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Regionalism and Its Kaleidoscopic Portrayal with Special Reference to Indian Literature

Dr. Tarit Agrawal

Assistant Professor

Department of English,

Mahamaya Govt. Degree College,

Kaushambi, U.P., India

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Abstract

It is a truth universally acknowledged that literature mirrors society. Among many branches of literature, regional literature is what undoubtedly keeps us bound to our soil i.e. our culture and traditions. Some people think that traditions are all static, stable and unalterable. However, this is not so. Even our traditions also change with the change of time. In fact, tradition is the gift of the historic sense. A writer with this sense of tradition is fully conscious of his own generation, of his place in the present, but he is also acutely conscious of his relationship with the writers of the past. The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past but also of its present. In brief, the sense of tradition implies (a) a recognition of the continuity of literature, (b) a critical judgment as to which writers of the past continue to be significant in the present and (c) a knowledge of these significant writers obtained through painstaking effort. Tradition represents the accumulated wisdom and experience of ages and so its knowledge is essential for really great and noble achievement. Regional literature is perhaps the only branch of literature which, by portraying these changing traditions, keeps us in touch with our ancestors, in touch with the world at present and in touch with the hope to make our world better and better. In fact, Indian literature stands as the mirror of Indian culture, quintessential of its exceedingly rich pre-historical tradition. Regarded as one of the oldest body of the literary works, Indian literature goes back to even those times, when copious written literature was still not in vogue and oral form was very much prevalent. And regional literature in India is an integral and inseparable body of writings, which was the precursor of this enriched past, laced with the potential orators and writers. A strong characteristic of the Indian regional literature is the sublime influence of regional Kathas, fables, stories and myths, which later developed as a distinct genre and were termed as the 'regional literature. Indian literature, thus, as the cradle of the art of narration, gave birth to an important and independent genre of literature, the regional literature of India. The regional literature of India since the ancient times has traveled an extensive traversed path to gain the chic outline and shape that it possesses in present Indian panorama. The journey of regional literature of India is long, yet rich; it unveils the saga of the changing

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tradition of India, whilst murmuring evanescently about the exhaustively recognizable past of India.

Keywords- Tradition, Indian Culture, Indian Panorama, Fables

Regional literature is a branch of literature which primarily deals with the portrayal of regional life with a language and atmosphere that is completely regional in its true spirit. To understand the soil of a country, there can be no better medium than the regional literature. It is this regional literature which demonstrates, through its peculiar and specific portrayal, the true spirit of land to which one belongs. India has always been very rich in regional literature whether it is regional fiction or regional poetry or regional drama. As a matter of fact, regional literature, it would not be wrong to comment, has always been the bedrock of Indian literature. It is what gives a real recognition to Indian literature. Besides this, regional literature is always a source of great attraction among Indian writers. The reason is that it is this regional literature which helps us to paint the true spirit of our land. In other words, it can be said without the fear of contradiction that regional literature is the treasure of all our traditions and culture which seem to wither today in the modern scientific world of chaos and confusion. Regional literature performs this invaluable task of keeping all our ancient kathas and fables safe and secured. Writers like R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulka Raj Anand have given a unique expression to regional flavour in their novels of exquisite beauty.

Taking regional fiction into consideration, it can be said that the regional novel emphasizes the setting, speech, and customs of a particular locality, not merely as local colour, but as important conditions affecting the temperament of the characters, and their ways of thinking, feeling and acting. Both the regional and local colour literature are concerned with an accurate depiction of the manners, morals, dialects and scenery of a particular geographical area, but “ regional” usually implies a wider interest because a regional novel tends to be centred in a particular geographical area but it has also a more general interest. Regional fiction is generally realistic and is likely to concern itself with life in rural areas or small towns rather than urban centres. The regional novel is the national novel carried to one degree further of sub-division; it is a novel which, concentrating on a particular part, particular region of a nation, depicts the life of that region in such a way that the reader is conscious of the characteristics which are unique to the region and differentiate it from others in the common motherland. In any nation, then were completely homogeneous, regional novels could not arise within her literature. But where within the limits of a national culture there is a considerable diversity, a considerable variety corresponding to geographical divisions, of patterns of life, in such a nation there exists considerable material for regional novels; and at one period or another of the national history, writers will be stimulated by the presence of that material to handle it. That the regional novel is the novel which depicts the physical feature, life, customs, manners, history etc. of some particular region or locality does not mean that regionalism is mere factual reporting or photographic reproduction. The region

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artist emphasizes the unique features of a particular locality, its uniqueness, the various ways in which it differs from other localities. But as in all other arts, so also in regional art, there is a constant selection and ordering of material. In other words, regional art is also creative. Through proper selection and ordering of his material the novelist stresses the distinctive spirit of his chosen region and shows, further, that life in its essential is the same everywhere. The differences are used as a means of revealing similarities; from the particular and the local, the artist rises to the general and the universal. The selected region becomes a symbol of the world at large, a microcosm which reflects the great world beyond. The greatness of a regional novelist lies in the fact that he surmounts the bounds of his chosen region, and makes it universal in its appeal. That explains the continuing and world-wide popularity of regional novels.

Thomas Hardy is considered to be one of the greatest writers of regional novels in English. Hardy spent his childhood in the country side of Dorsetshire. The characters in his novels belong to the south western part of England which he renamed as Wessex. The locale chosen by him for his novels was also the south-western part of England. Hardy gave a description of the countryside and the clothes and manners of the people living in the countryside. In English, Maria Edgeworth was the inventor of the regional novel. She created a new kind of fiction. The novelists belonging to the eighteenth century lacked a sense of place and did not go beyond London and Bath. It was Maria Edgeworth who gave to fiction a local habitation and name. She discovered that Ireland and the Irish peasant could be used in fiction.

As a matter of fact, a regional novel deals with and emphasizes the unique features of a particular locality. For instance, Raja Rao's famous novel entitled *Kanthapura* introduces the readers to a village in southern part of India and gives a vivid and graphic description of the village and the people living in the village. It is the story of a village called *Kanthapura*. So the novel can be classified as a regional novel and it can be called a *sthala-purana*.

Sir Walter Scott writes about the border countries, William Wordsworth sings of the lake districts of Cumberland. Maria Edgeworth and Hardy's novels also are regional novels. In his novels and short-stories, R.K.Narayan writes about the town of *Malgudi* and its surroundings. R.K.Narayan is the father of regional novel in Indo-Anglican fiction.

Art is a synthesis of reality, myth, fantasy and imagination. Just as in other forms, in this also there is constant selection and ordering of material because a regional art is also creative. Regionalism is not mere factual reporting. Through proper selection and ordering of material the novelist stresses the distinctive spirit of his chosen region and shows further that life in its essentials is the same everywhere. The selected region becomes a miniature representation of the world at large.

Raja Rao says in the preface to the novel entitled *Kanthapura*, "There is no village in India, however mean, that has not a rich *sthala-purana*, or legendary history of its own. Some god or godlike hero has passed by the village – Rama might have rested under this Pipal tree, Sita might have dried her clothes, after her bath, on this yellow stone, or the Mahatma

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himself, on one of his many pilgrimages through the country, might have slept in this hut, the low one, by the village gate. In this way the past mingles with the present, and the gods mingle with men to make the repertory of your grandmother always bright. One such story from the contemporary annals of my village I have tried to tell.” In fact, Kanthapura is the name of a small village in the southern part of India. There are legend and stories attached to this village. It is a typical Indian village and in this matter also it is not different from other Indian villages in general. This village also has a sthala-purana. For instance, there is the legend concerning the goddess Kenchamma which has been described in detail.

“Kenchamma is our goddess. Great and bounteous is she. She killed a demon, ages ago, a demon that had come to take our young sons as food and our young women as wife. Kenchamma, came from the heavens – it was the sage Tirpura who had made penances to bring her down – and she waged such a battle and she fought so many a night that the blood soaked and soaked into the earth, and that is why the Kenchamma Hill is all red. If not, tell me sister, why should it be red only from the Tippur stream upwards for a foot down on the other side of the stream you have mud, black and brown, but never red. Tell me how could this happen, if it were not for Kenchamma and her battle? Thanks heaven, not only did he slay the demon, but she even settled down among us, and this much I shall say, never has she failed us in our grief. If rains...she has never failed us, I assure you, our Kenchamma.”

The novel begins with the description of the village and its location. It is a small village in the southern part of India. The narrator describes the area surrounding the village and the crops grown in that village. The people are uneducated and superstitious. The society is caste-ridden and the village is divided into four quarters called the Brahmin quarter, the Potters' quarter, the Weavers' quarter and the Sudra quarter. Then the individual characters are introduced and the characters are described. The narrator also gives information about the relationship of each character with other characters. The jealousies and the rivalries between the characters is brought out. However, some characters like Ratna and Advocate Sankar are introduced much later. The characters in the novel are concrete and real. They are real but they lack depth and are flat characters. If all major and minor characters are included then the total number of characters is quite large. The Gandhi movement is introduced only after giving an idea about the place where the events described in the novel take place. The novel basically deals with the impact of the Gandhi Movement on this village called Kanthapura. In fact, what was happening in that village at that time was happening all over the country. So, this village is only a miniature representation of the whole country. Kanthapura is symbolic of a wider and larger world. It is a microcosm of India. The people of this village realized that they must fight for the freedom of the country and for this, unity among the Indians was essential. Like the lakhs of people all over the country, the people of Kanthapura did also fight for the freedom of the country. Ultimately, they had to leave Kanthapura and settle in Kashipur and it was as if they had failed in their efforts, but still, they felt that they had achieved something and they still had hope.

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In the conclusion of this discussion about the nature, habit and characteristics of regional literature, it can be said without the fear of contradiction that regional literature deals with the physical features, people, life, customs, habits, manners, language, traditions etc. of particular locality. But it also rises from the particular to the general. There are certain things in human beings and in human life which are universal and present in human beings irrespective of human caste creed, religion or the country they belong to. Such universal human weaknesses, sorrows and passions are depicted in regional literature. So in a way, regional literature is also a representation of humanity in general. True, regional Indian literature is a saga of the changing traditions of India.

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