limited welfare measures that existed. Finally in its desperation to extend its market it seeks to enter every sphere of economy resulting in the privatisation (and rise in costs) of even such basic amenities as water, health, transport, energy and subsidized foods and fertilizers. [8]

Privatisation, Corporate agriculture, Consumerism and many more forms of globalization overwhelmed the lives of people living in the rural and urban areas – are made to suffer the ill effects of globalization in all spheres such as economic, social, educational, cultural so on so forth – at an equal pace in India in general and Andhra Pradesh in particular.

The cosmopolitan, multicultural cities are said to have become centers for global market economy. New forms of dominations, cultural alignments have become a sort of sources of new approaches in literature. Maya points out that 'Literature has always been subject to socio-political and economic pressure. The most recent phenomenon has been the emergence of the powerful post colonial discourse writing back to the empire and asserting its own identity and cultural and national individuality. Literature of post colonial times reflected the increased flow of people from one country to the other, mostly the land of colonizer and dealt with consequent issues like migrancy, hybridity, loss of identity, multiculturalism and disappearance of rigid national identities'. [9]

The suppression and exploitation under the cover of colonialism and imperialism were very well understood by Indian writers in general and Telugu writers in particular. The voices of Telugu writers against the suppression and exploitation of globalization in different social sectors were consolidated into poetry and short story anthologies, like *Global Khadgam – Poetry*, *Globalisation Kathalu – Short*

stories.

## V. CONCLUSION

Kethu Viswanatha Reddy, an eminent Telugu critic states that the "dialectical relationship between socio cultural events and literature has to be studied with all its complexity – ecological, class, and linguistic – complexity with all the regional and sub regional variations. [10] Here, I have made an attempt in the direction of giving a detailed analysis on some of the local issues, which can be said, will definitely throw light on the gaps in the social history of Andhra Pradesh. Moreover, 'for any great literary work, the authentic source of inspiration will be the key social events, since in such social contexts only the human intellectual will attain its heights in perceiving greater human values'[11] says social activist and critic K. Balagopal in one of his interviews. The socio cultural significant events in the post colonial period have acted as source of inspiration to the literati of Telugu Literature.

The major trends in post colonial period in Telugu literature reveal the potential of Telugu writers who depicted the social history in a very subtle and realistic manner. The socio-cultural reflections in Telugu literature particularly between the period from 1947 – 2010 are vibrant and powerful. The anti colonial, anti imperialistic and the anti globalization native voice of Telugu speaking people can be heard in the major trends and different genres of Telugu literature. In each and every trend, we can observe the social context very clearly from which the literary work or movement has been originated, generated and glorified. In this context we can say that Telugu literature is as powerful as literatures from other countries which are undergoing the stress to combat the evil effects of colonialism, imperialism and globalization.

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