

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The East India Company had by the beginning of the nineteenth century established its sovereign authority over India out of the ruins of the Mughal empire. Yet the fiction of the Mughal suzerainty was continued. The transfer of power did not necessarily create a change in appearance in the daily life of the common people, though, in reality a great change was effected in every aspects of man's life, - political, social and economic, all underwent a great change.

The English education and western science, and, the contact ^{with the} western mind, first began in Bengal, and then in other provinces of the then British Empire, caused a necessary change in intellectual pursuit in India. The nineteenth century experienced a great intellectual movement known as the period of Renaissance as the necessary outcome of socio-economic and political changes.

Before the 'Renaissance' or the re-awakening of the people, the Indians had neither any clear idea of the ruling power, nor the character of the rule which subjugated them, nor ever tried to understand those. The existance of feudalism for more than a thousand years had buffled the realisation of the feeling of ~~the~~ nationalism. The society continued in peculiar feudal surroundings with all its evils - poverty, sufferings, superstitions and traditional thoughts.

The vast multitude lived in villages not connected with the governing power except the obligation of paying taxes (1). The revenue organisation in the ^{form} ~~favour~~ of permanent settlement did not create any change in the even tenor of India's village life. The majority people in India was kept carefully in an atmosphere of medieval ignorance and feudal tradition by the ruling power and its fiends. Such was the picture of India before Renaissance.

Life and literature in India during the pre-renaissant period had very little, if any, foundation on reality. Original though and critical studies were totally lacking in literature which had no basis of reality. Literature centred round religious themes, sentimental verses and fairy tales and fictions about Gods and Goddesses of heaven and kings and queens of dreamland. Religious writings and translations from religious texts occupied a major part in literature. Creative literature having any original thinking was neither appreciated nor encouraged. Such literary trends continued till the nineteenth century. (2) Endless repetitions of themes and expressions resulted in its monotony. Besides what literature lacked most was objectivity. Thus literature, without novelty, creativity, originality and objectivity faced a period of decadence.

During the second half of the nineteenth century profession oriented education, closer relations with European people (especially the missionaries and non-official progressive individuals), and the growth of capitalism brought a change in the traditional livelihood and a necessary change in thought and outlook. Rural population who so long depended entirely on agriculture remained in isolation and believed firmly on orthodox views of life and had no communication with the bourgeoisie community living in cities and metropolises. With the development of business and industry and commerce and specially the growth of railway and other means of communications, intimate relations were established between the rural and the urban community. This period also marked the growth of a powerful middle class hitherto unknown in India.

The new economic and intellectual environment gave birth to the middle class. The English education opened the floodgates of the western ideas to the younger section of the middle class, which almost overwhelmed them at the beginning. But the fifty years of education brought a great change in their minds.(3) The ways of thinking and feelings had begun to alter. Political misrule, economic exploitation, demand for mass employment, led by the educated middle class resulted into a mass unrest, and, beginning of protest against the state of inequality and autocratic attitude of

the ruling power, and, before late, a sharp reaction was built up, against their vanity for religion, literature and culture. Some Indians with their middle class background were determined to resist the attack of their powerful opponents and had therefore started a movement to reform and remodel India's religious ideas, traditional thoughts and age-old culture. This movement was possible because its leaders felt strong sense of individualism. Some European gentlemen encouraged the growth of such a movement. Different individuals and groups emerged with their respective individual thoughts and imaginations.

Individual thoughts in varieties found dissemination possible with the beginning of printing press in India. Periodicals, pamphlets and newspapers and other literary publications, were widely admired and appreciated by the educated mass. The main aim behind was to enlighten the common people and improve their condition of decadence. Thus to appeal to the common people led to the growth of vernacular literature. Therefore alongwith religion and culture, history, philosophy, ^{science} ~~science~~ also formed the subject of their studies and composition. Indian literature came out of its prison of traditional thoughts and entered into a new phase of new thoughts, ideas and activities. The traditional mode of expression i.e. poetry though not discarded yet was superseded by others, viz, novels, dramas and essays. Patriotism, romanticism and sympathy for the common people, significantly enough became the new theme of literature.

As the contact with the European mind first began in Bengal, among the languages of India, Bengali first showed the consequences of the impact of the west. Gradually, all other languages became exposed to the same influences, as English education through schools and colleges, had begun to remodel the mind of the intelligentsia. (4) From the beginning of the nineteenth century with the foundation of Fort William College in Calcutta (1800 A.D.), the Bengali mind started to be influenced by the western thoughts and western method of literature. William Carey, with the help of some Bengali writers like Ramram Basu, Mrityanjay Vidyalankar and Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya created Bengali prose and helped the development, by publishing several books on various subjects. Ramram Basu and others also wrote books in Bengali prose which deserved merit. This was the beginning. Then came the eminent scholar of that period, Raja Rammohan Roy who started writing in Bengali prose. The Bengali prose style from its beginning came out with different experiments. Mrityunjay Vidyalankar produced an artistic literary style, William Carey in one of his books used colloquial Bengali and Raja Rammohan Roy adopted a heavier prose style. Moreover, Mrityunjay adopted a Sanskritised style in some of his books. " The last style, which soon found favour among the educated, was mainly inspired by the very common desire of the authors to show

off their learning and a repugnance to the easy colloquial words which were regarded as some what vulgar". (5) Dr. Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyaya also observed three types of prose-style in the writings of the Fort William College group. To him, chaste, Sanskritised, and colloquial, were the styles the group followed. In his opinion Mrityunjay Bandopadhyaya was the first conscious creator of the Bengali prose. (6).

The contribution from the Bengali periodicals like Bangal Gejeti (1818) -(failed to continue for more than a year), 'Samachar Darpan' of Serampur Mission, 'Sambad Kaumudi' of Rammohan Roy, 'Vividhartha Sangraha' of Rajendralal Mitra, 'Tattvabodhini Patrika' of Devendranath Tagore and 'Sambad Pravakar' of Iswarchandra Gupta, helped the development of Bengali prose. The periodicals through their labours made the stage ready for the masters of prose style like Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath and others. Following the colloquial style of the Fort William College group, Pyarichand Mitra wrote his 'Alaler Ghare' Dulal' in colloquial, - full of slange. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar showed his talent to rescue the language from the hand of Pandits and the vulgarities. But due to heaviness his prose style was not suitable for novels. Bankimchandra in his novels, showed the vigour of the Bengali

language with all its speed, beauty and simplicity. He made various experiments with language. In his novels, Bankimchandra moved with an ornamental language, in his serious type of essays he used simple and straight prose, and in 'Kamalakanta', - colloquial, of course free from any vulgarity. Bankimchandra inspired many Bengalis to write novels in Bengali language. Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyaya, Taraknath Gangopadhyaya, Ramesh Chandra Datta, Svarna Kumari Debi and Srishachandra Majumdar were some ^malong them. In poetry Madhusudan Datta through his blank-verses wrote an epic, numerous sonnets and long poems which disclosed a new spirit in Bengali. Moreover though he had no respect for the Vaishnavas, yet wrote Vaishnava poems in modern style. Rangalal - Hemchandra- Nabin were the followers of Madhusudan's tyle of epic writing. These poets ■ led the verses to create a patriotic spirit, though their poems were not so unique in imagination like that of Madhusudan. In the next phase of development Bengali literature displayed romantic poetry through the writings of Biharilal Chakrabarty, which led Bengali poetry in the later period towards an unparallel success and glory. Bengali drama first showed its success through 'Kulin-Kula-Sarbasva' of Ramnarayan Tarkaratna. The drama using colloquial style appeared as a social satire. Madhusudan's 'Sarmistha', 'Krishnakumari' disclosed him as a genius in prose writing. Madhusudan's satirical drams also

deserve mentioning. Dinabandhu Mitra, Rajkrishna Roy, Jyotirindranath Tagore, Girish Ghosh gradually raised the Bengali dramas to the high level. They were ably followed by Kshirode Prasad Vidyabinod, Dwijendralal Roy, Amritalal Basu and Rabindranath Tagore.

The Bengali language and literature was enriched by religious, philosophical and moral literature. Devendranath Tagore, Vidyasagar, Rajnarayan Basu, Dwijendranath Tagore wrote series of articles in lucid style for 'Tattva-bodhini'. The master of a graceful prose style Akshoy Datta contributed the paper as the editor. Keshabchandra Sen and Swami Vivekananda showed their qualities as prose writers. There were several other essay writers who established the form of essay writing in Bengali. They were Bhudev Mikhopadhyaya, Rajnarayan Basu, Ramtanu Lahiri, Chandranath Basu, Akshoychandra Sarkar, Kaliprasanna Ghosh and Haraprasad Sastri. Through some autobiographies and biographies, the form of writing was established in Bengali. Rajnarayan Basu, Devendranath Tagore and Sibnath Sastri wrote autobiography, Nagendranath Chattapadhyaya wrote biography of Rammohan Roy, Jogindranath Bose wrote on Madhusudan Datta and Biharlal Sarkar and Chandicharan Bandopadhyaya wrote Vidyasagar's biography. Later came Rabindranath with variety of miscellaneous prose writings. Thus Bengali language and literature grew up during the period of Renaissance.

As, Bengali language and literature adopted the western knowledge and European methods of literary approach, earlier than the other Indian languages and literatures, so, this development naturally worked as an influential force in the development of other languages and literatures in India. Moreover, the Bengali modern literature reflected the currents of new feelings and thoughts, which helped to spread them in the country and inspired the intellectual minds in other parts of India to bring back the consciousness of their own society. (7) Among the Bengali writers, specially, Bankimchandra Chattapadhyaya and Rabindranath Tagore, through translations into various Indian languages, influenced in their development in various ways.

Assam, a close neighbour of Bengal, came under British control in ^{by} 1826. Assamese youth had no scope of studying their own language and literature upto 1873, in the own place, Assam. Due to absence of any facility to gain collegiate education in Assam upto the beginning of the twentieth century, the Assamese youths in the nineteenth century, had to stay at Calcutta for their English education. So, naturally, they became influenced by Bengali language and literature. Moreover, their early education in Bengali (as Bengali was the

medium in the schools of Assam till 1873), helped the Assamese youths to feel the flavour of the Bengali literature.

During the first fifty years after the unification of Assam, though the Assamese society as a whole showed little progress in education and culture, yet, she could produce three great talents like Anandaram Dhekiyal Phookan (1829-59), Hemchandra Barua (1835-96) and Gunabhiram Barua (1837-95), in the period. These three known as 'The Trinity' laid the foundation of Assamese language and literature.

The Christian missionaries like Bronson and others started their work in Assam for the development of the Assamese language and literature through the publication of a periodical 'Arunodoi' (1846) and many other books in Assamese. 'The Trinity' on the one hand, produced some valuable articles in 'Arunodoi', and, on the other hand, they published their independent writings on history, culture and grammar. Besides, Hemchandra wrote a dictionary 'Hemkosh' and Gunabhiram started publishing a periodical 'Asem Bandhu'. Thus through these attempts Assam gradually stepped towards towards Renaissance. During the last three decades of the nineteenth century the Assamese literature showed a considerable improvement. The Bengal Renaissance, in the meantime had made considerable success. The Bengali intellectuals were then trampling with a feeling of re-awakening which developed into them a pride and love for the own race and language. Naturally Bengal Renaissance

developed in the Assamese educated people a strong sense of regionalism, sympathy for the people, respect for its historical traditions and culture. English education and Bengali literature had pushed the Assamese young people to create a literature of their own language which was then lagging far behind. They published a literary magazine, the 'Jonaki' in 1889 from Calcutta, which had a great influence on the modern Assamese mind. Thus, it can be said that Assam Renaissance actually started in Calcutta. This younger generation developed a deep love for their own language and literature which was so long neglected in Assam. So, following the examples of progress of Bengal and Bengali literature, they were determined to improve Assamese language and literature. They started to enlighten the people about their history, religion, traditional evils in society through periodicals, fictions, essays, pamphlets etc. City centred intellectuals were the real pioneers of these writings. Novels, essays along with poems were the main creations which came out during the age. Scientific reasoning mixed with Assamese sentiments were found in the essays of this period. Formerly scientific reasoning or discussions on scientific subjects were unknown in Assamese literature. Traditional thoughts, religious verses and absurd fictions were mainly present in Assamese literature. Lakshminath Bezbarua, Hemchandra Goswami, Chandradhar Agarwala, Padmanath Gohain Barua,

✓
Kamalakanta Bhattacharya, Bholanath Das, Rajanikanta Bordoloi etc. were the Assamese youths of the nineteenth century who brought Renaissance to Assamese literature.

To compare Bankimchandra of Bengal and Rajanikanta of Assam, a careful study of their respective regional literature is an important matter to be discussed carefully. The careful study in this line will be helpful to make a real assessment of their contributions in their respective language and literature and their place in the history of Indian literature and Renaissance movement.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

1. The British Impact on India - Percival Griffiths
(P. 472-473) (1974 Edn.)
2. History of the freedom movement in India - Tarachand
(P.582) (1974 Reprint)
3. The British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance - Vol. II - Edtd. R.C. Majumdar
(P. 89) (1965 Edn.)
4. The British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance - Vol.II - Edtd. R.C. Majumdar
(P.162) (1965 Edn.)
5. The British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance - Vol.II - Edtd. R.C. Majumdar
(P. 168) (1965 Edn.)
6. Bangla Gadyaritir Itihas - Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay
(P. 77-78) (1374 Sala)
7. History of the freedom movement in India - Tarachand
(P. 591) (1974)