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Literary “Leftism” and The Indian Progressive Writers Association

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Abstract

The ideological underpinnings of leftist politics in India can be traced back to a deep societal consciousness regarding long-standing inequities and deprivations. The implementation of a hierarchical system of exploitation, coupled with the imposition of political dominance by imperial forces, created fertile ground for the emergence of a novel political ideology in India. This ideology was rooted in the principles of equity, socialism, and Marxism. During a particular period, when a significant faction within the Indian National Congress began to favour an advanced capitalist framework, there arose a necessity for the development of a socialist and Marxist perspective rooted in the marginalised segments of Indian society. The emergence of contemporary leftist politics, drawing inspiration from the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, has given rise to a form of resistance that incorporates intersectionality in challenging the prevailing power structure. This manifestation of political resistance in India was unparalleled in its historical context, as it effectively coordinated opposition to various forms of discrimination based on class, caste, and gender. Consequently, it engaged in a comprehensive examination of social justice within the framework of contemporary society. This development was additionally facilitated by the cohesion within the trade union movement, the establishment of the All-India Kisan Sabha, the emergence of the All-India

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Students' Federation, the ascent of a progressive literary and cultural movement, and the collective endeavours of the leftist groups. Thus, the formation of the Indian Progressive Writers Association, which convened its inaugural annual conference in Lucknow in April 1936, was contextualised. Sajjad Zaheer, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mulk Raj Anand, Hiren Mukherji, Hasrat Mohani, and other notable individuals played pivotal roles as founding members of the newly established organisation. The establishment of this association led to a clearer delineation of both the societal progression of literature and the author's position within it. The writer's role transformed from a passive observer of life's drama to an engaged participant aligned with the resilient human spirit. This article endeavours to analyse the emergence of leftist politics in India and its influence on the development of novel literary and artistic awareness among the intellectual elite in the country.

Keywords: leftist politics, Indian Progressive Writers Association, stratified exploitation, intersectional resistance, literary and artistic consciousness.

Following the Russian Revolution, there was a proliferation of socialist and communist literature that was subject to governmental censorship. The literary works of prominent Russian writers, including Gorki, Gogol, Turgenev, and Chekhov, were extensively translated into various Indian languages, and gained significant popularity. A significant surge of Western influences, particularly through literature in English and French, was observed during this period. The emergence of novel transformative influences profoundly impacted budding writers, prompting them to delve into uncharted territories and innovate novel writing styles and methodologies. In 1924, Rabindranath Tagore made a bold proclamation in his article titled "Art and Corruption in Literature". He asserted that contemporary literature had moved beyond the portrayal of mundane existences of royalty and landowners, and instead should document the emotions, hardships, and afflictions of marginalised individuals, as seen in Soviet literature. In the early 1930s, Rabindranath Tagore made a significant contribution to the literature by releasing his epistolary work titled "Letters from Russia". The statement pertains to Tagore's observations regarding implementing socialist principles in the Soviet Union. The publication of this book and other literary works pertaining to the Soviet Union by notable intellectuals within the nation has generated a degree of intrigue among the upper echelons of society.

In their fight against British colonialism, Indian nationalists saw the socialist revolution as a potential partner. It served as motivation for them. While in Russia, Rabindranath Tagore claimed that his life's pilgrimage would have been unfinished if he had not made it here. According to Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipan Chandra Pal, Bolshevism was an inexorable concept that advocated for the universal entitlement to a life free from the subjugation and oppression of the affluent and privileged segments of society. Tilak held the belief that the Bolsheviks had the potential to liberate India due to their implementation of the principles of Gita and Shastra.

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Moreover, the British government was offended by early Soviet documents such as the Leninist Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia (16 November 1919) and the appeal of the Council of People's Commissars to all Muslim toilers of Russia and the East which exhorted as KM Panikkar remarks,

This was an explosive statement and all the nations of Asia struggling for freedom heard it with a new hope. This emphasis on national self-determination and ethnic separateness of minorities had an immense effect on shaping opinion in Asia during the next quarter of a century. (Panikkar 250)

The leaders of the revolution in India highly influenced the intellectual sensibilities of the Indian political leaders as well as other intelligentsia. K.M. Troianovsky, a Russian communist leader incited the freedom struggle in India by highlighting, "If Russia is justly considered to be a citadel of world revolution, then India can be definitely called the citadel of revolution in the east, a revolution which is bound to respond most strongly in the west and the world in general" (Sinha 3).

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Indian independence movement experienced a surge in momentum, which in turn resulted in a renewed interest in the Indian novel in English. This was due to the creative demands of a newly imagined national community. The fledgling writers had recently completed their education at esteemed universities and were poised to embark on their professional writing journeys. The authors aimed to emphasise the complexities that characterise a particular geographical location by shedding light on the intersections and uncertainties that are present within its literary works. Their objective was to establish a shared literary lexicon for the area. The emerging authors expressed significant apprehensions regarding the role of literature as a means of evading reality. The individuals aspired to establish a closer relationship between literature and culture by engaging in discourse on significant social issues. Conventional forms of communication were considered outdated and disapproved of consequently. Authors were summoned to propagate the message of resistance and mobilisation. Contemporary authors are unable to seclude themselves in a secluded space and enhance their literary pieces in solitude. The individuals were prompted to assess the situation in an exposed environment, which had a significant impact on the complementarity of pen and paper. In this period, literary scholars have recognised the emergence of the political novel in Indian literature which is characterised by an amplified focus on social realism, a fervour for the heroic capacity of political engagement, and a repudiation of historical themes, significantly influencing the political aesthetics of Indian literature.

Within the domain of literature, there emerged a growing sentiment of discontentment towards the rigid tenets espoused by Gandhi, coupled with a yearning for more radical alternatives. Notwithstanding its endeavours, Civil Disobedience failed to produce any significant results. The discourse of the anti-colonial movement, coupled with the state's curtailment of artistic freedoms, engendered a compelling exigency for a new writers' association. The new organisation would direct the production of literature towards a trajectory

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that would prove arduous to modify, prioritising the disclosure of veracity to those in positions of authority, the unrestricted expression of ideas, and the exposure of individual hardships in everyday existence. Prem Chand, the Hindi writer who presided over the inaugural meeting of the Indian Progressive Writers Association in 1936, is widely regarded as a prime exemplar of the literary style that was in vogue during that era. Premchand's final and most notable literary work, *Godan* (1936), presents a bleak and uncompromising portrayal of the hardships endured by peasants. This novel is notably devoid of the optimistic and idealistic themes that characterised his earlier works from the 1920s, which were influenced by the principles of Mahatma Gandhi. The author's shift in ideological perspective towards the Soviet literary model is most effectively conveyed in his final essay, titled "Mahajani Sabhyata", which presents a scathing critique of capitalist profit-driven motives alongside an admiration for the Soviet endeavour.

The manifestation of nationalist inclinations in Indian literature predates the commencement of World War I. The era subsequent to the war and spanning until the latter half of the 1930s was marked by notable political, economic, and social turbulence within the nation. The Indian nationalist movements and the events in Europe that followed World War I had a significant influence on Indian society, leading to notable progress in Indian literature. One of the most noteworthy developments in literature, which gained significant popularity through the works of Premchand, was the rise of short stories. The author's literary oeuvre encompasses a wide range of topics, but his most noteworthy contributions are distinguished by empathetic depictions of underprivileged and marginalised communities inhabiting rural areas of India. Premchand's literary oeuvre was notably impacted by the Indian national movement for independence in the 1920s, as he documented India's resistance against colonialism.

K.N. Panikkar through his article titled "Progressive Cultural Movement in India: A Critical Appraisal" informs that the progressive cultural movement was initially envisioned by its creators as a comprehensive and inclusive platform of,

The intellectuals of India, the largest block of writers who, whatever their difference in the standpoints, whatever their contradictions of philosophical, religious and cultural belief, join for common actions, in the defence of our old culture, and development, through a proper criticism of the past, of a new culture. (Panikkar)

In the process of drafting the manifesto of the Indian Progressive Writers Association, the youthful Indian writers residing in London demonstrated a willingness to transcend their personal linguistic, provincial, and communal inclinations in favour of a perceived national interest, thereby fostering a sense of camaraderie among Indian writers. The writers who adhered to the progressive movement placed great emphasis on realism and advocated for the utilisation of literature as a means of portraying the realities of life. The Indian Progressive Writers Association crafted the manifesto into a strategic political text with grand aspirations, aiming to establish itself as a catalyst for transformative shifts in India's literary sphere. The emergence of these groups during the 1930s marked a distinct shift in the representation of

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India's socioeconomic and political conditions, thus rendering them noteworthy in the annals of the nation's cultural history. Their intellectual contributions led to a paradigm shift that initiated a period of substantial transformation in the realm of creativity, resulting in the emergence of exceptionally remarkable works of art and literature.

The interrelation between the literary imagination and social reality is profound. A considerable body of literature or literary imagination influenced by sociological perspectives reveals their inherent reflection of the social reality from which they emerge. The fundamental nature of literature can be interpreted as a demonstration of an inherent human tendency to communicate, originating from a deep desire to articulate one's thoughts and feelings. Thus, a writer's imagination is shaped by their construal of the factors that possess significance. This prompts a sequence of inquiries pertaining to the constituent components that bear significance for an author. The manifestation of the cultural and ethical paradigm of literature takes place within a specific contextual setting, wherein it is actualized as Raymond Williams, a Marxist scholar, posits when he writes, "Societies and literature have active histories, which are always inseparable from active values" (Williams 7). Therefore, one could contend that literature is not exclusively a product of individualistic efforts, but rather a collaborative creation that is shaped by a distinct set of principles that are emblematic of a given epoch. Following their departure from universalism, progressive writers' literary works began to centre on the regional and immediate. The preference for veracity in narratives over their aesthetic appeal resulted in the emergence of a fresh assemblage of visual representations and figurative language. The shift from a "philosophy of life" to a focus on the "problems of life" within the movement prompted a transformation in the writer's overarching pursuit, highlighting the notion, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness" (Marx 3). The articulation of the transition phenomenon was more distinct in the indigenous languages of India in comparison to the English language. A literary movement surfaced in Andhra Pradesh subsequent to the translation of Gorky's "Mother" in 1932, which was distinguished by the authentic depiction of the existence of labourers through the medium of novels. Moreover, the poet Sri Sri, who ingeniously integrated spoken Telugu in his poetry, drew inspiration from the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh to compose the celebrated literary piece "Mare Prapancham", culminating with an allusion to the red flag. (Sarkar 342)

Prior to the inception of AIPWA, there was a scarcity of nationwide endeavours geared towards aiding writers, and inadequate emphasis was placed on the undertaking of cross-linguistic interpretation. The aim of progressive writers was to leverage both local and foreign resources to achieve a new beginning for India. To describe the formation of the Indian Progressive Writers Association, Raza Mir and Ali Hussain Mir elaborates, "On the evening of 24 November 1934, the atmosphere at London's Nanking hotel must have been electric. A group of young Indian intellectuals were engaged in an intense discussion over a manifesto that had been circulated by the convenor of the meeting, Sajjad Zaheer. The document was audacious in its scope, for it sought to articulate a manifesto for the future of Indian literature"

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(Mir and Mir 1). A cohort of Indian scholars and students with extremist perspectives assembled in London to confer, formulate an outline of principles, and strategize the execution of the campaign in India. The cohort consisted of Mulk Raj Anand, Sajjad Zaheer, Jyoti Ghosh, Promod Sen Gupta, and M.D. Tasir. Sajjad Zaheer attests to a gradual inclination towards socialism among himself and his companions, as evidenced by his following statement:

Our minds searched for a philosophy which would help us understand and solve different problems. We are not satisfied with the idea that humanity had always been miserable and would also remain so. We read Marx and other socialist writers with great enthusiasm, solved the historical and philosophical problems through mutual discussion. Our minds became clear and our hearts contended. (Coppola 6)

Ralph Fox, a British leftist critic, was instrumental in catalysing the formation of the formal organisation. With the aid of Fox, a collective of individuals instigated the establishment of an organisation. A committee was instituted and despite an initially slow commencement, all members eventually exhibited noteworthy eagerness. A determination was reached to formulate a manifesto with the purpose of defining the aims and objectives of the organisation. The preliminary version of the document was authored by Mulk Raj Anand and subsequently conveyed to Jyoti Ghosh, who presented the draft to the committee. Sajjad Zaheer undertook the task of revising the sketches authored by Anand and Ghosh, subsequently producing the ultimate iteration. Following extensive deliberation, the participants ultimately agreed upon the nomenclature “All India Progressive Writers Association” to designate their recently established entity. Consequently, a group of writers convened and officially founded the Indian Progressive Writers Association in April 1936. In the 1930s, the formation of the All India Progressive Writers Association served as a notable forum for Indian nationalist novelists espousing leftist ideologies. The group demonstrated a strong dedication to promoting a variant of socialist realism that was heavily informed by Marxist principles. The AIPWA achieved international status through the establishment of committees in both London and India and it pledged to

rescue literature and other arts from the priestly, academic, and decadent classes into whose hands they have degenerated so long; to bring the arts into closest touch with the people, and to make them the vital organs that will register the actualities of life, as well as lead us to the future. (qtd. in Tickell 215)

The organisation was established in April 1936. However, the origins of the movement can be traced back to the publication of a compilation of short stories in Urdu titled *Angare*, which means “the burning coals”. Within this corpus of literature, Sajjad Zaheer authored a total of five works, while Ahmed Ali and Rashid Jahan each penned two. Additionally, Mahmuduzzafar authored one work within this collection. The anthology was published in December 1932 and was quickly banned within a four-month timeframe under the jurisdiction of section 295A of the Indian Penal Code for “hurting the religious susceptibilities of a section of the community” (Ali and Rasheed, 91). According to Coppola, the anthology's critique of the middle-class Muslim customs and behaviours of that era was the cause of the reaction (21).

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However, as noted by Ali, one of the authors of the anthology, the dissemination of the book's message was rapid, and individuals clandestinely devoured its contents to publicly condemn it (Ali and Rasheed 91). *Angare* was subjected to proscription under Section 295A shortly after its publication. Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code dealt with "deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of His Majesty's subjects, by words, either spoken or written or by visible representations insults or attempts to insult the religion or religious beliefs of that class" (qtd. in Farooqi 139).

The novel *Angare*, written in Urdu, was a crucial trigger in the establishment of the Indian Progressive Writers' association because of the radical changes it introduced to the prescribed literature's traditional form and subject. The young writers tried out several approaches to writing, taking cues from mostly the Bloomsbury group in London, and other Marxist authors to have an impact with their direct and unfiltered depiction of life. Both Sajjad Zaheer and Ahmed Ali, in their respective works, denounce the inequalities plaguing Indian society and the country's economic woes, as well as societal and religious practices based on ignorance and uncritical acceptance of foreign governance. Mahmuduzzafar's writings shed light on the stifling confinement and subjugation of Muslim women who were expected to conform to the norms of their male guardians and to practise archaic religious and social tenets. Both the religious and secular authorities reacted with fury to the publication of *Angare*. Editorials and articles published in newspapers and periodicals criticised and condemned the book. In an article titled "Urdu Pamphlet Denounced: Shias Gravely Upset" that appeared in *The Hindustan Times* on February 21, 1933, the central standing committee's resolution at the All-Indian Conference Lucknow was cited as follows:

The meeting strongly condemns the heartrending and filthy pamphlet called *Angare*...which has wounded the feelings of the entire Muslim community by ridiculing God and his prophets and which is extremely objectionable from the standpoints both of religion and morality. The committee further strongly urges upon the attention of the UP government that the book be at once proscribed. (qtd. in Mahmud 448)

Mahmuduzzafar, one of the authors of *Angare*, responded to these criticisms in an article titled "In Defence of Angare: Shall We Submit to Gagging?", which was published in *The Leader*, an Allahabad-based newspaper, which reads as follows:

Shall we submit to such gagging? That is the question I wish to raise here. Coming to the contents of the book itself, the stories of Zaheer are concerned chiefly with the criticism and a Moslem conceptions, life and practices. His attack is against the intolerable theological burden that is imposed upon the average Moslem in this country—a burden that tions and a cramping of the inquisitive or speculative vigours of body of both man and woman. Ahmed Ali essays of poverty, material, spiritual and physical, especially Moslem woman, and imagination and admirable boldness the veils of convention to expose the stark reality. Rashid a Doctor of Medicine drawing on her practical experience, vividly the ghastly plight of the woman behind the purdah.

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contribution, is an attack on the vanity of man which seeks at the expense of the weak and defenceless womanhood. the truthfulness of those portraits, and anyone who chooses can see that they are not drawn for the sake of literary from an inner indignation against 'this sorry scheme of things.' of this book do not wish to make any apology for it. They or sink of itself. They are not afraid of the consequences it. They only wish to defend 'the right of launching it like it' ... they stand for the right of free criticism and all matters of the highest importance to the human race Indian people in particular. They have chosen the particular not because they bear any 'special' malice, but because, in that particular society, they felt themselves better qualified alone. They were more sure of their ground there. Whatever book or to the authors, we hope that others will not practical proposal is the formation immediately of a League Authors, which should bring forth similar collections from in English and the various vernaculars of our country. those who are interested in this idea to get in touch communicate to S Ahmed Ali, M. A., Jalal Manzil, Kucha Pandit, Delhi. (qtd. in Ahmed 82)

The central argument put forth in this text asserts the necessity of establishing a "League of Progressive Authors", thereby making it an essential and pivotal piece of literature. In the year 1935, notable figures such as Sajjad Zaheer, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and several others convened in London after the resounding triumph of a certain speech. This gathering ultimately led to the establishment of the Progressive Writers' Association in India, with Sajjad Zaheer at its helm.

The cultural pioneers recognised the plight of the marginalised and voiced their opposition to entrenched feudal orthodoxy and capitalism in order to promote radical and progressive cultural practices. Usually, literary compositions were primarily crafted with the intention of catering to the preferences of affluent readers, rather than engaging with pertinent social concerns of the era. The emergence of the progressive movement has engendered discourse surrounding the influence of cultural norms on the formation of individual values within contemporary society. In his capacity as the president of the opening conference, Premchand alluded to the perceived shortcomings of traditional cultural practises, namely their perceived "sterility, degeneration, and inaction", in comparison to the emerging paradigm. Ahmed Ali in his article titled "The Progressive Writers' Movement and Creative Writers in Urdu" wrote:

The movement had heralded an intellectual revolution as significant as anything since Rousseau's affirmation that 'man is born free; yet everywhere he is in chains' and Nietzsche's declaration that 'god is dead'. Almost the most shaking utterance of the movement is to be found in *Angare*, which is the spark for the founding the progressive movement in India. (Ali 40)

Motivated by emerging transformative influences, the youthful writers felt compelled to explore and engage in innovative methodologies within the realm of their craft. Due to their historical experience of colonial governance and exposure to revolutionary and radical ideologies, they exhibited a strong inclination towards effecting societal transformations. The

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writers who adhered to the progressive movement made noteworthy and substantial contributions to the realm of poetry as well. Due to this rationale, the utilisation of traditional metered verse was discouraged in favour of the more innovative approach of free verse. The progressives prioritised intellectual integrity over aesthetics. Hence, it becomes imperative to establish a novel poetic framework within which to situate even the natural beauties. Poems were composed, symbolising the collective conscience of society, which was incarcerated with the intention of thwarting the desired revolution. Furthermore, proponents of progressive ideologies frequently employ the concept of prison as a symbolic representation of censorship, highlighting the influence exerted by outdated ideas and practices on individuals.

By the Progressive Writers Association, Indian writers were not exclusively reacting to the fervent environment surrounding the movements for India's independence. Indian writers were also mapping a course for India's future by discussing issues like social restructuring and political reform. Though the organisation was initially dominated by the writers in Urdu language, in the long run, it widened its influence so that "almost no contemporaneous Indian writer in any language, including English, would remain unaffected by its reach" (qtd.in Anjaria 74). The Progressive Writers' Movement witnessed significant expansion and emerged as the paramount and comprehensive literary movement in South Asia in the subsequent years. The writers articulated a solid aspiration to actively participate in a society that has successfully eliminated exploitation and fully deployed the creative capabilities of humanity. Inspired by Marxism, they wanted to "give expression to reality as it existed in the world of matter and to impart new content to this realism by exposing the evil and projecting the contemporary conflict and the vision of the future progress through clear and moving world images"(Mishra194).

The authors established the context through the skilful utilisation of sophisticated and evocative language. The principal aim of their mission entailed the broad dissemination of literary movements that engaged in critical analysis and questioning of dominant oppressive social ideologies. Concurrently, they advocated for the safeguarding and advancement of essential human rights. The fundamental aim of the Progressive Writers' Association was to "produce and translate literature of a progressive nature and high technical standard, to fight cultural reaction, and in this way to further the cause of Indian freedom and social regeneration" (George 31). They conveyed their profound apprehension regarding the decline of classical culture, viewing it as a catalyst for the disconnection of individuals from the realm of actuality. However, each of them was deemed to be of considerable importance. Ahmed Ali, a notable individual within the cohort of founding members of the movement, garnered recognition for his discernment towards the tradition as "mythological, decaying and obscurantist" (Ahmed 97). He advocated a total break with the past and was critical of authors like Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal, whom he called "morbidly escapist". According to Carlo Coppola, Ahmed Ali's inclination to associate himself with the movement and his decision to adopt an expeditiously literary activist position, can be ascribed to his

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endorsement of burgeoning writers and his growing discontent with Gandhian ideals (Coppola 21).

The genesis of the movement was originally grounded in the notion of progress. The manifesto of AIPWA laid down its notion of progress as,

We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today- the problem of hunger and poverty, social backwardness, and political subjection. All that drags us down to passivity, inaction, and unreason we reject as reactionary. All that arouses in us the critical spirit, which examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps us to act to organise ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive. (qtd. in Panikkar 16)

The concept of progressivism, therefore, entailed the achievement of societal and political transformation that would dismantle the feudal and colonial system and introduce a state of cognition that surpasses conservative ideologies. The objective of progressive culture, however, extended beyond altering the circumstances of the physical realm. The main aim of this endeavour was to augment the artistic calibre and ingenuity of diverse cultural manifestations, encompassing literature, theatre, and other artistic modalities. The main aim of this task was to provide cultural contributions in order to facilitate the attainment of these objectives. The fundamental goal of the All India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA) was to reestablish the connection between literature and the social conditions prevailing in India by recording the experiences of underprivileged people in the literary sphere. While this goal may seem at odds with Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to uplift the underprivileged and his support for renewing national culture, it is important to remember that these were not mutually exclusive goals. Nevertheless, the organization's proclivity towards progressive and secular ideologies engendered a sense of scepticism among its members regarding Gandhi's spiritual message. The All-India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA) holds a prominent position in the realm of political novels in India, not only due to its Gandhian undertones but also because of its socially oriented aesthetics. This aspect has had a lasting impact on Indian fiction since its inception.

Poetry, as William Wordsworth wrote in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1802), should be "a man speaking to men", and so progressive authors have long argued that everyday local language should be used in literature, especially when dealing with commonplace topics and harsh realities. On April 10, 1936, as President, Premchand gave a speech in which he underlined the centrality of mundane life as an impetus for great literature and aired his opinion on the deplorable state of literature as follows:

The literature, which does not arouse in us a critical spirit, or satisfy our spiritual and intellectual needs, which is not 'force-giving' and dynamic, which does not awaken our sense of beauty, which does not make us face the grim realities of life in a spirit of determination, has no use for us today. It cannot even be termed as literature. (Premchand 186)

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The present endeavour is commendable as it effectively depicts the issues of hunger and societal underdevelopment. Sajjad Zaheer elucidates in his short story titled “Neend Nahi Aathi” (I cannot sleep) the diminishing significance of ostensibly positive concepts such as prayer, spirituality, and freedom when experienced by an individual afflicted with severe hunger as “These days there is quite a pleasant wave of freedom. Intestines are starving for food and you are stuck with freedom. Death or Freedom! Neither I like death nor freedom. Someone should just feed me” (qtd. in Farooqi 144).

However, the movement, in its endeavour, sought to defend the traditional culture while simultaneously nurturing the development of a novel cultural paradigm. This was achieved through judicious research into historical precedents, wherein a critical yet constructive and empathetic approach towards tradition was espoused, as eloquently articulated by Sajjad Zaheer. This tendency of the progressive writers was further reinforced by Maulana Abdul Haq, who in his speech at the Urdu Progressive Writers’ Conference in 1937 implored:

The idea that everything connected with the previous age is vitiated by reactionism is not correct. We should not break our link with the past just because we have advanced. Doing this is tantamount to cutting our roots. We are the heirs of the past and if an heir is oblivious of his past and not aware of it to the fullest extent, then however intelligent, active and revolutionary he may be, he can neither affect any reform nor can he himself derive any benefit (from the past). Therefore, it is the obligation of every progressive writer to study the literature of the past and to see to what extent ours has the capacity for advancement. What things are to be abandoned and what means are necessary to elevate literature to a high position? (qtd. in Ahmed 104)

Thus, one plausible reason for the appeal exerted upon a considerable segment of the liberal intelligentsia by the progressive movement can be attributed to this propitious inclination towards tradition. “It is of the utmost importance”, wrote Mulk Raj Anand, one of the Anglophone writers associated with the Progressive writers’ movement, “that we must unite, all of us, irrespective of class, creed and status, in spite of our varying methods of approach to the fundamental problems of life to save our civilisation” (qtd. in Panikkar 21). In a nutshell, The Progressive Writers Association houses a remarkable assemblage of esteemed writers and intellectuals in India, encompassing a substantial cohort of writers who, despite harbouring diverse political, religious, and cultural ideologies, collaborate harmoniously towards shared objectives. The objectives revolve around the preservation of cultural heritage, as well as the promotion of progress through the constructive criticism of past events and the cultivation of novel cultural perspectives.

Nevertheless, a group of writers who wrote in the English language in the contemporary era, such as G.V. Desani, Nirad.C. Chaudhuri, R. K. Narayan, K.S. Venkataramani and K. Nagarajan, refrained from extensively delving into Marxist political ideologies and engaging with the newly formed association with ideological baggage. Though writers like K. S. Venkataramani and K. Nagarajan wrote extensively on mundane realities such as peasant exploitation in southern India, as we see in Venkataramani’s *Kandan The Patriot*, they did not

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openly associate with AIPWA. It is also significant to note that Nagarajan's significant literary piece, *Athavar House* (1937), adeptly portrayed the profound impact of capitalism and colonialism. Mulk Raj Anand, a prominent figure in the literary domain, played a significant role in drafting the AIPWA manifesto. Similarly, Ahmed Ali, renowned for his active participation in the Angaaray (1932) collective, undertook the position of editor for the journal, *Indian Writing*, associated with the AIPWA. Regrettably, the AIPWA encountered a challenge in maintaining a consistent level of engagement from these writers, as evident from the eventual removal of Ahmed Ali from his leadership positions as a result of ideological disparities with other prominent members of the organisation. Despite their political inclinations, authors such as Bhabani Bhattacharya and Raja Rao refrained from affiliating themselves with the All-India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA). Moreover, according to Mulk Raj Anand's deliberations, Anglophone writers had limited involvement during the early stages of the movement, as its primary emphasis was on connecting with the general populace and addressing their everyday experiences and realities. A significant proportion of aspiring anglophone writers was excluded from the literary market because the target audience of the movement consisted primarily of individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds who possessed limited literacy skills in their native languages and lacked any knowledge of the English language. Subsequently, as the communist party of India exerted significant influence over AIPWA, several writers, including Ahmed Ali, departed from the organisation as an act of dissent. Ahmed Ali substantiates,

The fanfare that accompanied the first All-India Progressive Writers' Association meeting in 1936 was largely political and stamped with a certain ideology... When an open attempt was made in 1938–39 to give the movement a direct communist turn, the creative section moved away from it. Even Prem Chand would have done so had he been alive, for he was never a communist anyway, though he was progressive in the sense most of us understood the word (Ali 35).

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