

Chapter 8

Novels, Society and History

Write in Brief

Q. 1A Explain the following:

Social changes in Britain which led to an increase in woman readers.

Ans.: In the 18th century, the most exciting element of the novels was the involvement of the women. The middle classes in Britain became more prosperous. Women got more leisure to read as well as write novels. And novels began exploring the world of women, i.e. their emotions and identities, their experiences and problems. There were several novels that were based on domestic life – a theme about which women were allowed to speak with authority. They drew upon their experience, wrote about family life and gained public recognition. For example, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* which give us a glimpse of the world of women in rural society in early 19th century Britain. It makes us think about a society which encouraged women to look for good marriage and find wealthy or propertied husband.

Q.1B Explain the following:

What actions of Robinson Crusoe make us see him as a typical colonizer?

Ans.: The hero of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is projected as an adventurer and slave trader. In novel he was depicted as an impression of superiority. Once while travelling his ship gets destroyed and he reaches an island. There Crusoe mistreats black people considering them inferior creatures as he himself is a white. He rescues a 'native' and makes him his slave and names him Friday without asking about his name. The natives were seen as primitive and barbaric people by him. This nature of him shows that he was a typical colonizer and represents the period he belonged to.

Q.1C Explain the following:

After 1740, the readership of novels began to include poorer people.

Ans.: In the initial years of development, the poor were excluded from reading novels as they were too expensive for them to afford. But soon, people had easier access to books with the introduction of circulating libraries in 1740. Technological improvements in printing brought down the price of books and innovation in marketing led to expanded sales. As a result, poor people also joined the readership of novels, as a large number of circulating libraries were introduced which enable the poor people easier and greater access to books.

In France books were rented on hourly payments which enabled poor people to afford them without actually buying them. In rural areas, people would collect to hear one reading the book aloud, often become involved in the lives of the characters.

Q.1D Explain the following:

Novelists in colonial India wrote for a political cause.

Ans.: The history written by colonial historians has always projected Indians as weak, divided and dependent on the British. This was Indians as independent minded and the novel provided them with opportunity to give shape to their desires.

The nationalist wrote for the political cause of nationalism. Nationalism implies many concepts which have been brought out in following examples written during the colonial era:

(1) Pariksha Guru reflects the inner and outer world of newly emerging middle classes. The characters in the novel are caught in the difficulty of

adapting to colonized society and at the same time preserving their own culture and traditions.

(2) Bhudeb Mukhopandhyay's (1827-94) *Anguriya Binimoy* (1857) was the first historical novel written in Bengal whose hero Shivaji engages in many battles against a clever and treacherous Aurangzeb. The imagined nation of the novel was so powerful that it could inspire actual political movements.

(3) Bankim's *Anandamath* is a novel about a secret Hindu armed force that fights Muslims to establish a Hindu kingdom. It was a novel that inspired freedom fighters. The novel helped in popularizing the sense of belonging to a common nation.

(4) Potheri Kunjambu, a 'lower-caste' writer from north Kerala, wrote a novel called *saraswativijayam* in 1892 mounting a strong attack on caste oppression.

Q.2 Outline the changes in technology and society which led to an increase in readers of the novel in eighteenth-century Europe.

Ans.: The changes in technology and society which led to an increase in readers of the novel in eighteenth-century Europe were manifold.

These are mentioned below:

(i) The invention of the print in the 18th century led to the popularity of the novels because now it became quite easy to print novels in large numbers.

(ii) The creation of libraries and hiring out of books on an hourly basis allowed readership to expand beyond the aristocratic class.

(iii) Most of the novelists used the vernacular, the language that is spoken by common people. Novels involved women also.

(iv) Common people got attracted towards novels because, it dealt with many social issues such as the relationship between love and marriage, proper conduct for men and women and so on.

(v) Novels appealed to all sections of the society-middle class people like the shopkeepers and the clerks as well as aristocratic and gentlemanly classes.

(vi) Novels not only attacked the ills of the society but also suggested remedies so they were much liked by one and all.

(vii) The novels become a popular medium of entertainment among the middle class.

All this led to an obvious increase in the number of people who read books in eighteenth-century Europe.

Q.3A Write a note on:

The Oriya novel

Ans.: In 1877-78, Ramashankar Ray, a dramatist, serialized the first Oriya novel, Saudamani. But he could not complete it.

Within thirty years, Orissa produced a major novelist in Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918). The title of his novel Chaa Mana Atha Guntha (1902) translates as six acres and thirty-two decimals of land. The novel

revolves around a land and greed for its possession. It tells us about a landlord Ramachandra Mangeraj who neither spears his drunken master nor the childless weavers couple. The main theme of the novel is the social issues. But its characterization and style of description is quite absorbing.

Q.3B Write a note on:

Jane Austen's portrayal of women

Ans.: Jane Austen's novels give us a glimpse of the world of women in quiet rural society in early-19th-Century Britain. Her novels make the readers think about the social norms that women had to follow—predominantly, their duty was to marry wealthy husbands who could offer them financial and social security. The very first sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* states. "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune must be in want of a wife." This observation allows us to see the behavior of the main characters that are pre-occupied with marriage and money. Jane Austen's novels are not always shown to conform to social convention. Although her works do typify the society she lived in, the protagonist in her novels is always an independent-minded woman.

Q.3C Write a note on:

The picture of the new middle class which the novel *Pariksha-Guru* portrays.

Ans.: Srinivas Das's *Pariksha-Guru* (The Master Examiner) reflects the inner and outer world of the newly emerging middle classes. The characters in the novel are caught in the difficulty of adapting to colonized society but at the same time preserving their own cultural identity. It emphasizes that Western ideals must be inculcated, but without sacrificing the traditional values of middle-class households. The novel tried to teach the reader the 'right way' to live and to be mature and practical, to remain rooted in the values of their own tradition and culture,

and to live with dignity and honor. The characters in this Hindi novel by Srinivas Das are seen endeavoring to bridge the two different worlds of modern education and traditional ethics.

Discuss

Q.1 Discuss some of the social changes in nineteenth century Britain which Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens wrote about.

Ans.: Europe entered the industrial age in the 19th century. Factories were established, business profits increased and the economy grew. But these changes brought several problems for the workers. The cities expanded in an unregulated way. The growth of industry was accompanied by an economic philosophy which celebrated the pursuit of profit and undervalued workers.

Some novelists of that time such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy were very critical of these developments. They wrote mostly about the effects of industrialisation.

(i) Charles Dickens: Dickens wrote about industrial towns and the plight of the poor in them—smoking chimneys, grim factories, pollution, and identity-less and exploited workers. For instance in his novel *Hard Times* he describes a fictitious industrial town where workers are presented as ‘hands’, as if they had no identity other than operators of machines. He criticises the greed for profits and the reduction of human beings into tools of production.

In another novel *Oliver Twist* (1838), Dickens focused on the terrible conditions of urban life under industrial capitalism.

(ii) Thomas Hardy: Thomas Hardy, on the other hand, wrote about traditional rural communities of England which were vanishing in the face of rapid industrial growth. He was concerned about the changes which were taking place in old agricultural practice of independent farming to employment of labourers and machines on large farms.

In his novel *Mayor of Caster Bridge* (1886), Hardy wrote about traditional rural communities of England that were fading. This was the time when farmers fenced off land, bought machines and employed laborers to produce for the market. The old rural cultures with its independent farmers were vanishing. In the novel, he mourns the loss of the more personalized world that is disappearing even as he is aware of its problems and the advantages of the new order.

Q.2 Summarize the concern in both nineteenth-century Europe and India about women reading novels. What does this suggest about how women were viewed?

Ans.: The concern in both nineteenth-century Europe and India about women reading novels bore more or less similar fears. Because they often had to live in the confines of homes. Novels provided them a window to the outer world. They were seen as easily corruptible and an imaginary world that the novel provided was seen as a dangerous opening for the imaginations of its readers.

(i) Europe: Women in the 19th century Europe were very progressive. They began reading and writing novels. They drew upon their experience, wrote about family life and earned public recognition. But this change in the world of women-folk was not liked by many people. They feared that women would be in disorder.

(ii) India: In India too several men were suspicious of women writing novels or reading them. It was felt that women who read novels would leave their domestic environments and aspire to be part of the outside world—the male domain. They thought that novels would corrupt the people, especially women and children. But this did not stop women from reading or writing novels.

We can now infer that women in general were discouraged from reading novels. They were viewed as wives and mothers who had a lot of work to do with in the four walls of their homes. They must devote their time to the welfare of their family. Their role was limited to homes and hearth. This shows the biased attitude about women.

Q.3 In what ways were the novels in colonial India useful for both the colonizers as well as the nationalists?

Ans.: For the colonizers, novels provided a good source of information about Indian culture and society. They could utilize that knowledge to have a better understanding about India.

- Colonial rulers found “vernacular” novels illuminating for the information they provided on native customs and life. As outsiders, the British knew little about life inside Indian households and the information provided in the novels proved useful for them in governing Indian society, with its large variety of communities and castes.

- The new novels in Indian languages often had description of domestic life. They showed how people dressed, performed religious worship, and so on. Some of these books were translated into English by British administrators or Christian missionaries.

For the nationalists, many novels provided tools to spread the idea of nationalism. They used the form of the novel to criticise colonial rule and

install a sense of national pride and unity amongst the people. Many nationalist leaders themselves were highly motivated by some novels.

- Indian used the novel to criticize the defects in their society and to suggest remedies. Writers like Viresalingam used the novel mainly to propagate their ideas about society among a wider readership.
- Novels helped establishing a relationship with the past. Through glorified account of past, these novels helped in creating a sense of national pride among their Indian readers.
- Novels helped creating a sense of collective belonging on the basis of one's language. The novels also made their readers familiar with the people in other parts speaking different languages. The way characters spoke in a novel began to indicate their region, class or caste.

Q.4 Describe how the issue of caste was included in novels in India. By referring to any two novels, discuss the ways in which they tried to make readers think about existing social issues.

Ans.: Indians used the novel as a powerful medium to criticise what they considered defects in their society and to suggest remedies. The issue of caste was included in Indian novels for this same purpose. For example:-

(i) Chandu Menon's "Indulekha"- A love story which is a comment upon the marriage practices of upper-caste Hindus in Kerala. Caste seems to be an important factor in establishing marriage alliances. Nambuthiris were major landlords in Kerala at that time and a large section of the Nayars were their tenants.

The story of Indulekha is worth-mentioning here. Suri Nambuthiri, the foolish landlord comes to marry Indulekha, who is very intelligent. She rejects him and marries Madhavan who is an educated civil servant. The novelist Chandu Menon wanted his readers to appreciate the new values

of his hero and heroine and criticize the ignorance and immorality of Suri Nambuthiri.

While writers like Chandu Menon wished to bring about reforms within their castes, there were others who sought to reform the entire caste-based society.

(ii) “Saraswativijayam”- Saraswativijayam was written by Potheri Kunjambu, a lower-caste writer from north Kerala. This novel attacks on caste oppression. The novel revolves around a young man who happens to be an ‘untouchable’. He converts to Christianity, obtains modern education and returns to his village as a judge in the local court. Meanwhile, the villagers, thinking that the landlord’s men had killed him, file a case. In the end, the judge reveals his identity and the Nambuthiri repents and reforms his ways. Apart from being critical of the upper castes, this novel also stresses the importance of education for the upliftment of the lower castes.

Q.5 Describe the ways in which the novel in India attempted to create a sense of pan-Indian belonging.

Ans.: The history written by colonial historians projected Indians as weak, divided and dependent on the British. This was not acceptable to the new Indian administrators and intellectuals. Such minds wanted new view of that would show that Indians could be independent minded and had been so in history. The novels attempted to create a sense of pan-Indian belonging by imagining the country to be full of adventure, heroism, romance and sacrifice – qualities that could not be found in the offices and streets of the nineteenth century world. The novel provided them with opportunity to give shape to their desires. Inclusion of various classes in the novel also created a sense of pan-Indian belonging.

For example:

The Bengali historical novels of this time, dealing with Marathas and Rajputs, served this purpose.

Another way in which the sense of belonging to a common nation was popularised was by including various classes in the novel so that they could be seen to belong to a shared world.

For example:

Premchand's novels are filled with all kinds of powerful characters down from all levels of society.