UNIT 2 THE CONCEPT OF INDIAN LITERATURE: MODERN PERIOD

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will try to show how the concept of Indian Literature was reinvigorated during the colonial period and how it had shaped up till independence. [This is after all the time when the modern nation state of India was debated and imagined and finally came into being (only to be interrogated time and again)]. While we have already seen how Indian literatures do come together weaving a rich tapestry of values and aesthetics during earlier times, we will observe how modern Indian languages established and strengthened themselves during the colonial/postcolonial period of our history. While the comparative method may still be the best way to study Indian literatures, we shall also see how during this period the political consciousness of an entire nation was kindled in unity and in this desire to form a unified India was nationalist literature born. [So even if we feel that we don't have one national literature even now, we can see that nationalist literature was written during the colonial period, when we united in opposing the British who were ruling our land.] This nationalist phase disappeared after our independence when our various languages and linguistic cultures began to seek their own territories and separate spaces. Till 1947 (and even after) various parts of our country underwent similar social and cultural changes, and this similarity may be expressed in our literatures, but part of the similarity between the various literary cultures is the attempt to assert uniqueness, and to showcase distinctness. We will see how in this period similar movements could be seen in our various literatures.
2.1 INTRODUCTION

Colonial interventions including the introduction of printing presses and the new education system made an impact on various languages. The growing awareness of the colonial yoke galvanized nationalist feeling and various writers influenced the thoughts of a nascent nation. We shall begin by surveying nineteenth century literatures first and then move on to the twentieth century pre-Independence literature and study the various movements that can be seen to occur in almost all our major literary languages.

2.2 19TH CENTURY

2.2.1 Introduction

As we saw in the previous unit, the way to read Indian literatures is to see the ideas and philosophical movements that crisscross the subcontinent that had considerable impact on various Indian languages. We realized that literatures in various Indian languages were actually in conversation with each other. So in order to study Indian Literature(s), one must pinpoint the common historic moments that shaped these literatures and to trace the common influences on them and their influence on each other. This is not to ignore the differences and our justifiably famed plurality. We are however interested in what unites the literatures and what makes us feel that it is one spirit being expressed in different languages. It is interesting to see that during the 19th century and till half way through the next, even as various Indian languages established their territorial hold, strengthened their cultural and social moorings, they helped to develop an idea of modern India and create a political Indian consciousness. This was because they were enabled to chart their own courses during the period of colonisation when they also allied with each other to oppose the colonial power and helped in the cause to fight for Indian independence. Thus, when we talk about the modern period in Indian literary history we have to start from the advent of British colonialism in our country.

2.2.2 Introduction of Printing Press

It was with the increased British and missionary presence in India that the printing press established itself in the country, standardizing our languages, helping in the development of a supple prose, and changing the way in which our texts were transmitted and circulated — signaling the end of the era of written manuscripts.

One must remember that the first printing press was introduced into India by the Portuguese in sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century there were printing presses in existence in many parts of South India (the most famous being the Tranquebar press, established in 1713). However it was with the establishment of the Serampore Printing Press in Bengal in 1800 that printing came into its own, since the press could publish in various Indian languages. William Carey, who set up the press, also set up a paper making factory. Within the next fifty years most parts of India, from Assam to Gujarat to Kerala saw printing presses and the consequent revolution. While the aim of most of these presses was to help in the work of missionaries, to publish bibles and prayers in local languages, their direct contribution was to the
standardization of grammar, vocabulary and spelling of these languages. With the advent of newspapers, a modern prose developed. This easy circulation of information and literature had an immense impact, social as well as political, on Indians. However, we must also remember that this circulation of written literature created a gulf between the elite and the masses — earlier all literature circulated through oral means but now a reading public came into being and differentiated itself from the illiterate public. We must also remember that the same fifty years saw the introduction of English as the medium of education, and that the year of our first war of Independence (1857) also saw the establishment of three major Indian universities — Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay (now Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai). Thus, this century saw a radical change come about, a re-evaluation of tradition, a new valorization of the scientific and the rational, and the birth of a new political consciousness that was ironically the result of colonisation.

2.2.3 The Language Situation

The advent of English education sounded the death knell for Arabic and Persian, the two dominant languages of the immediately preceding centuries. Persian, one must remember, was even the court language of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the famous Sikh ruler. While Sanskrit continued to retain its position of prestige, the nineteenth century was the century of modern Indian languages: Tamil of course had an ancient literary tradition but languages like Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Malayalam, Punjabi, Oriya, Telugu, and Sindhi too had a rich literary culture by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Urdu was of course seen as the crowning jewel of India at the time, and there were also a number of other languages that had seen the beginnings of literatures, and there were many others who had a rich oral literary culture. Many of these languages acquired scripts during this period. As Sisir Kumar Das points out, “the situation was very complex indeed and yet in terms of the hierarchy between the languages among different groups there was a stable pattern…” (Das 1991: 28) This hierarchy manifested itself in terms of prestige: Sanskrit and Persian were link languages amongst the educated, and were languages that were both held in high esteem, and both conferred prestige on writers and other languages. There were certain dominant local languages also — Urdu and Braj, e.g., — and whatever other language a bilingual writer may write in, it was considered nobler to write in such a literary language. Hindi reached out to most people and would also gain from its association with the independence movement. However, the language of power, prestige, and aspiration was soon to be English.

It will not be an exaggeration to say the situation in India in the beginning of the nineteenth century paralleled that of the beginning of the twenty-first century. People, in both the periods, identified English as the language that enabled them to achieve material affluence. It is seen as a passport to success. There were English teaching shops in Kolkata in the beginning of the nineteenth century as people tried to learn the language anyhow. The initial policy of the British was for the administrators to learn the local languages, not for the Indians to learn English. But there were many Indians who demanded English — some for the new knowledge systems (prominent among Indians who argues for English education for this reason was Raja Rammohun Roy), and others simply for the language for commercial reasons. There was a long drawn out debate amongst the British about their language policy and
finally Lord T.B. Macaulay won the day for English with his justly famous Minute on Education (1835). But even before 1835 many schools had been established that taught in English, and the famous Hindu College (now called Presidency College) in Kolkata came up in the second decade of the nineteenth century and famously produced Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, the first Indian English poet. English dislodged Persian completely, and not only became the lingua franca of the country, it began to influence various Indian languages, and also became a language of literary expression in the country. One has to realize that it was a break with the literary power relations with Sanskrit and Persian, and the new acquaintance with English and European literatures, that allowed literatures in various Indian languages to come into their own in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

2.2.4 Prose and Journalism

While scholars have pointed out that Indian languages had a tradition of prose writing, it does seem that prose came into its own only after the establishment of printing presses and the intervention of foreigners. It is in the nineteenth century that prose is used copiously for both literary and non-literary purposes. The different colleges set up by the East India Company, the College of Fort William at Kolkata, and the College of Fort St. George at Chennai, were intended to serve the interests of British civil servants by producing grammars and readers in Indian languages. Scholars, Indian and British, employed by the colleges compiled tales and other prose texts as source materials for language teaching and conducted research into the structures of various languages, wrote grammars and textbooks for the first thirty to forty years of the nineteenth century. One must remember that Christian missionaries had embarked on a similar activity as far back as in the sixteenth century itself and that prose works, e.g. in Tamil and Malayalam, and grammars and dictionaries had already been produced by Portuguese, Italian, and German missionaries in South India. However, it cannot be denied that this intervention of British imperialism had a lasting impact on Indian prose styles.

Prose became the chief pedagogical tool in language education, and education in general and thus the demand for textbooks around the country strengthened prose writing. Also, the need to defend native religions against the arguments of Christian missionaries and to circulate this defense quickly and effectively called for prose writing and publication. This also led to a felt need for social reform which too was propagated through prose. And with all this came the rise of print journalism and the demand for a prose that would address everyday matters effectively. Newspapers and journals began appearing in various Indian languages in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was in these that writers experimented with prose styles, many of the journalists going on to become established writers in the languages. As Sisir Kumar Das points out, many changes were introduced in the languages:

There was a sudden influx of loan-words, direct from Sanskrit and Persian, borrowings from English, and neologisms. This helped the growth of technical words as well, thus complementing the efforts of text-book writers ... [There were] also many innovations in syntax, most conspicuous of which is the increasing frequency of reported speech, a feature borrowed from English....

Thus the emergence of prose in various Indian languages can be seen as a major step in the modernization of Indian literatures and languages. This
modernization was a result of colonial intervention but would also serve the cause of nationalism, becoming the vehicle of reaction to the ideologies of western domination.

2.2.5 Literature Till 1857

It is interesting to note that Indian English literature, that was almost a natural outcome of the domination of the English language and the aspiration of Indians to write and interact in the language of power, almost in its moment of conception is filled with patriotism and a new nationalism. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is in this literature that the notion of an independent India was born. The first Indian English poet, Henry Derozio (1809-1831) and the poets who followed him enunciated the idea of a captive India and a need for a national resurgence. They talked of contemporary issues no doubt but to me their importance lies in poems like Derozio’s sonnets on India or the short story, “A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945” by Kylas Chunder Dutt, which speaks of an uprising against the British more than a century later — the patriotism and the desire for freedom they exhibit was yet to enter the Indian psyche at large, yet to be exhibited in other Indian language literatures.

For in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, most Indian literatures were enmeshed in their traditions. It is Urdu poetry that dominates this period. The greatest of all Urdu poets, Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869), as well as other writers of the period (Ibrahim Zauq, Momin, Anis, Dabir, to name some) were exponents of their tradition. The pulls of Persian and Arabic can be seen in their poetry just as the pull of Sanskrit can be seen in the poetry of some other languages. The poetry of this period in Indian languages seems to be caught in a time warp, speaking of other times and places and movements. It is only in Indian English writing that one sees the ferment that Indian polity and cultural life was going through.

2.2.6 The ‘Birth’ of the Novel

Almost all literary historians agree that the novel in India emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was in 1857, the time of the First War of Indian Independence, that the first notable novel was published in an Indian language. This was Aitler Gharer Dulal, a novel in Bengali, written by Peari Chand Mitra (1814-83) under the pseudonym of Techand Thakur. This novel had been serialized earlier in a monthly magazine. The novel was noted for both its contemporary theme and vibrant prose, for its use of colloquial language that hadn’t yet been used in literary discourse. The impact of the novel was such that this style of writing was soon known as “Alali language”. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94), who is popularly known as the first of the novelists, was very impressed by Mitra’s achievement, especially his use of colloquial Bengali and his Bengali subject matter. Bankim himself started off his career as a novelist with a work in English: Rajmohan’s Wife (1864). He followed this up soon after with Dugesmandini (1865), which was a huge success and established him as a great writer in Bengali. Bankim was to play a major role in the way fellow Indians imagined their history, as he tried to chart a history of masculine valour, looking toward the Rajputs and the Marathas for Hindu heroes, those who fought the might of invaders. Invariably, the invaders were Muslims, since Bankim not only did not attack the British directly as foreign rulers, he actually expressed in Anandamath (1882), his
famous novel that gave us the song “Vande Mataram”, the hope that British rule would bring about peace and order. Bankim popularized historical romances, a la Walter Scott, who along with Lytton was a much admired novelist of the era.

But perhaps the most famous of all Bengali writers is Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), and he made as much of an impact on the novel as he did in the other literary genres. He too started with the historical novel: his *Bauhakuranir Hat* (1883), and *Rajarishi* (1887) were quite different from those of Bankimchandra’s even though Tagore held the pioneering novelist in great esteem. Even in his historical novels, Tagore moved into the inner realm of the mind. However, most of Tagore’s more famous novels were to be written in the twentieth century.

The novel seems to have entered most Indian languages in the decades after the First War of Independence, and to have been well established by the turn of the century. Like in Bengali, the first novel in Marathi was published in 1857. This was *Yamuna Paryatam* written by Baba Padmanjhi. This was a novel about conversion to Christianity and attacked Hindu practices especially with regard to widows. The first historical novel in Marathi was *Mochangad* (1871) written by R.B. Gunjikar (1843-1901). Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919) began writing his social novels in 1885 and by the time he wrote *Ganpatrao* (1887-88), which is about the problems of a daughter-in-law, and later novels that show us an accurate picture of middle-class life in its entire range, he had grown to be a major novelist. The first novel in Gujarati, *Karan Ghelo*, again modeled on Scott and about the last Hindu king of Gujarat, was published by Nandashankar Mehta (1835-1905) in 1866. The first novel in Urdu was *Miratul Urs* (1869) by Nazir Ahmad (1836-1912). This novel about a middle-class girl, about the differences that were being made by education and reform arising as a result of colonialism, was highly influenced by *Sandford and Merton*, a little known novel by the now relatively unknown English novelist, Thomas Day. Pandit Rattan Nath Sarshar (1845-1902) was another famous novelist from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. His very first novel, *Farsmaa-i-Azad* (serialized in 1878-1879 and published in four volumes 1880), made him famous. It is about the decadent Lucknowi culture during the Nawabi era. Towards the end of the century came what is perhaps the most famous Urdu novel — *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899) by Mohammad Hadi Ruswa. This decade also saw the publication of many historical novels.

The first novel in Telugu was *Ranga Raja Charitra* (1872) by Gopala Krishnamma Chetty (1949-1921). This was written as a prose epic to reflect the customs and conventions of Telugu society and to be of help to Telugu students. The author criticizes the caste system and other Hindu conventions. K.V. Pantulu (1847-1919) wrote *Rajasekhara Charitra* in 1880, and according to many this is the first genuine novel in Telugu. C.L. Narasimhan Pantulu (1867-1946) was also a successful writer who began his career in the 1890s. His *Ramachandra Vijayam* (1896) is considered a major realistic novel and depicts the life of the Konasima region. This is about the struggle of a young orphan boy and how he overcomes all odds. There were also a number of social novels written towards the end of the century that tackled the evils of the dowry system and of the caste system.

In Tamil, the first novel was published in 1879 — *Pratapa Mudaliyar Charitiram* by Samuel Vedanayakam Pillai (1826-1889). A first person narrative, the novel displays a sense of humour even as it tries to educate the
reader. Gnanambal the heroine of the novel, while dressed in male clothes, is chosen as the king by an elephant! She proves to be an able ruler and the narrator tells us many other stories and anecdotes in this rambling novel. Two other major Tamil writers made their debut in the last decade of the nineteenth century — B.R. Rajam Iyer (1872-98), and Madhavayya (1872-1925). The former’s Kamalamba Charitram (1893) and the latter’s Padmanavathi Charitram (1898) portray the life of common people, but both depict the Brahmin community, and if the first is philosophical the second depicts the impact of English education, the movement to the city, and the plight of widows. The first detective novel also made its appearance in Tamil in 1894 — this was by S.M. Natesa Sastr (1859-1906).

The first novel in Hindi, Pariksha Guru written by Shrinivas Das (1850-1887) was published in 1882. This was about a middle class trader and is a realistic novel about the trading community and about generation gap. In Kannada, the first novel came in 1892, a historical novel, Suryakanta, written by Lakshamana Rao Gadagkar. Interestingly a translation of Bankim’s Durgesnandini had appeared in Kannada in 1885. In Malayalam the first novel appeared it 1887: this was Appu Nedungadi’s Kudalata. Again influenced by Walter Scott, it is a romance credited for its dialogue. However, it is Indulekha (1889) by Chandi Menon (1847-1900) that is usually celebrated as the first Malayalam novel. Indulekha was a critique of prevailing social customs. C.V. Raman Pillai (1958-1922) introduced the historical novel in Malayalam with his hugely successful Marthanda Varma (1891). The first novel in Assamese was written by Padmanath Gohain Barua (1871-1946) in 1890. This novel Bhamumat and its successor Lahari (1891) were historical novels set in the 18th and the 19th century respectively. In Oriya, the first novel came out in 1891 — this was Bibasini by Ramashankar Roy (1858-1907). This was again a historical novel full of romance and adventure. It is set in the days of Maratha rule and shows a band of young men leading a revolt.

In Punjabi, the first novel was Sundari (1897) written by Bhai Vir Singh. This deals with Sikh history when the Moghuls were resisted by the Sikhs. The first novel in Sindhi, Zina written by Mirza Qalich Beg (1853-1920) came out in 1890. A novel about the need for education of women, this is more or less a realist piece of fiction that describes the society of its times in contemporary language.

Thus, almost all the major modern languages of India had seen the advent of the novel before the end of the century and in many of them the novel was fairly well established by that time.

2.2.7 Poetry

It is not to Bengali that we must look for the first poetic reactions to the influence of the West but to Gujarati. Kavi Dalpatram Dahyabhai (1820-98). Dalpatram wrote about modernity, about the new (urban) world — about printing presses, railways, fire brigades, education of women, tobacco, foreign travel etc. His first poem, Bapani Pipar, was written in 1845 and has been seen as a milestone in Gujarati poetry, the first truly modern poem. He is seen to have written an English type of poetry in Gujarati. Dalpatram’s contemporary Narmadashankar Lalshankar Dave (1833-86), popularly known as Narmad, is often seen as the true pioneer who brought in nature poetry into
Gujarati as also a new strain in love poetry, a love that was not devotional. This change to a new idiom was reinforced by the poetry of Narsinhrao Bholanat Divatia (1859-1937) who was greatly influenced by English poetry and who tried to mould Gujarati poetry accordingly. He produced two volumes of poetry in the nineteenth century, the first of which was Kusum Mala (1887).

If Indian English poetry from Bengal was the first to react to western poetry and thought, we see that even in Bengali, tradition continued to rule poetry. The first modern poet of note, one who contributed immensely to the development of Bengali poetry, was Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73) who began his career as an Indian English poet and turned to writing in Bengali only in 1860, publishing Tilottamasambhav Kavya. This was immediately hailed as the marker of a new literary era in Bengali. He then went on to write his famous epic, Meghnadbadh Kavya (1861), and followed it with love-lyrics in Vrajanagama Kavya (1861). His other works include heroic epistles (Viragama Kavya, 1862) and sonnets (Chaturdaspadi Kavitaavali, 1866). Michael Madhusudan Dutt introduced in this six-year span a whole range of styles into Bengali poetry — the epic, blank verse, ode, heroic epistle, and the sonnet. His Meghnadbadh Kavya exhibits the reassessment of tradition that all Indian intellectuals were forced to make and, as Ashis Nandy argues in his foundational book, The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism (1983). Dutt makes Ravana the hero of his poem because he is reacting to readings of Hinduism as an effeminate religion, and hence makes the urban, technological masculine villain of the Ramayana his hero and relegates to the other side the pastoral Rama. It is often said that it was his experimentation that had a far reaching impact on Bengali poetry, but perhaps it was the success of his experimentation that led to the freedom of Bengali poetry from the shackles of traditionalism.

Other Bengali poets who followed Dutt were influenced equally by English poetry and a poet like Akshaychandra Choudhury (1850-98) echoes Thomas Parnell and Alexander Pope. While Bhairilal Chakrabarty (1835-98) has been hailed for writing modern lyrics, it is also pointed out that he did not know any English poetry and that his work was completely within the Bengali tradition and in reaction to the imitations of western poetry. His mystical and romantic poetry made an impact on the truly major voice to emerge from Bengali — that of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1841) who spans the turn of the century as a true colossus, influencing writing all around India. He published his first work Sandhyasangit in 1882. He began his career as a Romanticist but his poetry really came of age with the publication of Manasi in 1890, and in the following decade he is said to have written some of his best poems as he moved towards a thirst for God.

While Bholanath Das (1858-1929), and Kamalakanta Bhattacharya (1853-97) are sometimes seen as poets of transition in Assamese, they herald a new spirit in the language. Bholanath Das is known for his introduction of the blank verse into Assamese poetry in his highly successful Sitoharan Kavya (1884). His contemporary Kamalakanta Bhattacharya wrote patriotic poetry in the vein of the romantics. He was instrumental in enabling succeeding poets write social poetry rather than religious verse.

In Hindi, poetry writing was impeded because of the ascension of Khariboli as the language for literary activity, displacing Brajbhasha. Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-84), who ushered in the modern era in Hindi poetry,
advocated the use of Khariboli but his own poetry he wrote in Brajbhasha. His poetry reflected the nascent nationalism of the time. But it was only towards the last decade of the century that Hindi poets managed to write in Khariboli. Ayodhya Simha Upadhyaya (1865-1947), Maithili Sharan Gupta (1886-1964), Ram Naresh Tripathi (1889-1962), to name a few poets, all began to write after 1895. Their poetry was seen as message poetry, didactic in intention.

Marathi poetry saw the publication of the first modern poem by Keshavasut (1866-1905). This new spirit in poetry was again inspired by the western education system and English poetry. Keshavasut’s favourite poets were the English Romantic poets, those represented in The Golden Treasury. He was a social reformer, writing against untouchability, the condition of women, about all about the stultifying traditions. He employed the rhythms of spoken Marathi in his poetry and avoided embellishments. The impact of the new times was felt by other poets as well — like Narayan Vaman Tilak (1865-1919) who wrote nature poetry.

The first of the moderns in Oriya poetry was Radhanath Ray (1948-1908). Not just a product of the new education system, Ray was also Inspector and, later, held an important post in the Orissa Education Service. Some of his early works are Kedaranagari (1886), Chandrabhaga (1886), and Nandikeswari (1887). The first is based on the story of Pyramus and Thisbee, the second on Apollo’s pursuit of Daphne, and the third is inspired by Ovid and Byron. He tried his hand at the epic in Mahayatra (1896), the first poem written in blank verse in Oriya. He was heavily influenced by Milton, Pope, Shakespeare, and other western writers. He changed the style of Oriya poetry and created a taste for the new. His contemporary Madhusudan Rao (1853-1912) was a school teacher and then became a senior officer in the Education Service. He wrote lyrics and sonnets and introduced a mystic dimension into modern Oriya poetry. The earliest experiment in a new lyricism in Malayalam was Malayalvilasam (1895) by Rajaraja Varma (1863-1918). However, major changes took place in Malayalam like in other languages, only in the first decades of the twentieth century.

2.2.8 Drama

It is interesting to see the changes that took place in Indian drama with the arrival of Shakespeare and other English plays and the introduction of the proscenium arch and the auditorium. While there were a number of translations from Shakespeare in different languages, one must note that the changing situations in India led to early treatment of the new social dynamics in drama. The Assamese play Ram-Navami by Gunabhiram Barua (1837-95), which is about widow-remarriage, was written in 1857. While this was a social tragedy, a number of light plays and farces came to be written soon after in Assamese. Hemchandra Barua (1835-97) wrote Kantyar Kirtan (1861) about the evil effects of opium. Padmanath Gohain Barua (1871-1946) wrote Gaonhura (1897) wrote about the miseries of a village headman under the British rule. The last decade also saw the development of mythological drama.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the poet, was also a dramatist of note in Bengali. Two farces written by him, Eket ki Bhole Sahayata? and Buro Saliker Ghare Ro (both written in 1859) are about contemporary times and mores, and both
are influenced by Moliere. He also wrote more serious comedies and tragedies, among which *Mayakatan* (1874) is often seen as the grimmest of his plays. He was a great dramatist with an assurance of craft. His contemporary Dinabandhu Mitra (1829-74) was not so accomplished but is justly famous for his play *Nal Darpan* (1860), which is about the exploitative indigo planters in Bengal. This is one of the first political protest plays and also one of the most successful. The first public theatre, the National Theatre, was established in Bengal in 1872. Soon, actresses began to perform in plays here. A number of plays attacking British rule or enunciating patriotic values were performed here. Jyotindranath Tagore (1848-1925) and Upendranath Das (1848-95), both had patriotic plays performed in the early 1870s which saw other such plays as well, which led to the promulgation of the Dramatic Performances Act of 1875. One must mention that the major figure who dominated Bengali theatre after this was the actor-manager-playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844-1912). His fame rests on the way he kept his professional company afloat and is a part of theatrical history.

The Parsee theatre emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and though known Gujarati writers like Dalpatram were associated with some of these companies, there is no extant play of any significance from the early period. While playwrights like Dalpatram and Pandya tried to write socially conscious plays, the Parsee Gujarati theatre became a vehicle for entertainment for a long time. Urdu dramatic writing flourished because of Parsee theatre — playwrights like Aram ruled this phase, The Parsee theatre also kickstarted drama in Hindi as it did in other languages like Telugu, Kannada, and Tamil, where professional and amateur companies were formed in imitation. But serious Hindi theatre arose in reaction to it, and the father of modern Hindi poetry, Bhartendu Harish Chandra, was also the first Hindi dramatist. He wrote plays in order to create social awakening. His plays explore the past in order to kindle nationalist passions against foreign domination. Plays like *Prem Jogini* (1875) critiqued contemporary degradation of society. While he protests against decadent social institutions, Bhartendu also attacks westernization in his sixteen plays. His contemporary playwrights like Srinivas Das (1851-97), Pratap Naraian Misra (1856-94), Radhacharan Goswami (1858-1925), and others wrote romantic, mythological, historical or patriotic plays like Bhartendu and also attempted to write problem plays.

### 2.3 Twentieth Century — 1900-1947

This was the time of nationalist ferment, the decades that saw the consolidation of the movement for independence and the serious rift that arose between the Congress and the Muslim League and that led to the partition of the subcontinent. The conversation between various regions as they strove to come together was seen in the extensive translation activity from one Indian language into another. Works by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, and Rabindranath Tagore were made available in most Indian languages as well as English. They influenced both thought and style in various Indian literatures.

#### 2.3.1 The Novel

The first decades saw not only the continuing influence of English novelists but also that of the famous Bengali novelists. Rajanikanta Bardoloi (1868-
1939), the Assamese novelist, is said to have taken a vow that he would enrich Assamese with historical novels written in the style of Walter Scott and Bankimchandra Chatterjee. He wrote seven such historical novels beginning with *Manomati* (1900). He also wrote a social novel, *Miri Jivari* (1894), which is about the Miri tribe. His historical novels depict the decline of the Ahom rule in Assam, and *Manomati* has the Burmese invasion of Assam as the background. It is a love story in the Romeo and Juliet mould. The first of the social novelists in Assamese was Dandinath Kalita (1890-1955) who began to write in 1908. However it is *Sadhana* (1929) that has a Gandhian character and that begins a phase in his career in which he deals with social purification and the emancipation of women. The same Gandhian influence can be seen in the novels of Daibhachandra Talukdar (1900-67) whose best known novel is *Apurna* (1931) that depicts the tragic story of Premadhar, a Gandhian youth who betrays his ideal love. His novels are filled with incidents and ideals of the Gandhian movement, from removal of untouchability to the creation of cottage industry.

The early decades of the twentieth century saw two really bright stars in the genre of the novel, both Bengali writers — Saratchandra Chatterjee (1876-1938) and Rabindranath Tagore. It may not seem so now but Saratchandra was hailed as a phenomenal writer, far greater than other Indian writers of the time. His sentimental novels that dealt with middle class life were popular all over India and were translated into many Indian languages. Born in a lower middle class family, Saratchandra wrote with great sympathy about the plight of the middle class Bengali women, and about fallen women. He wrote with great simplicity and his descriptions of lower middle class life as well as about poverty-stricken lives struck many chords as did his expression of traditional womanly virtues — his prostitutes too are chaste at heart. He critiques religious practices that led to social discrimination, superstitions and immorality. The immense popularity and reputation of his works were perhaps because of his narrative ability and his simple language. Saratchandra's first novel, *Badalbibi* (1907), was serialized in *Bhumi* and brought him almost instant fame. He went on to write several novels, including *Bindur Chhele* (1914), *Parinita* (1914), *Pallisamaj* (1916), *Devdas* (1917), *Charitrahin* (1917), *Niskrti* (1917), *Shrikanta* (Part 1-4, 1917-33), *Pather Dabi* (1926), *Shes Prashna* (1931) etc., *Srikanta*, *Charitrahin*, and *Pather Dabi* were some of his more popular works. *Pather Dabi* was banned by the British Government because of its revolutionary theme. His continued popularity is attested to by the number of successful movies that have been made based on his works, including *Devdas*, *Srikanta*, *Raimer Sumati*, *Dena-Poona*, *Birajbhat*, *Parinita* etc.

Throughout this period, Tagore continued to write and produce some of the most significant of Indian novels. He wrote some of the most difficult to write romantic novels (how would you get an adult man and an adult woman to meet and fall in love in the middle class society of the time?) many of which resort to accidents or chance to bring about the action. While this remains a staple technique in his work, Tagore tackles some of the most important debates of the time, including nationalism. He explores the impact of western influence on Bengali society in *Gora* (1910), *Chaturanga* (1916) and *Ghare Baire* (1916). *Ghare Baire* is justly famous for its complicated reading of human relationships as well as exploring the debate between nationalism and
liberal humanism. Throughout his career he explored man-woman relationship and was a novelist of the mind as much as about a society in flux.

From the mid-twenties onwards, the Bengali novel saw the birth of psychological realism, and the stream of consciousness technique. The novelists of what was called the Kallol age wrote about the individual and his disjunction from society. This period once again saw a spate of translations from European languages into Bengali. Achintya Kumar Sengupta (1903-76), and Prabodhchumar Sanyal (1907-1983) are some of the well known novelists from this period who wrote about the alienated individual. Three other writers, all Banerjees — Tarashankar (1898-1971), Bibhutibhusan (1894-1950), and Manik (1908-1956) — stand tall as novelists in mid-century Bengali. Bibhutibhushan, perhaps second only to Saratchandra in popularity, is best-known for his first two novels *Pather Panchali* (1929) and its sequel *Aparijita* (1931). His seeming artlessness is used to great effect to depict the lives, dreams, and fears of rural people. Tarashankar Banerjee was a powerful writer, and depicted the lives of simple peasants, boatmen and minstrels of rural Bengal. His novels *Ganadevata* (1942) and *Panchagram* (1944) bring rural life alive. Manik Banerjee was deeply influenced by Marxism and by Freudian psychoanalysis. Critics say that *Putul Nacher Itikatha* (1936) and *Padmanadir Majhi* (1936) reveal his Marxist leanings as well as his psycholgical approach.

The pathbreaking work in Gujarati was *Sarasvatichandra*, which was published in four volumes between 1887 and 1901. Written by Govardhanram Madhavram Tripathi, it had a great impact on Gujarati writing. A huge novel (about 2000 pages long), *Sarasvatichandra* explores the cultural life of the times. But it is K.M. Munshi (1887-1971) who made his mark as a pioneer of the social and the historical novel. A lawyer by profession, Munshi published his first novel, *Verni Vasulat*, in 1913-1914. Written in a simple non-Sanskritised language, this social novel was quite different from anything that had come in Gujarati till then and was highly successful. His historical trilogy — *Pattommi Prabhuta* (1916), *Gujaratma Nath* (1919), and *Rajadhira* (1922) — are justly famous. Obviously, Mahatma Gandhi, who also evolved a simple direct prose style in Gujarati had a very great impact on Gujarati literature. One of the most famous Gandhian novelists from Gujarat was Ramanlal Vasantlal Desai (1892-1954). His idealistic novels expressed the spirit of the Gandhian age. His most famous novels are *Kokila* (1928), *Divayasyakshu* (1932), *Bharel Agni* (1935), which deals with the First War of Independence, *Pralaya* (1950), and *Balajogan* (1952). The regional novel also made its appearance in the writings of Jhaverchand Meghani (1897-1947). His novels, like *Sorath Toran Vahefa Pani* (1937), *Vevishal* (1939), and *Tulasi Kayaro* (1940) are all based in Saurashtra. He wrote of middle and lower middle class life in the region. The rural novel had its practitioner in Pannalal Patel (1912-1989). Novels like *Valamanan* (1940), *Malela Jiva* (1941), and *Manavasini Bhavai* (1949) bring rural Gujarat before our eyes, the last novel being about the great famine in Gujarat towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Premchand (1880-1936) heralded a new dawn in the Hindi novel and is one of the greatest of Indian novelists. A writer with a serious social commitment, Premchand wrote about middle-class life — both urban and rural. An idealistic and didactic writer, Premchand was nevertheless on the right track as far as the problems he identified were concerned. He wrote many works on the problems faced by women. Some of his famous novels are *Sevasadan* (1919), which was about prostitution, *Rangabhum* (1925), which was a Gandhian
novel, *Nirmala* (1926), *Gaban* (1931), *Karmabhumi* (1932), which deals with untouchability, and *Godan* (1936). The last novel is considered his finest and a landmark in the development of the Hindi novel. A novel about peasant life, known for its sensitive portrayal of the social tragedy rural life in India, *Godan* is truly a novel of social vision. Premchand was influenced by Gandhiism and was aware of Marxism, and was a progressive writer. Many of his contemporaries also wrote novels about the status of women, Jainendra Kumar being the most famous of them. Jainendra’s *Sunita* (1935) dealt with extramarital infatuation. He writes about the struggle of modern women against traditional morality but he usually stays with convention. This can be seen in other novels of his like *Tyagapatra* (1935) and *Sukhada* (1953) as well. This search for new moral values can be seen reflected in the novels of writers like Ajneya (1911-1987), in his Shekhar: ek Jivani (1940-44). There were also Marxist writers during this period, the most famous of whom is Yashpal (1903-76). Two of his novels from the period are *Deshdrohi* (1943) and *Dada Komred* (1941). Other than the Vrindavan Lal Verma (1889-1969), there are few historical novelists of note during the pre-Independence period. Like other historical novelists of the period he affirms a faith in a glorious past in order to express his nationalism in novels like *Gadha Kundar* (1929), and *Virata ki Padmini* (1930). Even the regional novel took longer to arrive in Hindi that in other languages.

In Kannada, it is said that the novel truly arrived with *Madiddunno Maharaya* (1915) by M.S. Puttanna (1854-1930). But historical novels did make their appearance earlier. The Kannada novel owes as much to translation from Bengali and Marathi (done by Venkatacharya and V.T.K. Galaganatha respectively) as to translations from European languages. If the first historical novel in Kannada was *Suryakanta* (1895) by Lakshmana Rao Gadagkar, the first detective novel was published in 1897 — this was *Coragrahana Tantra* by M. Venkatarkrishnaiah (1844-1934). The first social novel was *Indira Bai* (1899) by Gulavadi Venkata Rao (1844-1913). This novel exposed traditional customs for the cruelty they imposed, and explored the hypocrisy that underlies religion. But Puttanna is revered as the first novelist of note because his *Madiddunno Maharaya* brings a rural community alive in the ten chapters it consists of. The novel, which is about the fortunes of two generations of a family, is written in a lively and colloquial style. The next major novelist in Kannada was Sivaram Karanth (1902-1997). His first novel *Devachaturu* (1928) also heralded the beginning of the Navodaya period in Kannada literature, a period of high romanticism, influenced also by the nationalist movement. This was the same year that Masti Venkatesha Iyengar (1891-1986) published his short novel *Subbanna*, and Devudu Narasimha Sastry (1896-1962) published his historical novel, *Mayura*. Sastry’s *Antaranga* (1932) was the first psychological novel. Karanth’s famous novel (also made into a successful film), *Chomana Dudi* (1933), was about the life of an untouchable. *Marali Mannige* (1942) by Karanth is also justly famous because it shows both the life of a community over three generations as also the relationship between human beings and nature and thus the universe. K.V. Puttappa (1904-1994), who wrote under the pen name of Kuvempu, brought alive the life of the hilly regions in his epic novel *Kamuru Subbamma Heggaditi* (1938). Social protest can be found in *Jivana Yatre* (1934) by A.N. Krishna Rao (1908-1971), and *Vishwamitrana Shrishiti* (1934) by Adya Rangacharya (1904-84) is a novel about an outsider but one who is influenced by Gandhian teachings. The first novel to be completely influenced by
Gandhian thinking was *Sudarshana* (1933) by Betagiri Krishna Sharma (1900-1982). The progressive movement in the Kannada novel was to make its appearance only after Independence as did the existentialist Navya novel.

Mention has already been made of C.V. Raman Pillai who wrote the first historical novel in 1891. His characters and events are chosen from Travancore history and his first two novels are named after Nair chieftains, Marthanda Varma and Dharma Raja. Pillai’s *Ramaraja Bahadur* (1919) is often said to be the most successful of his novels. A number of historical novels were written after Pillai among which T. Raman Nambisan’s *Keralaswaram* (1941) is considered to be equal to Pillai’s historical romances. Narayan Gurukkal (1861-1948) wrote strong political satires — *Parappuram* (1906) and *Udaya Bhamu* (1925), and like in other languages detective fiction too made an early entry in *Bhaskara Menon* (1909) written by Appan Thampuran (1876-1942). The first social novels that are known for their social criticism are *Parishkarappati* (1925) by K.K. Thooman, which depicts the lives of Syrian Christians and the effect of English education on women, Potheri Kunjampu’s *Sarasvati Vijayam* about the struggles of an ostracized Brahmin girl and a casteless boy, K.M. Panikkar’s *Dorassini* (1931) which is a satire on westernized Malayali women, and B. Namboodaripad’s *Aphante Magal* (1933) which is a critique of Brahminical society. While the progressive movement made its entry through the short story, the socialist realist novel makes its entry into Malayalam in the 1940s with the publication of *Balyakakaalakshakhi* (1944) by the well-known writer Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (1910-1994) and *Ottayil Nimbu* (1944) by P. Kesav Dev (1905-83). Basheer’s first novel was a tragic love story which delineates the lives of the Muslim community in Kerala and *Ottayil Nimbu* has a working class hero. The other major Malayali novelist of this generation, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (1912-99) wrote his most successful novels only after 1948 even though he began writing in the 1930s.

The Marathi novel had made an earlier beginning and had evolved into social entertainment, though some serious social novels did make their appearance in the nineteenth century itself. But it was the historical novels of Hari Narayan Apte (1864-1919) that ushered in the modern period in the Marathi novel. From 1895 he began to write a number of historical novels — five on Shivaji (starting with *Usakkar*); one on Rajputs; one on the age of Chandragupta; one on the Vijayanagar empire. Apte’s success inspired a whole spate of historical novels. As said earlier, he also wrote a number of social novels. One must also mention Vaman Malhar Joshi (1882-1943) who wrote strong novels about women, starting with *Ragini* (1916). The mid-twenties saw the emergence of two major writers — N. S. Phadke (1894-1978) and V.S. Khandekar (1889-1976). Phadke was an extremely prolific writer but one who believed in art of art’s sake and wrote well-crafted works, many of which explored the minds of characters. Khandekar, on the other hand, was a Gandhian and wrote socially relevant fiction. Another major novelist of the period, G.T. Madhukholkar (1899-1976) was a political novelist who has written on the freedom movement. He also wrote social novels, again concentrating on women. Marathi again saw the emergence of women novelists like Gita Sane and Vibhavari Shirurkar. The regional novel made its appearance in the writings of R.V. Dighe whose *Pamanakala* (1939) is said to be the first of such novels. R.S. Mardhekar’s *Ratriva Divas* (1942) was the first stream of consciousness’ novel.

The colossus overshadowing everyone else in the Oriya novel is Fakirmohan Senapati (1843-1918). His *Lachaima* (1901) and *Chamana Athaguntha* (1902)
are considered to be the first two true novels in Oriya by many critics. He wrote about the common people and their problems, and used a colloquial style. The first novel is set in the past during the Maratha invasion of Orissa and shows the influence of Bankim. The second novel was a trend setter, followed later by novelists like Premchand and Tarashankar, that exhibited stark realism and dark humour, and was written with great sympathy for the poor. Senapati's influence on Oriya literature can never be overestimated. Among the social novelists who followed him, mention must be made of Nandakishore Bal (1875-1928) whose Kanakalata (1925) supports widow remarriage. Kuntal Kumari Sabat (1900-38), a major woman novelist, who wrote five novels, was full of patriotism and wrote for social reform, particularly with regard to women. The historical novels also became an established sub-genre of the Oriya novel. Gandhi and the freedom movement made their impact on the Oriya novel as well and one can safely say that K.C. Panigrahi's Matira Manisa (1934) is one of the most famous novels from the period.

The Punjabi novel before independence was first dominated by Bhai Vir Singh and then by Nanak Singh. If Vir Singh's attempt was to further the cause of the Singh Sabha movement by creating the Sikh hero, Nanak Singh, who was a prolific novelist, turned to Gandhian ideology and advocated social reform and humanism. His formula novels were to rule the roost till the emergence of Surinder Singh Narula in 1946 with his novel Pio-Puttar, which narrates the story of Amritsar during 1896-1918.

The Sindhi novel saw a number of social novels written in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This trend began earlier, in 1892 itself, with the publication of Ajab Bhet by Pritamdas Humumatrai. Two novelists from the early decades are Lalchand Amardinomal (1885-1954) and Bherimal Mehrchand (1875-1950). The first was known for his prose style, and the later for his advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity and also for the first crime novel in Sindhi, Varial ain Naimat (1915). Sindhi then saw the emergence of the Freudian psychological novel as well as the influence of Gandhi. Assanand Matora is a writer belonging to the psychological school, while Shewak Bhojraj is a Gandhian. There were also novels on rural life but the Sindhi novel of the period is known for its explorations of Hindu-Muslim interaction, an important area of concern for Sindhis.

The first few decades belonged to popular entertainers in Tamil fiction. Perhaps the most powerful novel from this period is Chandriyayin Kathai, an incomplete novel by the famous poet Subramania Bharati (1882-1921). A major novelist who began to write in the 1930s was Kalki (R. Krishnamurthy, 1899-1954). He wrote a number of historical and social novels. His novel Tyaga Bhumi (1939) captures the social tensions of the times brilliantly. It is about a young woman, Savitri, and how this young village girl is transformed into a sophisticated urban woman with progressive views about women’s liberation. She is reunited with her estranged husband when both of them participate in the national movement. Kalki’s Partipan Kanavu, which began to be serialized from 1941, was a historical novel, which in the guise of talking about the struggles of the Chola king against the Pallava dynasty sketched out the Indian fight for freedom from the British. He wrote two other major historical novels — Sivakamiyin Sapatam (1945) and Ponniviyan Selvan (1950). The forties also saw some rural novels but Kalki overshadowed most novelists during this period.
While the new century began with translations from Bengali which paved the way for a rejuvenation of the Telugu novel, the demand for a separate Andhra state in 1910 was the cause for the road it took. Many Telugu novelists like V.P. Kavulu, C.L. Narasimhan Pantulu, and D.R. Satasastri wrote novels with Telugu settings. But the Telugu novel reached its maturity in the 1920s with the publication of Malapall, the only novel written by U. Lakshminarayana (1880-1953). This is a realistic novel about the state of untouchables in pre-Gandhian Andhra land. It is justly famous for both its technique (especially its use of spoken language) and content. A new romantic movement took place in the novel in the late thirties and forties in Telugu. The three main novelists of the period are Chalam (1894-1979), V. Satyanarayana (1895-1977), and A. Bapiraju (1895-1953). The first wanted free love, the second Hindu revivalism, while the third fused art and life. The psychological novel also makes its appearance in Telugu in the 1940s.

Premchand, the great Hindi writer, was also a great Urdu writer, and it was he who ushered in the modern novel into Urdu with his path breaking Gausa-i-Aflat (1919) and Changan-i-Hasti (1924) and Maidan-i-Amal (1934). Gandhian ideals and the struggles of peasants under colonial rule were major themes in his novels. His realism made a deep impact on the short story in Urdu. The reaction to this realism was a predictable romanticism. The main writers in this stream were Sajjad Hyder Yaldram (1880-1943), Niaz Fatehpuri (1887-1966), Majnoon Gorakhpur (1904-1988), and Qazi Abdul Ghaffar (1862-1956). The progressive movement played a prominent part in Urdu literature. Its beginning was signaled by London ki Ek Rat (1938) by Sajjad Zaheer (1905-74). He depicts Indian in London and their sad life, using the stream of consciousness technique in this short novel. Major writers like Krishan Chander (1914-1977) and Ismat Chughtai (1915-91) began to write under the influence of this movement. They of course became even more well-known after 1947.

Thus, we can see that the novel in various Indian languages had similar influences, both foreign and Indian, and developed in similar ways. This rich tapestry that was woven before the departure of the colonial power attempted to construct the Indian nation and leaned towards a nationalist literature even while strengthening their local identities.

2.3.2 Poetry

The same is true of poetry in Indian languages. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the era of romantic poetry in Assamese, which was presided over by Lakshmikant Bezbarua (1864-1938), Chandrakumar Agarwalla (1867-1938), and Hem Goswami (1872-1928). Experiments in forms like the epic and the sonnet also went on. Notable for this is Padmanath Gohain Barua (1871-1946), whose Lila, written in blank verse is an attempt to write like Wordsworth (or the Prelude). Another major poet of the period, who too was heavily influenced by western classics, was Hiteshwar Barbarooah (1876-1939). Another poet from these times, Ambikagiri Raichowdhury (1885-1967) was a revolutionary turned Gandhian and his poems show the stages of his life. Other patriotic poets were Padmadhar Chaliha (1895-1968), Jyotiprasad Agarwalla (1903-51), Prasannalal Chowdhury, and Binandachandra Barua. All were Gandhians. This period of romanticism also saw mystical poetry. Poetry in Assamese changed dramatically after the Second World War and the independence of the country.
In Bengali, it was Rabindranath Tagore who overshadowed everybody in the beginning of the 20th century. His middle poetry moved from western romanticism to a deep search for God. This period begins in 1901 with *Naivedya* (1901) and it was in this period that he composed *Gitanjali* (1910) that won him the Noble Prize. He went on to speak of man, to affirm life, to mention death, and to try various experiments in style. It is because of Tagore that the prose poem was such a hit in Indian poetry. Tagore's was an overpowering presence and the first real note of opposition to his poetics was struck by Mohitlal Majumdar (1888-1952). He focused on the body (as opposed to Tagore) and went back to Madhusudan Dutt for inspiration. However, one of the most famous poets from this generation is Nazrul Islam (1899-1977). He was known as the rebel poet. His was poetry to be read aloud and he had great mass appeal. He was also a great composer of songs. He wrote politically charged poetry, the poetry of protest. While there were also poets of the rural countryside, the real change came about in Bengali poetry through poets associated with the journal *Kallol*. This group introduced modern poetry into Bengali — poetry about physical and the mundane, about the city and its ugliness, which was written in free verse. Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) is one of the most famous poets to emerge from the 1930s. Buddhadeva Bose (1908-1974) is another major poet from this decade. Bishnu Dey (1909-82) was a great influence in Bengali poetry, with his political poems. Samar Sen and Subhash Mukhopadhyah ushered in Marxist poetry in the 1940s. This decade also produced Sukanta Bhattacharya (1926-47) a hugely popular communist poet.

Many of the major nineteenth century Gujarati poets continued to write in the early decades of the twentieth century. This is often called the Pandit Yug by Gujarati critics. One of the major innovations introduced at this time was the blank verse and the sonnet, both by B.K. Thakore (1869-1952). Gujarati critics call the next phase, from 1915-1947 the Gandhi Yug. Two major poets of this era are Sundaram, the pen name of Tribhuvandas Luhar (1908-1991) and Umashankar Joshi (1911-1988). The two are named almost in the same breath, so inseparable are they in Gujarati poetry. Both were spiritualists and influenced by Sri Aurobindo. Sundaram’s *Kavya Mangala* (1933) and Joshi’s *Gangotri* (1934) are milestones in Gujarati poetry. The poetry of this era was imbued with nationalism, social awareness, and idealism. The language was less ornate and the poetry embraced the public stage, to be recited to large gatherings. The post-independence poetry would go in a different direction.

As we noted before, in Hindi, the challenge was to tame Khariboli to make it an apt vehicle for poetry. The poets we named earlier continued to write in the early twentieth century. Among their works, Maithili Sharan Gupta’s *Bharata Bharati* (1912) was a huge success because of its cultural sweep as also because of its spirit of nationalism. This prolific poet produced about fifty one original works and helped to establish the poetic diction of the language while reviving epic poetry. In the early 1920s romanticism swept Hindi poetry in the shape of three poets — Jaishankar Prasad (1889-1937), Nirala, the pen name of Surya Kant Tripathi (1896-1961), and Sumitra Nandan Pant (1900-78), of whom the latter two were major trend setters. This movement, called *Chhayavad*, was romantic and nationalist, reasserted cultural traditions even while it argued for the spirit of freedom. During this period itself there was a different kind of poetry being written in Hindi, one more concerned with the real world, with national and social consciousness. This has been called
Rashtriya Dhara or Hridaya Dhara. Makhanlal Chaturvedi (1889-1969) was a major poet in this trend. Two poets from late period of Chayavad, two secular lyricists were Mahadevi Verma (1907-1987) and Harivanshrai Bachchan. (1907-2003) Two movements succeeded Chayavad — Pragativad and Prayogvad; the first was progressive and the latter experimental. The most powerful voice in the progressive camp was that of Nagarjun (1911-1988). Another leftist poet who is known for his experimental poetry was Bharat Bhushan Agrawal (1919-1975). He introduced the limerick form into Hindi. Thus we can see that Prayogvad was not a distinct movement from Pragativad and that progressive writers also turned experimentalists. A new personal poetry called for a new language and a new form of expression and Prayogvad tried to find the answers to this need. 1943 saw the publication of a collection of poems by seven experimentalist poets, Tara Saptaka, edited by Agyea, a landmark in Hindi poetry. Agyea (1911-87) himself, and Mukitboh (1917-64) were major poets to emerge from this period. This was to be followed by the Nayi Kavita, new poetry movement after 1947.

Critics say that no great poetry was written in Kannada till the 1920s and that the first two decades prepared the way through translations and initial experiments. The 1920s saw the emergence of the Navodaya movement, as in the case of other Indian languages, a romantic movement. This was inaugurated by a book of poems translated from or inspired by English poetry Inglis Gitaagalu (1921) by B.M. Srikanthaiah (1884-1946). This book paved the way for modern Kannada poetry. Navodaya was again inspired by the national movement and thus had two pulls — one towards lyricism and passion, and the other towards a reassertion of cultural values and tradition. The two major poets from this period were K.V. Puttappa (1904-94) and D.R. Bendre (1896-1981). Both turned to mysticism and both explored the Kannada identity. The lyric, the sonnet, the ode, blank verse, the epic, and free verse all entered Kannada poetry during this period. Kannada poetry too would enter a new phase after Indian independence.

Malayalam too saw the emergence of a romantic movement in poetry in the early decades of the twentieth century. The trio who dominated this era are Kumaran Asan (1873-1924), Vallathol (1878-1958), and Ulloor (1877-1949). The first was a spiritualist, a follower of the famed Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928), who in turn had enriched Malayalam literature with devotional and metaphysical poetry. Asan’s disaffection with the Hindu social system manifested itself in his poetry of renunciation, of the materialness of life, a spiritual, metaphysical poetry. Vallathol and Ulloor were nationalists. Vallathol being equally influenced by Gandhi and Marx. He also venerated cultural traditions and traditional wisdom. Ulloor was more influenced by western poets but he had studied Sanskrit as well. His patriotic poetry picked up incidents from history and he writes about revolts and romantic adventures. Vallathol had many followers but Tagore too was a great influence on the lyricists who began to write in the 1920s — poets like Narayana Menon (1887-1954). In fact lyricism ruled the roost in Malayalam for quite a while. G. Sankara Kurup (1901-1978) is one such major lyricist who received the first Jnanpith Award in 1965. He began his career as he ended it with spiritual romantic poems. However, his middle period was one of social commitment; he was then a social and a national poet. Other poets who must be mentioned are Balamani Amma (1909-2004), who was not swayed by Marxism or nationalism, though she does acknowledge both, but wrote about the world of a mother; Raghavan Pillai (1908-30) and Krishna Pillai (1911-47) who wrote some of the most romantic of poetry, poetry of love and death; and
Gopala Kurup (1902-80), who has a very good translations to his credit. Interestingly, a more committed poetry, more political and revolutionary would begin to appear after 1947 mainly because of the failed armed uprising staged in Vayalar in 1946.

In Marathi poetry followed the trends of the nineteenth century till about the 1920s. The Ravikaran Mandal, a group of writers formed in Pune, set out to reform Marathi literature. Three poets from this group should be mentioned — Yeshwant, Girish (1893-1973), and Madhav Julian (1894-1939). They took poetry to the people and made it popular. They were influenced by nationalism but nationalism was the burning theme of poets like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar ([1883-1966] and Govind (1874-1956). Romantic poetry held firm till independence in Marathi poetry as well. Some major poets from this period were Anil (1901-82), a master of love poetry, Anant Kanekar (1905-80) and N.G. Deshpande. One must also mention Kusuagraj (1912-) whose Visakha (1942), a collection of poems of protest and hope brought him great fame and popularity.

Oriya poetry too carried on in the vein of earlier poetry for a while — epics and long poems, along with lyrics, poems dealing with nature and history were all produced during this time. So were satires, thanks to the famous fiction writer Pakirmohan Senapati. The first changes came about because of the spread of nationalism and the poets who pioneered this are called part of the Satyabadi Movement, which takes its name from a school set up at Satyabadi, near Puri, by these nationalists. The senior-most of these poets was Gopabandhu Das (1877-1928); and two of the others were Nilakantha Das (1884-1967), Godabaris Misra (1886-1956). Committed poetry continued in the poetry of Marxists like Ananta Pattanayak and Sachindanand Rautray and satirists like Lakshmikanta Mahapatra and Godabarish Mahapatra. The same period, from the 1920s to the 1950s, also saw also saw the growth of personal poetry, a mystic romantic poetry. This was triggered by the Abu Andolana started by poets like Baikuntanath Pattanayak and Kalindi Charan Panigrahi in 1931.

Even when Bhai Vir Singh towered over others in Punjabi, straddling the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, Puran Singh (1881-1931), who was well-versed in western literature and was influenced by Walt Whitman, liberated Punjabi poetry quite early from the stranglehold of traditional poetics. Kirpa Sagar (1875-1939) too adapted western form to Punjabi rhythms. Nationalism and Romanticism arrived hand in hand as usual in Indian poetry to Punjabi as well. Patriotism, gender equality, and Punjabi culture are the subject matter of nationalist poetry — the chief poets in this movement are Gurmukh Singh Musafir (1899-1976) and Hira Singh Dard (1889-1964) along with Puran Singh. The major romantic poets from this period are Mohan Singh (1905-78) and Amrita Pritam (1919-2005). Both of them wrote intense love poetry, and were lyrical poets of repute. However, both also became progressive poets. It was after independence that Punjabi, like in many other languages, turned to experimental and new poetry.

In Sindhi too the tradition of love-lyrics continued in the first two decades of the 20th century. But the freedom movement came to Sindh soon after the partition of Bengal and Lalchand Amardinomal (1885-1954) wrote poems on Swadesi in 1905 that were meant to be sung during marches. Gandhian ideals
came to influence the poetry of Kishinchand ‘Bewas’ among others and one of the most prolific writers of nationalist songs was Hundraj Dukhlayal (1910-2003). Hyder Baksh Jatoi (1901-70) was the first of the socialist poets. He was one of the main contributors along with Shaikh Ayaz (1923-1997) to the progressive monthly Nai Duniya that was established in 1945 in Karachi. Independence and the partition was a great blow to Sindhi poetry.

Tamil saw the twentieth century dawn with the nationalist poetry of Subramanya Bharati (1823-74). He wrote a new poetry for the people, a poetry that glorified Tamil as well as sang the nation, a poetry that called for a new equality. Bharati was followed by Bharatidasan (1891-1962), who became a poet of the Dravidian movement. If the first was a nationalist poet preaching unity and equality, the second was a Tamilian poet, a reformist and a separatist. Bharatidasan was also inspired by socialism and wrote against inequality. The two poets had separate bands of followers, those who accepted nationalism as well as Tamilianness, and those who believed in Tamil nationalism alone, writing against Aryanism, and showing their intense love for Tamil. In the Bharati camp were poets like Desika Vinayakam Pillai (1876-1952) and in the Bharatidasan camp were poets like Vanidasan (1915-77). While new poetry came into its own only in the fifties and sixties it began in the forties in Tamil with poems by poets like Na, Pichamoorthy (1900-78) and Ku. Pa. Rajagopalan (1902-44). These poets were influenced by western poets like Whitman as much as by Bharati’s prose poems.

The two poets who could compete for the position of the first of poets in modern Telugu are G.V. Appa Rao (1861-1915) and R. Subba Rao (1892-1984), and both ruled the first decades of the twentieth century. Appa Rao (also known as Gurajada) popularized lyrical poetry and revived folk traditions. Subba Rao was a poet of love and was influenced by English poets like Goldsmith. While he used traditional metres he brought in a new spirit into Telugu poetry. The romantic movement entered Telugu in the 1920s and held sway till 1940. As usual this consisted of love poetry, patriotic poetry, mystical poetry, and the pastoral. D.V. Krishna Sastri (1897-1980) was the principal poet of this movement. The same period saw poems written inspired by the Andhra (sub)nationalist movement. Progressivism also became a major force in Telugu poetry and gave us Sri Sri (1910-83). These poets also popularized the prose poem. The progressives carried on after independence along with the subsequent experimentalists of the free verse movement.

Though the early twentieth century was the era of Mohammad Iqbal (1873-1938) in Urdu poetry, the first decades saw the romantic movement enter its oeuvre. This is marked by subjectivism, sensuousness, obliqueness, search for beauty and an experiment in form. Some of the major figures of the movement are Josh Malihabadi (1898-1982), Akhtar Shirani (1900-48) and Saghar Nizami (1905-83). Josh was also called a rebel poet because of his revolt against social conventions. A number of poets wrote patriotic poetry around his time. Iqbal, who gave us the popular “Saare Jahan Se Acha”, too wrote patriotic poems as well as poems about nature. A humanist and a religious poet, he was influenced by Marxism and strove for Muslim unity. Progressive thought had a great impact on Urdu literature, and the first Conference of the Progressive Indian Writers at Lucknow in 1936 seemed to speak for many of them when it declared that it was “the sacred duty” for all writers to use all their “creative effects” to struggle for “the people’s freedom”. Poets like Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-84), Majaz (1911-55), Ali Jafri (1913-2000), Kai fi Azmi (1919-2002), and Sahir Ludhianvi (1921-80) came to the fore now. Many of
them belonged to the trade union movement or had participated in movements of workers and peasants and used poetry for communicating with their readers and listeners with a sense of immediacy. Again, like many other Indian languages, but perhaps the difference here being more stark, the same period saw the experimentalists come up with a different agenda from the progressive writers. They called themselves the Halqa poets, did not concern themselves with politics, and wrote of the psyche and paid great importance to form and style. Some poets of this movement were Taseer (1912-49), Miraji (1912-49) and Akhtarul Iman (1915-96). Again new poetry would come to Urdu after Independence from the British.

Again, we saw that there is a similarity in the way poetry developed in various Indian languages, that they all had the same influences, and that they were in dialogue with each other.

2.3.3 Drama

The mythologicals of the late 19th century were followed by the historical in Assamese. Padmanath Gohain Barua’s Jaymati (1900) was the first historical play. He also wrote other historical plays like Gadadhar (1907) and Lachit Barphukan (1915). Lakshmikant Bezbarua and Daibachandra Talukdar were two other historical playwrights of note. The mythological and the historical held the stage in Assamese till Independence.

Bengali has always seen lively theatrical activity. Bengali too greeted the dawn of the 20th century with historical plays and plays from the puranas. If D.L. Ray (1863-1913) wrote Pasani (1900) and Sita (1902), Girish Ghosh wrote historical plays to negotiate the aftermath of the Bengal partition of 1905 — some of the plays being Sirajuddaula (1905), Mir Kasim (1906), and Chatrapati (1907). This kind of drama — romantic-historical, musicals, puranic melodramas, religious drama, and domestic tragedy — was staple fare in Bengali theatre till the end of the Second World War. However, there was also another kind of drama available during this period. One must not forget that the colossus Rabindranath Tagore was active in theatre as well. He started off with operatic plays and then moved on to verse drama in the nineteenth century. In 1908 came a different kind of drama from him, the play Saradotsav, which was more contemplative than anything he had written till then. The plays of this phase were metaphysical, the form fluid, the language prose. Nature is vital to some of these plays. In others, e.g. Dakghar (1912), he focuses on existence, and in a third group of plays, an example of this being Acalayatan (1912) he looks at the impact of organization and regimentation. In his last phase, in the 1930s, Tagore went to experiment with ballets. The progressive movement, ushered in by the Indian People’s Theatre Movement, came to Bengali theatre in 1944 with Navanna by Bijan Bhattacharya (1917-78), about the Famine of 1943.

The mythological and the historical along with adaptations from western theatres kept Gujarati going through the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th. Nanalal Dalpatram (1875-1946) tried to write plays of literary values but these were hardly stageable. K.M. Munshi, on the other hand, wrote many stage-worthy plays, mythological as well as social satires. But it is C.C. Mehta (1901-) who ushered in the modern theatre into Gujarati. His first important play was Aggadi (1934), which is set in a railway colony and was one of the
first realistic plays. He constantly experimented in theatre and wrote a wide variety of plays. Pragjibhai Dosa and Adi Marzban were two other important playwrights of this period. Gujarati also saw the development of the one-act play from the 19th century itself. Initially this was a form for farces, and quite successful in Parsee theatre, but later (from 1922 onwards) was adapted for serious plays as well. Umashankar Joshi was a major writer who wrote serious one-act plays. Jayanti Dalal (1909-70) also wrote short plays successfully.

In Hindi too the mythological and the historical continued their hold in the first two decades of the 20th century. They become better crafted and with greater focus on characterization and motivation. Then the era of Jaishankar Prasad (1890-1937) began in the 20s. His was a literary drama, historical and fiercely nationalistic. However, it was his contemporary Lakshmi Narayana Misra who ushered in modern Hindi theatre. He introduced and popularized the problem play. Perhaps his inherent idealism is the reason that Upendranath Ashk (1910-1996) is seen to the first of the moderns. He is a realistic playwright and set the trend for Hindi drama that was to last till after Independence.

Influenced by the Parsee and Marathi theatre, Kannada theatre was full of mythologicals and melodramas till the 1920s. In the twenties B.M. Srikantaiah (1884-1946) wrote Gadayuddha Nataka (1925) and Asvathaman (1929) and ushered in a new era of elite theatre. He introduced the western notion of tragedy into Kannada drama. This Navodaya period saw other good plays and playwrights as well. But it is T.P. Kailasam (1884-1946) who shook the theatrical world with his realistic contemporary play Tullu-Ghati in 1923. He is a major playwright, Shavian in spirit. The other playwright, also influenced by Shaw, who was an equally towering figure in Kannada drama, was Adya Rangacharya (1904-84) who wrote under the name of Sriranga. The two of them had introduced real men and women on the stage. This theatre was to last till Independence.

In Malayalam translations had held sway in drama in the nineteenth century, followed by musicals, the latter lasting through the first decades of the 20th century. However, the prose play took over in the first decade, the first of them being dramatizations of popular novels of C.V. Raman Pillai and O. Chandu Menon. C.V. Raman Pillai also wrote farces. The farce then gave way to a comedy of manners. E.V. Krishna Pillai (1894-1938) is a notable playwright of the times who moved from farce to serious comedies and also wrote the historical play. Historical and puranic plays were written in Malayalam in the twenties and the thirties. Social plays, especially on the status of Nambudiri women, were also written in the thirties. The first political play was Pattabakki (1938) by the communist playwright K. Damodaran (1912-76). Ibsenian realistic drama enters Malayalam in 1940 with Bhagnrabhavanam by N. Krishna Pillai. While experimental theatre also began around the same time in Malayalam, it had to wait till the fifties to take over the stage.

In Marathi, the period till the 1920s set the stage for serious theatre through translations and adaptations. Dramatists and directors like G.B. Deval (1855-1916) were heavily influenced by Shakespeare. K.P. Khandilkar (1872-1948) who belongs to this period wrote plays to arouse the Marathi public against colonisation. His Kichhakavad (1907) was popular enough to be banned. In his last phase Khandilkar wrote plays for the famous actor-singer Balagandharva and made the musical extremely popular in Marathi. While the
historicals took over in the twenties, the decade also saw the freedom struggle enter the stage. Playwrights like B.V. Karlekar (1883-1964) attempted stage realism and wrote about social evils as well as political struggles. Marathi drama was to witness great changes after Independence and achieve its dominant position then.

The Jatra tradition held sway in Oriya theatre till the 1920s. It was then that Kali Charan Patnaik (1900-78) began his career and changed the face of Oriya drama. He brought in the colloquial language and after beginning with musical plays, went on to social plays by the late thirties. He overshadowed everyone else till the 1950s.

In Punjabi, the first two decades of the twentieth century were of translation, plays influenced heavily by western or Sanskrit drama, and a few didactic plays like Raju Lakhadota Singh (1910) by Bhai Vir Singh. The first major playwright happens to be Ishwar Chander Nanda (1892-1956) who won a one-act play competition organized by Norah Richards, who had links with Irish theatre. She wanted Punjabi drama to demonstrate similar links with the native soil and Nanda obliged brilliantly. He wrote about social problems of the day, from widow remarriage to ignorance and superstition. He used folk elements in his plays which were otherwise western in technique. The realism that Nanda advocated was the major inspiration in Punjabi theatre till the progressive movement. A dramatist like Sant Singh Sekhon makes his appearance then in the 1940s and gives a Marxist reading of history. In his controversial play Kalakar (1946) he uses Ahalya to talk about the modern woman. Balwant Gargi and Kartar Singh Duggal too began to write during this period and carried on to be major playwrights after independence.

Similarly in Sindhi, theatrical activity till 1920 consisted of translations and adaptations from Shakespeare and other western dramatists on the one hand, and Sanskrit source on the other. Khanchand Daryani (1898-1965) changed all that with his social and nationalistic plays in the 1920s. His first play Gulab Jo Gul (1920) was about the conflict between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. This period also saw the dramatization of Sindhi folk stories. The zeal to reform saw the enactment of short play called Cakchita in street corners, and this led to the writing of one-act plays. Playwrights like Karomal Khilnani, and Lalchand Amardinomal Jagtiani are some famous writers of such plays. This politicized sermonizing sub-genre soon became a more polished theatrical art with new writers like M.U. Malikani who wrote in the 30s.

Ibsen, Shaw and Wilde had a great influence on Tamil drama in the early 20th century. For example, one of the most successful plays of the late 20s and early 30s Aundy’s Mangalyam (1925) is an Ibsenian play about women’s emancipation. Tamil theatre had to face the early challenge of films and the most successful genre in Tamil became the musical play. This genre had developed in the nineteenth century itself. The one-act play as well as the social play too had a marked presence in Tamil. Theatre was company — and star-oriented and was used for political purposes as well. Two chief ministers of Tamil Nadu, Annadorai and Karunanidhi, have written scripts for plays.

Telugu saw a number of translations from contemporary Indian language drama as well as from English and European playwrights. Mythological plays began to be written in the 1890s and continued into the 20th century.
Chlakamirthi Lakshminarasimhan’s *Gayapakhyavanam* (1909) sold more than one lakh copies! The mythological drama held its own till the thirties. Telugu too saw the historical nationalist drama, as well as the devotional. If *Ramadas* (1920) by D. Gopalachari was a devotional play, *Rasaputra Vijnayam* was a patriotic play produced during the Vandematharam movement and *Na Raju* (1920) was a powerful historical play by Pingali Nagendra Rao. Even in the 1890s Telugu drama had witnessed social plays and Guraja Apparao’s *Kamvasuksam* (1897) is a wonderful social satire. But it is in the 1930s that the social play came into its own. P.V. Rajamannar (1901-78) and Acharya Atreyi are outstanding social dramatists of this era. The thirties also saw the first psychological play *Suryani* (1930) by Panuganti. This was also the era of musical plays.

Agha Hashr (1880-1938) took over from Aram in Urdu theatre which was still a part of the Parsee theatre movement. He too was inspired by Shakespeare and his main contribution was to demonstrate the potential of Urdu as a dramatic language. It was in the late 20s that changes took place in Urdu with the entry of Imtias Ali Taj (1899-1975) with his *Anarkali* (1927). With this play Urdu literature saw the arrival of well-constructed and serious plays. Playwrights like Abid Husain, Mohammad Mujib and Ishfaq Husain Quraishi came into prominence now. Influenced by western theatre, this was a theatre that seems derivative to a large extent. It was IPTA in the forties that gave a sense of urgency and commitment to Urdu theatre. Ali Sardar Jafri’s *Yeh Kis Ka Khoon Tha?* (1942) began this movement which had eminent playwrights like K.A. Abbas who began his career with *Zubaida* (1943). This new realism ruled for a while till after independence.

### 2.4 CONCLUSION

We have seen in this unit that modern India came into being in a reevaluation of the past, a reformation of the present, a surge towards freedom from the British, an acceptance of some western ideals and ideologies, and reassertion of cultural traditions, a construction of a national identity even while securing one’s particular cultural location and difference. The influence of Gandhi and of Marx, the exploration of western forms and the integration of Indian elements, the philosophical quest and the political protest — all these mark modern Indian literature. It is a literature of identity, the identity of Indian-ness, the politics of language negotiating with the politics of nationalism against British imperialism. We can again see that the best way to read Indian literature(s) is through the perspective of comparative studies. Since we cannot know more than a few Indian languages, we have to access most of these literatures in translation as you are to do in this course. We have also seen the role that translation played in the shaping of Indian literatures and the impact of the dialogue between our languages in the historic juncture that shaped our destiny as a nation.

### 2.5 QUESTIONS

1. What is the role of translation in the development of Indian literature in various languages?
2. Is there a similarity in the development of the novel in various Indian languages?
3. What do you think characterizes poetry in Indian languages from the 1920s till 1947?
4. What is a social play and do you find it in all Indian literatures? What problems did it deal with?

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS


Nehru, Jawaharlal, (1946; 1992) The Discovery of India, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund and OUP.