

---

# UNIT 20 LITERATURE IN THE INDIAN LANGUAGES

---

## Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 The Poetical Heritage of Old India
- 20.3 The End of Old Poetry
  - 20.3.1 Urdu Poetry
  - 20.3.2 Other Languages
- 20.4 The New Poetry
- 20.5 Developments on the Stage
  - 20.5.1 Western Influence
  - 20.5.2 Maturity
- 20.6 The Rise of the Novel
  - 20.6.1 New Narratives
  - 20.6.2 Bankim's Age
- 20.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.8 Key Words
- 20.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

---

## 20.0 OBJECTIVES

---

After reading this Unit you will get to know:

- about the nature of Indian literature at the turn of the 18th century,
- as to how this literature was losing its freshness and vigour,
- about the ways in which this literature got fresh impetus, and
- how new forms of Indian literature developed under this impetus.

---

## 20.1 INTRODUCTION

---

Unit 19 has described the growth of the language of modern India. Here the growth of literature in the modern Indian languages will be discussed. The development of a standardized language in each of the major vernaculars of India, together with the emergence of a well-developed language of prose in the vernaculars, had a critical impact on the evolution of Indian literature. To put it simply, literature in the vernacular languages of India evolved from the old to the new.

The vernacular languages of India had not developed prose literature in the eighteenth century. There was a huge literature, but it was almost entirely in verse. This old poetical literature bore the stamp of the mentality of a traditional age. The impact of English literature on Indian literature began to be felt in the nineteenth century. Two main consequences flowed from this. One was the development of a new kind of poetry, with several new forms borrowed from English poetry. The other was the emergence of a prolific prose literature that bore the stamp of the new age and the modern mentality. Since it is not possible to depict the changes in mentality and literary creativity with the limits of a strictly defined period, in this unit we also look beyond, to the decades preceding and succeeding this period.

---

## 20.2 THE POETICAL HERITAGE OF OLD INDIA

---

Under the impact of the west and of English literature, there arose, in nineteenth

immediately preceded it in the turbulent years of the Mughal decline and the English expansion. It must be stressed, however, that the devotional literature of Bhakti and Sufism which had flourished at an early time had an important influence on the poets of modern India.

In the old Sufi and Bhakti poetry the figure of the Beloved stood for God. But devotional poetry was not very characteristic of the eighteenth century which came under the influence of a highly conventionalized style of erotic poetry. Here and there we do, however, encounter some great Sufi and Bhakti poets and singers in that age of turbulence: in Sind, Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit; in the Punjab, Waris Shah; in the deep south, the Telugu composer Tyagaraja who set his thousands of devotional poems to matchless Carnatic music.

The Sufi saint Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit and his Punjabi contemporary Waris Shah took Hindu folk tales of their own regions, the love stories of Sasui and Punhoon and of Hir and Ranjha; they embroidered into them a deeper Sufistic interpretation; and thus they produced the classics known as the Risalo of Shah Abdul Latif (died 1752) and Hir-Waris (1766). Both tapped the deep pathos of popular love stories to give a spontaneous touch to Sufi preaching.

Hir Waris turns on an extra marital affair. The headman's daughter Hir is forcibly separated from the cattle-herd Ranjha by her kinsfolk and married off to a husband to whom she acts coldly. Her continuing attachment to her lover who roams the country as a Jogi ends in a tragic series of deaths. She is killed by her relations, and on hearing this Ranjha sighs deeply and his soul departs from his body. But as far as Waris Shah is concerned, their souls are united for ever in heaven. He feels that true love on earth is symbolic of the Sufi's union with God.

Shah Abdul Latif embroidered upon several folk stories of Sind. Of these, the pathetic love story of Sasui and Punhoon, set against the background of the parched desert, is the most popular among the Sindhis. Shah Abdul Latif's treatment of the well known theme begins when Sasui's husband, a stranger from Baluchistan named Punhoon, is secretly taken away by his kinsfolk at night on fleet-footed camels. The girl crosses the trackless desert of Sind, and the bare mountains of Baluchistan, alone in search of her husband. She loses her life amidst the sands in a quest that embodies for Shah Abdul Latif the devoted man's untiring search for God. This is the song Shah Abdul Latif puts into the mouth of the girl before she finally disappears in the sands:

I did not meet my love although  
A hundred suns to setting sped.  
O let me yield my life when I Have  
seen him, hence my journey made.

Shah Abdul Latif sees in Sasui's unremitting struggle into the last the difficult path of the Sufi striving to obliterate the distinction between himself and God. But he and other poets of his sort are something of an exception in that troubled age. The eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century are marked by a conventional poetry in most of the Indian language, inspired not so much by deep devotion as by decadent eroticism.

---

### 20.3 THE END OF OLD POETRY

---

The social crisis accompanying the decline of the Mughal Empire left a deep imprint on the literature of the age. A sense of decadence pervaded the literature of practically every major language in Northern and Southern India before the new prose and poetry emerged under the impact of Western influence. This was especially true of the Urdu poetical literature that came into its own in the eighteenth century. From its birth in Delhi around 1700 it showed the signs of a profound moral crisis, indicating the misfortunes of the aristocratic Muslim society which patronized the poetry.

### 20.3.1 Urdu Poetry

Characteristic of the age was the Urdu genre of poetry called the *Shaihr-i-Ashob* (Lament of the Town) which described the decline of all the professions of a town and the triumph of the mean over the noble. More specifically it conveyed the upsetting of the existing order of things (*inqilab*) and the overthrow of the formerly great by upstarts. Significantly the word 'inqilab' in the *Shaihr-i-Ashob* was used not in the sense of a revolution of creative potential, but rather in the sense of a revolution or overturn of the right order of things. Everything, a late eighteenth century Urdu poet of Patna named Rasikh said regretfully, is turned upside down. It appeared to him that the former ruling class of Mughal mounted warriors were now 'so afflicted by poverty that they do not command even a toy clay horse'. Another Urdu poet of Delhi, Suda (1713-1780), who lived through the Iranian, Afghan and Maratha raids on his city, spoke in his *Shaihr-i-Ashob* of houses once alive with music 'now ringing with the braying of asses' and of deserted mosques with no light 'except the light of a ghoul'. He made fun in a *qasida* of the emaciated horse on which the impoverished Mughal nobleman was riding off to fight the Marathas. The sycophant showed it the corn bag and the servant beat it with a stick from behind, while a member of the crowd advised: 'Provide it with wheels, or attach sails to it to make it move.' When the warrior found the battle about to start, he took his shoes in his hand, shoved the horse under his arm-pit, ran helter-skelter through the city, and stopped not till he had reached his house.

Wine (*sharab*) and woman (*saqi*, a euphemistic term for the courtesan) formed an inseparable combination in the Urdu poetry of the age. The dissipation, luxury and sensuality of the declining aristocratic society was reflected in the predominance of the figure of the courtesan in the Urdu poetry of Delhi and Lucknow. No longer intent on the marriage of souls, the typical poet looked forward to a sensual union with the beloved, as is indeed made clear in the following verse from Insha Allah Khan, son of Mughal courtier of Murshidabad and a displaced young man driven to Lucknow after the English take-over in Bengal.

I am prepared to tolerate abuse from you  
and blandishments and frowns,  
But your saying No is wholly unacceptable.

That the figure of the Beloved stands now not for God but for the courtesan is also made amply clear by Insha Allah Khan:

Not the fun of it: The Shaikh was unexpectedly embarrassed when I greeted him in the assembly of the Beloved yesterday.

Love in Lucknow as Insha Allah Khan and other Urdu poets came to cultivate it in the latter part of the eighteenth century was a pastime, the accomplishment of a courtier too sophisticated and cultured to believe in feelings. The Hindi poetry of the age, too, exhibited symptoms that were similar. The *Jagat Vinod* of a Padmakar Bhatta (1753-1833), composed in the rich and luxurious court of Jaipur, reflects a world from which serious concerns are excluded and which exacts from those who live in it one duty alone, that of pursuing pleasure. Hindi poetry had undergone since the middle of the seventeenth century a long-term change from 'Bhakti' to 'Riti' (meaning an emphasis on rhetoric and poetics and also poetry of a secular and sensuous type composed according to a carefully cultivated technique). This school had lost its freshness by endless repetition and was barren at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

### 20.3.2 Other Languages

The 'dictatorship of the Grammarian and the Rhetorician' was not confined to the language of Hindustan alone, and had affected Bengali, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil and Oriya as well. K.M. Munshi talks of 'a weary' lifeless age in Gujarati literature at the close of the eighteenth century, Mayadhar Mansinha speaks of 'the dark night of the Oriyas' in which voluptuous and ornate poetry flourished, and Chenchiah and Bhujanga Rao describes as 'one long night' the period of Telugu literature between 1630-1850.

The fall of the Hindu kingdoms of Orissa and Vijayanagara seems to have created in peninsular India the same kind of social and moral crisis that the subsequent

disintegration of the Mughal Empire produced in Hindustan. The Kavya style which flourished in Telugu came to depend more on hyperbole and exaggeration: 'One poet said that the turrets of the city seemed to kiss the sky. Another went a step further and imagined that they pierced the vault. Yet a third outstripped these, describing them as emerging in the court of Indra.' The moral tone of the Telugu poetry of the age was not high **Suka Saptati** related the artful way in which society women violated their marital vows and **Bilhaniya** related to a sexual intrigue between a young daughter and her teacher. The same stories were to be found in Bengali as well presented in another garb and with superb technique by Bharat Chandra Ray (died 1760). The insecurity and turmoil of the age lent an underlying tone of darkness to its poetry. A profound sense of the evening tide dominated the songs of Kali the Mother composed by Ramprasad Sen in mid-eighteenth century Bengal:

Let us play, you said, and brought me down on earth  
Under false pretence. O Mother, the play did not  
Fulfil my wish. What was to be on this playground  
Has been played out. Now at evening, says Ramprasad,  
Gather up the child in your arms and let us go home.

Ramprasad Sen

The same sense of gloom permeated the Persian and Urdu poetry of Mirza Ghalib (1797-1869) who lived and wrote his incomparable ghazals in Delhi between 1827-1857. He was the last great poet of the old world, a poet of the Mughal twilight. For him, living in Delhi under the last of the Mughals,

Life is not journey with an end, there is  
No rest in death,  
We move not on, but slip and slide  
On unsure, trembling feet.

With Ghalib, the old poetry shot forth its last ray of disappearing glory. Even while he was turning out Persian and Urdu ghazals in the set mould of Delhi, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and other Bengali poets of Calcutta were importing new forms into Indian poetry by engrafting on to it from English poetry the blank verse, the sonnet and the modern individualistic epic.

---

## 20.4 THE NEW POETRY

---

New forms were adopted in Bengali poetry, Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-1873) gave shape to the new Indian poetry with his Bengali epic in blank verse, **Meghnad Badh Kavya** (1861). Gradually every other language, including the Urdu language in which Ghalib left his heritage, was enriched by poetry of the new form. Ghalib's rebellious disciple, Hali (1837-1914), was one of the first to rebel against the convention of the ghazal. In the preface to his **Flow and Ebb of Islam** (Madd-O-Jazr-e-Ismail), better known as **Musaddas-e-Hali** (1879), he exposed the defects of the older erotic poetry pitilessly. His **Musaddas**, which expressed the new spirit of Islam under the influence of the reformer Sir Saiyid Ahmed Khan, narrated the glories and decline of Islam. While giving trenchant expression to the aims and ideals of reformers, Hali also warned against losing one's roots in the craze for reform. He said in one of his verses:

For washing, O reformer: There is good reason left,  
So long as any stain upon the cloth is still left;  
Wash the Stain with a will: but do not rub so hard  
That no stain upon the cloth—and no cloth be left.

While Altaf Husain Hali was establishing the new poetry in Urdu, Narmadashankar Lalshankar (1833-1886) and Bhartendu Harischandra (1846-1884) were doing the same in Gujarati and Hindi respectively. Narmad and Bhartendu are remembered today mainly as the makers of modern Gujarati and Hindi prose, but they also brought a new spirit to the poetry in these two languages. Narmad, a social rebel, gave the stirring nationalist call to Gujarat—'Jaya Jaya Garabi Gujarat': (Hail, hail Glorious Gujarat:)—in his poem **Downfall of the Hindus** (Hinduoni Padati, 1864). Bhartendu Harishchandra left his poems mainly in Braj Bhasha, popularizing nationalism in Hindi. The Balasore trio—Phakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918),

Radhanath Ray (1848-1908) and Madhusudan Rao (1853-1912)—did for Oriya poetry what Madhusudan Dutt had done for Bengali Poetry. Following Dutt, they imported the blank verse, the sonnet and the individual epic into Oriya, and they expressed their love for the heritage and natural beauty of Orissa through the new genres. Similarly Lakshminath Bazbarua (1868-1938), the greatest figure in modern Assamese literature, set forth the glories of Assam in patriotic songs such as *Amar Janma Bhumi, Mor Desh and Bin Baragi*. Krishnaji Keshav Damle, better known as Keshava Suta (1866-1905), established the new romantic lyric in Marathi poetry from around 1885. He was the greatest poet of nineteenth century Maharashtra. Like Hali, Bharatendu and Narmad, Keshava Suta also expressed in his poetry a new spirit of activism and social regeneration that contrasted strongly with the dark and despondent tone of Ghalib earlier in the nineteenth century.

But it was Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) who best represented the new spirit in India. It was he who accomplished the naturalization of the humanist and rationalist values of the West in Indian literature. He did not make any forced adaptation of foreign models: instead, the influence of the Upanishads and of Kalidasa, of Vaishnava lyricism and the rustic folk songs, were organically blended in his poetry with Western influences. This achievement brought him world-wide recognition, and in 1913, the Nobel Prize. He was not merely a poet; he wrote novels, short stories, plays, essays and literary criticism, all of which reached maturity in his hands. In due course his writings influenced the various Indian languages through direct reading or translations from the Bengali original. It may be truly said therefore that with him modern Indian literature came of age.

What was the new spirit that Tagore embodied? It will be evident at once when we look at his challenge to the doctrine of Maya (Illusion)—the philosophical basis of India's age-old 'otherworldly' culture. It may be noted that some of the medieval bhakti poets had not accepted the doctrine of Maya. Tagore was indebted to that poetic tradition; but his assertion that the world was real went much further and it contained a scientific and humanistic core of benefits. It expressed itself in his love of his country, but it was not narrow of patriotism. His patriotic ideal, which embraced the whole of humanity and was inspired by the spirit of reason and freedom, found expression in a famous poem of the *Gitanjali* which won him the Nobel Prize:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments  
by narrow domestic walls  
Where words come from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into  
the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever-widening  
thought and action  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

In a word, Tagore imparted the universal spirit of progress and reason to the literature of his country, and he did so in a uniquely Indian manner, not forgetting God and the eternal truth.

The age in which he lived and worked saw the rise of several other poets who enriched Indian literature with their distinctive poetical works. Subramanya Bharati, the greatest poet in modern Tamil, was greatly encouraged by his example. Bharati's *Kuyil Pattu*, a collection of songs of love, may be taken to be the counterpart to Tagore's *Gitanjali*; he also wrote *Swatantra Pattu*, an equally influential collection of songs of freedom. The three great contemporary Malayalam poets, Kumaran Asan, Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer and Vallathol Narayana Menon, also exuded the same new spirit. Together they created what a historian of Malayalam literature calls the 'golden age of romantic poetry' in that language.

Among other contemporaries of Tagore must be mentioned Bhai Vir Singh, a Sikh poet whose Punjabi masterpiece, *Rana Surat Singh* (1905), depicts a widow's spiritual journey in search of her dead husband; Narsinhrao Divatia, a Gujarati poet

who wrote an incomparable elegy on his son's death (**Smarana Samhita**) in 1915; and the Hindi poets of Chhayavad, Jai Shankar Prasad, Nirala and Sumitra Nandan Pant, who were inspired by Tagore and the European symbolists to introduce a mystic and romantic subjectivity in the Hindi poetry of the 1920s.

The account of modern Indian poetry would remain incomplete without a reference to Mohammed Iqbal, who furrowed a course different from that of Tagore. During the prolonged crisis that overpowered the Turkish Caliphate in the second decade of the twentieth century, he emerged as a poet of Pan-Islamism in the Urdu language. Later he wrote several works in Persian which gave him a certain recognition in the Islamic world outside India. With **Bal-e-Jibril** (1935) he returned to Urdu again. Although at first an outspoken nationalist, he came by 1930 to advocate a separate homeland for the Muslims in India. He died in 1938, leaving behind a poetical heritage rich in spirituality and informed by the spirit of Islamic revivalism.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) With the decline of Mughal empire what were the changes which took place in the Indian literature?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 2) Was the new poetry able to shake off the earlier decadence?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

---

## 20.5 DEVELOPMENTS ON THE STAGE

---

The stage brought a new dimension to Indian literary activity in the nineteenth century. It did not exist before. The idea caught on when the European community in Calcutta performed English plays on the stage. Before this, there were folk performances of various sorts under the sky—Kathakali in Kerala, Yakshagana in Karnataka and Andhra, Yatra in Bengal and Orissa, Ras Lila in Braj, etc.

Combining song, dance and bits of acting, these were performances without a formal theatre. There was no drama proper, except for survivals of classical Sanskrit drama here and there. In certain parts of the country, for instance in Orissa and Kerala, Sanskrit drama was still to some extent a living tradition. When plays on the stage were first attempted in the nineteenth century, Sanskrit drama, especially Kalidasa's **Abhijana Shakuntalam**, provided a source of inspiration in several provinces.

### 20.5.1 Western Influence

However, Western plays, which caught the imagination of the Indian middle class, made them acquainted with ideas of drama ruled out in the classical Sanskrit play: especially the idea of tragedy, of sad endings and violent deaths on the stage. That this was a new notion, and a valid one, was acknowledged by G.C. Gupta, who wrote the first original Bengali play in 1852. Justifying the sad ending of the play, he referred to the great English poet named Shakespeare. 'Writers in our country', he wrote in the preface to the play, 'used to think that if they did not cap the enacting of a sad event in a person's life with a happy ending, they would in verity commit a sin'. But he advocated a departure from this concept on the ground of the deeper reconciliation and happiness reached by the plumbing of sadness.

This was not the Indian audience's first acquaintance with plays of Western type. A Russian visitor to Calcutta, named Gerasim Lebedeff, translated an English play into Bengali, and had it enacted on the stage in 1795. Even earlier than this, Christians of Central Kerala, ever since coming into contact with the Portuguese, had produced plays that exhibited some of the features of western drama. But these were isolated productions, and had no influence on the development of dramatical literature from around the middle of the nineteenth century.

Among the first original plays influenced by Western notions were the tragic play mentioned before, named *Kirtibilas*, and Taracharan Sikdar's Bengali comedy of the same year (1852), entitled *Bhadrajuna*, which followed both Sanskrit and Western notions of comedy in developing the Puranic theme of Subhadra's elopement with Arjuna. In Marathi, the first full-fledged play was *Prasannaraghava* (1851). The first Urdu play, Anant's *Indar Sabha* (1853), is said to have been enacted in Lucknow by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, his courtiers and his concubines. It is based on an inconsequential tale of a fairy's love for a man, the latter's imprisonment by god Indra, and how the fairy rescued her beloved in the guise of a jogan.

### 20.5.2 Maturity

These were early beginnings, full of the shortcomings to be expected in such initial efforts. The man who raised modern Indian drama to the status of literature was the famous Bengali poet, Michael Madhusudan Dutt. His first play, *Sharmistha* (1859), was based on a Mahabharata tale. Within a few months of this he wrote two contemporary social plays of a satirical character and finally he wrote the tragic masterpiece, *Krishnakumari* (1861), based on the dispute between the rival princes of Jaipur and Jodhpur for the hand of the peerless princess of Udaipur, who was driven to commit suicide in order to save her father's house from ruin. His contemporary, Dinabandu Mitra, wrote the celebrated play *Niladarpan* (1860), on the oppression of the indigo planters in Bengal. This play created a sensation and its translator, Reverend J. Long, was sentenced to prison on the charge of sedition. Among notable early plays in other languages may be mentioned Ranchhodhbhai Udayram's tragic Gujarati play, *Lalita-duhkha-darsaka* (1864) in which a cultured girl married to an illiterate rake is driven to commit suicide; Ramashankara Ray's great historical play in the Oriya language, *Kanchi Kaveri* (1880), dealing with a heroic and romantic episode in the career of King Purushottama Deva of Orissa; and the short social play in Kannada by Venkataramana Shastri, entitled *Iggappa Heggadeva Vivahaprahasana*, dealing with the social evil of the sale of girls in the marriage market.

Plays were enacted at first by amateur groups, usually in the mansion of some notable family. Michael Madhusudan Dutt's tragedy, *Krishnakumari*, was staged in the Sobhabazar Raj house of North Calcutta in 1865. The first public theatre, named the National Theatre, was set up in Calcutta in 1872. Soon there were several rival Calcutta theatres and professional troupes. In Bombay, the other great centre where the professional stage flourished, the Parsi community, realizing the commercial possibilities of the theatre, set up several companies in Bombay and soon extended their activities to several parts of Western and Northern India. These were itinerant companies, going on a round of the leading cities of India and attracting large plebeian crowds to gaudy and dazzling plays in which the actors acted with sweeping gestures and a shrill declamatory style. Naturalism had no place in such theatre and the drama thus produced seldom attained the dignity of literature. The development

of the professional stage had by early 20th century brought about a split between literary drama and popular drama in every part of India.

---

## 20.6 THE RISE OF THE NOVEL

---

The novel was a new genre in Indian literature. Along with the short story, it emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century under the growing influence of English literature upon Indian literature. In classical Sanskrit literature, Banabhatta's prose romance, *Kadambari*, came closer perhaps to the form of the novel than other tales. Such tales abounded, both in Sanskrit and in Persian, but these were without the realism and the specific time-and-place context required by the novel. In the modern Indian languages, the rise of the novel was contingent upon the prior emergence of prose literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

### 20.6.1 New Narratives

As prose emerged, there was also emerged prose narratives of a somewhat new variety in the first half of the nineteenth century. These formed the tentative overtures to the emergence of the full-fledged novel. *Alaler Gharer Dulal* by Pyarechand Mitra, which is sometimes cited as the first novel in Bengali, was a satirical social sketch published in 1858. A series of sketches built around a dissolute young zamindar, it had a good deal of social realism, but it did not have the sort of developed plot characteristic of the later nineteenth century novel. In 1862, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay published two romantic historical tales in Bengali. He entitled it *Aitihāsik Upanyas (Historical Fiction)*. The word 'upanyas' later on became the common word for 'novel' in several north Indian languages. This was the first time it was used in the sense of a romantic work of fiction. Prose romances approaching to the form of the novel appeared in Marathi around the same time: *Muktamala* (1861) by Lakshman Moreswar Halbe and *Manjughosha* (1868) by Naro Sadasiv Risbud.

Even earlier than this, didactic tales of a modern character had emerged in more than one modern Indian language. These were tales with a social message. The earliest tales of this variety formed part of Christian propaganda in India. *Phulmani-O-Karunar Bibaran* (1852), written in Bengali by Hannah Catherine Mullens, and *Yamuna Paryatan* (1857), a Marathi work by Baba Padamji which recounts the sufferings of a Hindu widow who converts to Christianity, belong to this variety. Some critics identify these two works as the first novels in Bengali and Marathi respectively, but neither possessed any depth of characterisation, nor even a closely woven plot. Other didactic works followed, written by Christian, Muslim and Hindu authors propagating a social message with a plot of a story. Nazir's Ahmad's *Mir at-ul-Urus* (1969), a didactic narrative contrasting the lives of a good sister and a bad one, is identified as the first novel in Urdu. Pandit Gauri Dutt's *Devrani Jethani ki Kahani*, published next year in Hindi, had an almost identical theme. Subsequently, the Tamil Christian author, Samuel Vedanyakam Pillai, wrote the first original novel in Tamil, *Prathapa Mudaliar Charitram* (1879), in order to preach such moral virtues as 'filial affection, fraternal affection, conjugal affection, chastity, universal benevolence, integrity, gratitude, etc.'

### 20.6.2 Bankim's Age

With Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's first original work in Bengali *Durgesh Nandini* (1865), the novel came of age in India. The first full-fledged novel in any Indian language, it is set against the background of the Mughal Afghan war for the possession of Bengal, with a romantic love triangle as the main focus of interest (a young Rajput general of the Mughal army, the daughter of a local lord of the castle whom he marries, and a noble Pathan princess who sacrifices everything for love of him). Chatterjee's incomparable novels, set mostly in a historical context, followed one after another. *Ananda-Math* (1882), set against the background of the Sannyasi rebellion in Bengali, contained the famous nationalist song 'Bande Mataram'. *Rathasthan* (1881), with the Rajput rebellion against Emperor Aurangzeb as its theme, was another stirring historical novel. Chatterjee's contemporary, Romesh Chunder Dutt, wrote several historical novels under his influence, of which the two



most famous are Maharashtra Jivan Prabhat (1878) and Rajput Jivan Sandhya (1979).

The historical novel came into vogue in other Indian languages, too. The reason is that, contemporary society in the late nineteenth century afforded little scope for love and heroism on account of numerous social restrictions. In consequence, tales of heroism and love had to be set in a historical context. The first romantic historical novel in Marathi, Ramchandra Bhikaji Gunjekar's *Mochanged* (1871), is built around a hill fort in Maharashtra which Shivaji captures eventually. Later on, Harinarayan Apte had great success in Maharashtra with his historical novels: *Mysorecha Vegh* (1890), *Gad Ala Pan Simha Gela* (1903), *Suryodaya* (1905-1908), etc. C.V. Raman Pillai's great historical trilogy in Malayalam—*Martanda Varma* (1891), and *Dharmaraja* and *Rama Raja Bahadur*—evoked the time of troubles in eighteenth century Kerala in authentic detail.

Many of these historical novels had the heroic deeds of the Rajputs and the Marathas as their theme, with Muslim characters being sometimes shown in an unfavourable light. The historical novels that appeared in Urdu drew their inspiration, by way of contrast, from the historical glories of Islam, both within and outside India. The leading Urdu novelist, Abdul Halim Sharar, wrote several novels exhibiting the great superiority of Islam in its heyday over non-Muslim, especially Christian, powers. The first of these, *Malik-ul-Aziz Varjana* (1888), was his rejoinder to Scott's *Talisman*, which he considered to be biased against Islam; in vicarious revenge, Sharar had King Richard's niece, Varjana, fall, in love with Saladin's son, Malik-ul-Aziz. *Mansur Mohana* (1890) was written to exonerate Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni from charges of looting and destruction. *Flora Florinda* (1897), set against the background of the excesses of the Christians in Moorish Spain, portrays a Muslim girl presented by the Christians. Sharar's stories were usually built around a romantic affair between a captain of the Saracen army and a high born maiden of the invaded land.

To set novels successfully in the contemporary social context made greater demands for realism on the art of the novelists. Bankim Chandra showed the way with his two major social novels, *Bishabriksha* (1873), and *Krishnakanter Will* (1878). These works had a depth of characterization that set the standard for Indian fiction for many years to come. O. Chandu Menon's Malayalam novel, *Indulekha* (1888), sought to combine romantic love with realistic social detail. Govardhan Ram's huge Gujarati novel, *Saraswati Chandra* (4 parts, 1887, 1892, 1898, 1900), had a romantic and sentimental interest, but in this work the hero and the heroine decided at the end not to marry each other as the girl was a widow and the idealistic lovers were unwilling to hurt the sentiments of their community. Hari Narayan Apte's large Marathi novel, *Pan Lakshant Kon Ghetto* (1890), was a more realistic work dwelling on the injustice and violence of Orthodox Hindu society towards widows. Mirza Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899) a distinguished Urdu Novel with a courtesan as the protagonist, recounted her story in the first person with remarkable detachment and objectivity.

The beginning of the twentieth century accentuated the tendency towards psychological realism, which Rabindranath Tagore consciously projected as the main thrust of his weighty novel, *Chokher Bali* (1903); this was followed by his even bigger work, *Gora* (1910), a massive novel of the new aspirations and ideals that had stirred Bengali society in his youth. The portrayal of contemporary society in authentic detail was also the distinguishing mark of the two widely acclaimed novelists who started writing soon afterwards: Sarat Chandra Chatterjee and Munshi Premchand. Their works bore the strong imprint of the nationalist movement that stirred twentieth century India. But it was the depth of their social and psychological observation, climaxing with Chatterjee's *Grihadaha* (1920) and Premchand's *Godan* (1936), which made them the leading writers of fiction in their own time.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What impact did Western influence have on the evolution of drama?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) What was the difference between the early novels and the novels which were written in Bankim's age?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

---

## 20.7 LET US SUM UP

---

After reading this Unit you saw that :

- The old literature in the vernacular languages consisted almost entirely of poetry and this old literature persisted through the eighteenth and indeed the first half of the nineteenth century.
- Over time this old poetry began to show the symptoms of an age of decline and there was a loss of freshness and a tendency towards repetition. The declining values appeared in the change from devotion (bhakti) to technique and virtuosity (riti).
- Under the impact of English literature, Indian poetry recaptured its freshness in the nineteenth century. There was experimentation with new forms, such as blank verse, the sonnet and the lyric. Above all there was the exuberance of a new creative spirit that changed the very content of poetry.
- Another direction in which the creative spirit of the modern age manifested itself was the appearance of the stage. The setting up of the stage gave the impetus to the prolific growth of dramatical literature under the influence of both classical Sanskrit drama and the Western plays, especially those of Shakespeare.
- Under the influence of the West, there emerged a completely new branch in Indian literature. This was the novel, accompanied by the short story. This brought in its wake a new social realism in Indian literature.

---

## 20.8 KEY WORDS

---

**Genre** : A specific form of art, literature etc.

**Rhetoric** : The technique of writing powerfully.

**Poetics** : Technique of understanding aesthetic experience underlying literary texts.

**Realism** : Form of art of literature which consciously attempts to link up with reality.

**Didactic** : Related to teaching, preaching, propagating, etc.

---

## **20.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES**

---

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) See Sec. 20.3                      2) See Sec. 20.4

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) See Sec. 20.5                      2) See Sec. 20.6