
Impressions on Contemporary Telugu Literary Scene

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Abstract

Telugu literature is renowned for its rich and diverse expressions, reflecting a deep-rooted awareness of time across historical and contemporary contexts. Notably, the Dalit and Feminist movements have been central to this literary landscape, although their vitality has waned due to assimilation by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This shift has impacted literary production, diluting the movements' original fervor. Furthermore, these movements influenced post-1990s Indian politics, particularly following the implementation of the New Economic Policy, the influx of capital investments, and the IT revolution, fostering a distinct Third World Consciousness. This consciousness has been further shaped by changes in India's political and economic policies, notably the New Economic Policies and the advent of capital investment and IT advancements. Within Telugu literature, four discernible streams of writing have emerged: revolutionary, feminist, Dalit, and minority. The present paper aims to examine how these streams reflect the evolving consciousness and socio-political dynamics within the literary realm, encapsulating the multifaceted narrative of Telugu literature.

Keywords: Assimilation, Consciousness, Dalit, Feminist, New Economic Policy, NGOs, Political Influence, Telugu literature, Third World Consciousness.

Time consciousness has consistently played a prominent role in Telugu literature, both in its historical context and in contemporary times. The decline of the Progressive movement in Telugu during the 1960s paved the way for the Digambara Movement and the formation of the Revolutionary Writers Association

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in 1970. This association, strongly aligned with Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist ideologies, contributed significantly to the literary landscape. The RWA openly supported The Naxalbari Movement in Bengal and armed struggles in the Srikakulam and Telangana districts of Andhra Pradesh. These revolutionary writers played a pivotal role in reshaping the form and content of Telugu literature.

Notable poets such as Sri Sri, a key figure in the formation of the Progressive Writers Association in the 1930s, aligned themselves with the revolutionary movement and published poetry in support of these new causes. An eminent poet and leader of the Marxist-Leninist Party (Peoples War Group), K.G. Satyamurthy, known as Sivasagar, expressed this commitment in one of his poems: "Today's poet is a revolutionary preparing the people to take up arms." This line serves as a testament to the dedication of the revolutionary writers in the 1970s.

Prominent writers such as Sri Sri, Cherabanda Raju, Gaddar, Vangapandu Prasada Rao, Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao, Rachakonda Viswanadha Sastry, K.V. Ramana Reddy, and Varavara Rao were at the forefront of revolutionary writing between 1970 and 1980. They tapped into the rich oral tradition of the region and incorporated songs and ballads to propagate revolutionary ideologies. Balladeers like Gaddar played a crucial role in drawing thousands of young men and women toward revolutionary politics. Additionally, writers and activists like Subba Rao Panigrahi utilized tribal art forms like Burrakatha and Jamukula Katha to spread revolutionary ideas.

The Revolutionary Writers Association provided a tangible form of literary expression and guided Telugu writers. However, during the Emergency period and afterward, the state's successive governments imposed significant oppression, which affected the revolutionary movement and its literature. New political forces, such as Feminist, Dalit, and Minority movements, along with internal conflicts within the Left Parties of the state, contributed to the weakening of revolutionary literature.

This weakening in revolutionary politics naturally resulted in a decline in revolutionary literature. Monotony in the literature and a failure to embrace experimentation were also factors in this decline.

In response to these developments, new schools of thought, including Postmodernism and its offshoots, such as Identity Movements (e.g., Feminist and

Dalit movements), emerged. These movements criticized Marxist-Leninist ideologies and caste politics. Many writers and leaders in these movements had previous affiliations with the Marxist-Leninist Party or were activists. Dalit writers began to expose casteism, the situation of Dalits in the state, and the Dalit experience in their writings. Feminist writing delved into gender discrimination, oppressive family structures, patriarchy, and values. These movements engaged in both literary and political struggles, aiming to challenge caste-based social structures and gender oppression. They produced literature in various forms, drawing from external philosophies and intellectual influences while reflecting on their own life experiences.

These movements gained significant influence, leading left-wing parties to reconsider their stance on caste and gender issues. Poets like Sivasagar, Sikamani, Yendluri Sudhakar, and Satish Chandra published powerful anthologies of poetry that introduced the theme of self-respect into literature. Incidents such as the massacres of Dalits in places like Padhirikuppam, Karamchedu, and Tsundur further fueled the writings of Dalit writers and poets, who expanded their work into other genres like short stories and novels.

The conflict between the Mala and Madiga castes in the 1990s, marked by the Madiga Porata Samithi's demand for the categorization of reservations into ABCD (similar to BCs of the state), exacerbated tensions and influenced literary production. Additionally, political parties' vote bank politics contributed to this conflict.

The Feminist movement also had a significant impact on the state's politics and literary production. Poets like Jaya Prabha, Volga, Gantasala Nirmala, Kondepudi Nirmala, Hymavathi, Rajani, Silalolitha, and Mahejabin published numerous anthologies of poetry that addressed gender discrimination, women's oppression, sexuality, and related issues. Writers like Volga, P. Satyavathi, and Kuppli Padma delved into fiction that exposed patriarchal and phallogocentric structures, with works like Volga's "Rajakiyakathalu" focusing on gender politics and freedom.

Feminist writers succeeded in maintaining a fine balance between form and content, which was lacking in previous movements. They deconstructed old myths and rewrote histories, drawing influence from the Subaltern Studies Group, as seen

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in the book "ManakuteliyaniManacaritra," which featured interviews with women who participated in the Telangana Armed Struggle of 1940.

Unfortunately, both the Dalit and Feminist movements have been taken over by NGOs, leading to a shift in their operations and a subsequent loss of their earlier vigor, affecting literary production. However, individual writers who remain outside the NGO sphere continue to address genuine issues.

In addition to these movements, changes in Indian politics after the 1990s, the introduction of the New Economic Policy, capital investment inflow, and the IT revolution gave rise to a specific consciousness known as Third World Consciousness among many Telugu writers. These writers asserted nativity and explored anti-globalization, anti-American, and anti-imperialist themes in response to the impacts of globalization. Several books and poetry anthologies, such as "Global Kadgam," "Multinational Muddu," "India Private Limited," and "Dabbupitta," were published to address these concerns.

The effects of globalization and the erosion of native cultures also became central themes for many fiction writers. P. Satyavathi and Kuppli Padma, among others, examined how globalization influenced people's lives and day-to-day affairs. These changes also began to influence Dalit and Feminist writing.

Furthermore, critical trends such as post-Marxism, structuralism, Postmodernism, and post-colonialism have a growing influence on these literary and political movements. As a result, the Telugu literary landscape became enriched with diverse and multifaceted expressions.

In the present context, four distinct streams of writing are discernible in Telugu literature. The first stream focuses on anti-globalization, with two sub-streams—one continuing the Revolutionary movement's legacy and the other representing individual perspectives. The second stream revolves around regional identity consciousness, with a strong desire to assert regional specificities and, in some cases, pursue separate statehood. The third stream highlights sub-caste awareness, particularly in the literature addressing the conflict between the Mala and Madiga Castes. The fourth stream centers on literature produced by the Muslim minority, with poets like Kadar, Kaza, and Shajahana establishing themselves as major voices in this domain.

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In addition to these streams, individual poets like Vegunta Mohan Prasad, K. Siva Reddy, Sitaram, Afsar, Prasen and few others have contributed richly to the growth of contemporary Telugu poetry.

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