



## **INDIAN LITERATURE: A CULTURAL MANIFESTATION**

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Cultural representations dealing with unity in diversity may be found almost in every region and every language of India as far as Indian literature is concerned. As far as cultural phenomena is concerned almost every civilization has its own attitude and background-- Greeks have given emphasis on beauty, Asirians on war, Egyptians on dignity of God, China on equal and balanced social life and European civilization, after immense progress of intellect, has laid emphasis on establishing dominance over nature apart from the discrimination of the principal and the subordinate. Indian culture has made its efforts flowing on spiritual and religious search. It has remained the distinction of our country to transcend the momentary element and seek for the elixir of immortality. In the words of Anand Shankar Dhruv “The life breath of the people has survived in the pulse of religion.” The great seer; Ravindranath Tagore has also kept on singing in his hymn: AMRUTASYA PUTRAHA VAYAM| This truth is borne out even by the folk literature of our land; the lore of the yore. “Humankind”, says Meghani, “by untiringly persevering to create art and literature, culture and civilization, has successfully thwarted the designs of annihilation.” So the folk mind kindled the lamp of its indigenous oral literature. The rays emanating from this earthen lamp has entered every home, made every heart aglow and illumined the path for the generations that followed; it’s the voice of the desert, voice of the sea, voice of the mountain; according to Jhaverchand Meghani; folklore is the universal language. [Foreword, *Shade Crimson*, Bhavan, Mumbai, 2003, XXVII ]

*Mahabharat and Ramayan* are two great sources for all kinds of cultural spirit and its representations of literature in general. *Mahabharat* is a great and grand reservoir in

itself coming to existence after the mingling of many rivers of culture such as Vedic, Aupnishadic, Shraman, Anarya, Asur, Vratya, Das, Shabar, etc. Describing its significance it is said:

YATHA SAMUDRO BHAGAVANYATHA CHA HIMAVANGIRIHI |  
KHYATAVUBHAU RATNANIDHEE TATHA BHARATAMUCHYATE||<sup>1</sup>

[As the ocean and the Himalayas are the popular treasures of jewels, the Mahabharat is also a treasure of various jewels] and as maintenance of body is impossible without the shelter of food, no tale would be possible without the shelter (source) of this great story-

ANASHRITYAWADAKHYANAM KATHA BHUVI NA VIDHYATE|  
AHARAMANAPASHRITYA SHARIRASYEV DHARANAM ||<sup>2</sup>

Thus as Himavan gives water to all, *Mahabharat* has given the water of inspiration to all languages of India.

*Ramayan* is also the great epic resembling the true spirit of Indian culture through the life sketch of Ram and his manners. It also deals with great ideas and ideals of society, humanity, philanthropy, fraternity and generosity in enmity with extraordinary cultural vitality. It shows the true way of life and the ideal living standards and mannerism illustrated through the life of Ram and other great characters. For example, even Vibhishan, the brother of the enemy like Ravan, is also given protection when he asks for the shelter of Rama. Despite of the opposition of Sugriva and others, Ram sets example of true valour and speaks:

SHARNAGAT KAHAN JA TAJAHI, NIJ ANAHIT ANUMANI|  
TE NAR PAMAR PAP MAYA, TINAHI VILOKAT HANI||<sup>3</sup>

[The man who refuses (rejects) the man asking for shelter, thinking of his own wrong, is very mean and full of sin. It is sin to behold such a man.] It shows generous aspect of Indian culture and the lofty tradition of hospitality.

Thus, everywhere in this great epic the true spirit of Indian culture, showing the real principles, ways of life is depicted. That is perhaps why Pruthviraj Chauhan forgave Ghoris seventeen times and finally got imprisoned by him. But he remains immortal in the history of humanity. And the same is true in the case of Porus the great who forgave Alexander and showed the true spirit of Indian culture. The same sense of hospitality and

generousness may be found in Javerchand Meghani's story "The Killer of his son".<sup>4</sup> The way, the overlord of the village Davaliya Mandodarkhan, forgives and saves the life of the Charan, who killed Mandodarkhan's son, is really heart touching. The Charan actually did not intend the act and was about to be killed when the overlord, with tremendously generous heart, gives him his own horse and provides the opportunity of the escape.

Thus, from *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan*, the great classical resources to the treasures of folk literature, we find the throbbing and pulsating Indian culture with all its vitality and versatility. Dineshchandra Sen has picked up the excellent jewels of old Indian culture in his work *Folk Literature of Bengal* in the form of tales and songs, and proving the women to be the authors of some of them, referring the style and manner in which they were delivered. W.R. Gourlay gets utterly impressed by the beauty of some tales especially "Malan Chamala" as he writes: "The beautiful story of Malan Chamala is a tale of which a nation might well be proud: it has all the attributes of a beautiful lyric: it contains a conception of purity and love which evince a high state of civilization."<sup>5</sup>

The famous Gujarati writer and poet Meghani has created and edited wonderful tales of oral history depicting the true colour and spirit of true Indian culture in about twenty books edits many Rasa ballads, composed by women in Saurashtra, in his book *Radhiyali Rat*. His *Saurashtra –ni Rasadhar* and *Sorathi Baharvatiya* are really the landmarks of folklore as far as world literature is concerned. In Europe these folk stories are of popular literature, here it is oral history concerned with distinct races, Nomadic men and women, their origin, places, customs, disguise, dialect, etc. So they have ethnological as well as socio-cultural significance. Kathiyawad has its own history, traditions and culture and is believed to be the main spring of Gujarat's folk literature, in Meghani's words "A peninsula of hoary antiquity". It is the only place where lions roam in majesty and folklores flourish because of abundance of valor, honesty, nobility, generosity and love filling up the treasures of folklore of legendary human beings, of the land of the real heroic born of earnest unions, true sacrifices, of the land where the undercurrents of civilization continue to flow- the sagas of sheer bravery and heart touching love stories, lilting ras-ballads, pathetic elegies arousing the interest of people in

any corner of the world. The tales of Rasdhar and Baharvatiyas, with historical background and socio-cultural significance within, have variety and uniqueness reflecting the land of the time with cultural vitality and with the mesmerizing charm that cannot be paralleled by any literature of the world.

Hindustan is really a nation of diversity of a wonderful culture, sublime traditions and religions, castes and languages. And almost the literature of every region deals with an integrated form of India. In the famous River-verse of *Rugved*, the Rishi inspires people to awaken towards the fundamental unity of the country by depicting undivided India:

IMAMMEGANGEYAMUNESARASWATI SHUTUDRISTOMAMAPARUSHNAYA  
ASIKANYAMARUDVADHE VITASTAYARJIKEE YESHRNUYASUSHOBHAYA||<sup>6</sup>

The language variety enrooting from the same resource Sanskrit and enrooted to the same morals and values, also shows the integrated cultural phenomena of our nation and proves to be unique. The mother of most Indian regional languages is Devavane-Sanskrit. It is also one of our distinguished features to honour our motherland as well as our own mother and consider them even greater than heaven itself-**Janani Janmbhoomishcha Svargadapi Gariyasi** And the mother, of course, is considered unique and greater than anything, see how the Gujarati poet Botadkar depicts a woman in her eternal mother form- with everflowing and overflowing affection --

MEETHAN MADHU NE MEETHA MEHULA RE LOL,  
ETHI MEETHEE TE MORI MAT RE,  
JANANI NI JOD SAKHI! NAHI JADE... RE ...LOL,  
PRABHUNA E PREM TANEE POOTALEE RE LOL,  
JAGATHEE JUDEREE ENEE JAT RE.

JANANEE—NEE.....7

[Sweet is the honey, and sweet is the rain, the sweeter though (honeyer than honey) is my mother. There is no equal to mother, my dear. She is the idol of Godly love. Her own self is different from the rest of the world.]

The foreign scholar like Monier Williams also praise this variety and the religious and scientific ideals of Sanskrit-

INDIA, THOUGH IT HAS MORE THAN 500 SPOKEN DIALECTS, HAS ONLY ONE SACRED LANGUAGE AND ONLY ONE SACRED LITERATURE, ACCEPTED AND REVERED BY ALL...SANSKRIT...RELIGIOUS AND SCIENTIFIC IDEALS||<sup>8</sup>

For centuries we have sustained this spirit through the utterances, praises and writings of saints, thinkers and litterateurs and kept its glory and dignity up. See the picture drawn by Swami Ramtirth taking India as his own body and its different parts like limbs-

THE LAND OF INDIA IS MY OWN BODY.  
THE COMORIN IS MY FEET, HIMALAYAS MY HEAD.  
FROM MY HAIR FLOWS THE GANGA,  
FROM MY HEAD COMES BRAHMAPUTRA  
I AM THE WHOLE OF INDIA, AND ITS EAST AND WEST  
I AM UNIVERSAL IN MY LORE.....

This is an unforgettable depiction of one's own motherland, especially as the body is not perfect without any particular limb. One integrated Hind is to be seen with people of different regions, religions and languages together. Not only that but it is also to be felt: When I walk.... I feel India walking

When I breathe..... I feel India breathing.

THIS IS THE HIGHEST REALISATION OF PATRIOTISM AND THIS IS PRACTICAL VEDANTA.<sup>9</sup>

Ravindranath Tagore rightly saluted the India of unity in diversity in his poem 'The Song of India'.

HEART OF MINE, AWAKE IN THIS HOLY PLACE OF PILGRIMAGE  
IN THIS LAND OF INDIA ON THE SHORE OF VAST HUMANITY.  
HERE DO I STAND WITH ARMS OUTSTRETCHED TO SALUTE MAN DIVINE  
AND SING HIS PRAISE IN MANY A GLADSOME PAEAN.

Further, the poet reminds the world of India's pious soil and addresses every clan, every caste, every race and every culture--

(COME O ARYANS.....NO-N ARYANS, HINDU, AND MUSALMAN

.....COME YE ONE AND ALL.)

And he appeals all to walk together to honor our motherland --

.....WIPE OUT THE DISHONOUR,

COME TO THE CROWNING OF THE MOTHER, FILL THE SACRED BOWL

WITH WATER THAT IS SACNTIFIED BY THE TOUCH OF ALL

IN THIS LAND OF INDIA, ON THE SHORE OF VAST HUMANITY. <sup>10</sup>

We find wide range of striking influential and beautiful cultural representations in the great national epic the *Mahabharat* and the *Ramayan*, the inexhaustible sources of any type of literature. Draupadi, Savitri, Sita and Mandodari are some excellent examples of the ever heightened womanhood, generous, pious and devoted. Toru Dutt has used the sources and created some wonderful, poetic, characters such as Savitri and Sita. As Nateson & Co. cites, “--- She has successfully striven to interpret the spirit of the east to west---”<sup>11</sup> In the very beginning of the poem ‘Savitri, She depicts the charm and grace of the young lady:

The sweet simplicity and grace,  
Abashed the boldest; but the good  
God’s purity- there loved to trace,  
Mirrored in dawning womanhood. <sup>12</sup>.

Thus, Toru’s *Ancient Ballads* contains rare poetic versions of the famous legends of classic Sanskrit literature. Thus, using her genius and under the influence of the mingled culture of East and West Toru has harmonized the sense of universal brotherhood and exquisite sense of beauty, she has contributed immensely to Indo-Anglian literature even when the term did not exist. Dr. G. Seth rightly writes: Toru’s expression was like a glorious sound of trumpet, which heralded the renaissance of knowledge and culture in India”. <sup>13</sup>

Finally, it is perhaps the versatile culture of India, which is one of the most significant aspects keeping her integrity otherwise as Earnest Renan remarks “Nations were and are profoundly unstable formations likely to collapse into sub-divisions of clan, tribe, language, religion etc.” [Bill Ashcroft; Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, Routledge, London, 2004.] Our national anthem itself reveals this

unique and unparalleled cultural vitality, referring to the variety of religion, caste, language, region etc.

Jana-Gana- Mana- adhinayak jay he Bharat bhagya- vidhata

Punjab- Sindh –Gujarat- Maratha.....

That is why Dr. S. Radhakrishnan remarks –

“It looks on this country as one and requires us to use our spiritual energies for the cultural and emotional integration of the country”<sup>14</sup>

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