

10th Standard

Social Science-History

Novels, Society and History

The Rise of the Novel:

Novel is a modern form of literature. It is born because of print which is a mechanical invention. Novels could reach a larger audience because of print. Novels began to be written from the 17th century and flowered in the 18th century. New groups of lower-middle-class; along with the traditional aristocratic and gentlemanly classes in England and France formed the new readership of novels.

The Publishing Market:

Initially, novels did not come cheap and were out of reach for the poor classes. With the introduction of circulating libraries in 1740; people could get easier access to books. Apart from various innovations in printing, innovations in marketing also helped in increasing the sales and bringing down the prices.

The worlds created by novels were more realistic and believable. While reading a novel, the reader was transported to another person's world. Novels allowed individuals the pleasure of reading in private. It also allowed the joy of publicly reading and discussing stories.

In 1836, Charles Dicken's Pickwick Papers was serialized in a magazine. Magazines were cheaper and illustrated.

Moreover, serialization allowed readers to relish the suspense. They could live for weeks in anticipation of the next plot of the story.

The World of the Novel:

In the 19th century, Europe entered the industrial age. While industrialization created new opportunities of growth and development, it also created new problems for the workers and the city life. Many novelists created stories around the problems of ordinary people in the new cities. Charles Dickens and Emile Zola were the notable authors of this period.

Community and Society:

The novels reflected the contemporary developments in the society. Thomas Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) is a novel written in the rural backdrop. The novel by Hardy has use of vernacular language which is the language spoken by common people. Use of vernacular helped Hardy in correlating with the common people who lived in that period.

Women and the Novels:

During the 18th century Britain, the middle class became more prosperous. Women could get more spare time which they utilized to read and write novels. That is how the novels began to explore the world of women. Many novels were about domestic life. A woman writer could write about domestic life with more authority than a male writer. Many women novelists also began to raise questions about the established norms of society.

Novels for the Young:

Novels for the young boys were based on heroism. The hero of such novels used to be a powerful, assertive, independent and daring person. As this was the period of expansion of colonialism, most of the novels tried to glorify colonialism. Books; like R. L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894) became great hits. G. A. Henry's historical adventure novels for boys were very popular at the height of the British Empire. These novels were always about young boys who witness grand historical events and get involved in some military action.

The Novel Comes to India:

The modern novel developed in India in the 19th century, once the Western novels were introduced. Many Indian authors initially tried to translate the English novels but they apparently did not enjoy doing that. Later many of them decided to write novels in their own language and on their own social background.

Some of the earliest novels in India were written in Bengali and Marathi. Baba Padmanji's *Yamuna Paryatan* (1857) was the earliest Marathi novel. This was followed by *Miiktamala* by Lakshman Moreshar Halbe (1861).

Leading novelists of the nineteenth century wrote to develop a modern literature of the country. They wanted to produce a sense of national belonging and cultural equality with their colonial masters.

Novel in South India:

O. Chandu Menon wrote the first Malayalam novel Indulekha in 1889.

Kandukuri Viresalingam (1848-1919) wrote the Telugu novel Rajasekhara Caritamu in 1878.

The Novel in Hindi:

Bharatendu Harishchandra was the pioneer of modern Hindi literature. The first proper novel in Hindi was written by Srinivas Das of Delhi. It was titled Pariksha Gum and was published in 1882. This novel highlights the pitfalls of blind copying of the western culture and advocates preserving the traditional Indian culture. The characters in this novel attempt to bridge the western and the eastern world and try to make a balance between the two cultures. The writings of Devaki Nandan Khatri created a novel-reading public in Hindi. Chandrakanta was his best-seller. This novel is believed to have immensely contributed in popularizing the Hindi language and the Nagari script among the educated classes of that time.

Premchand and his writings:

The Hindi novel achieved excellence with the writing of Premchand. He began to write in Urdu and later shifted to Hindi. He took a leaf from the traditional art of kissa- goi (storytelling). Simple language was the hallmark of his writings. Moreover, he portrayed people from all sections of the society. In many of his writings, the main character belonged to oppressed classes.

Novels in Bengal:

Durgeshnandini (1865) was written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and this novel was much appreciated for its literary excellence.

The initial Bengali novels used a colloquial style associated with urban life. Meyeli, the language associated with women's lingo was also used in those novels. But Bankim's prose was Sanskritised and contained a more vernacular style.

Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay became a novelist of universal appeal in all parts of India. He was a straight forward supporter of armed rebellion against British in his novel Pather Dabi (1926).

Uses of Novel:

For the colonial administrators, novels provided a good source to understand about the life and social hierarchy in India. They could understand different aspects of the Indian society through novels. Some of the novels were translated into English; by British administrators or Christian missionaries. Many novels highlighted the social ills and suggested remedies. Many novels told stories about the past so that people could establish a relationship with the past. People from all walks of life could read novels. This helped in creating a sense of collective identity on the basis of one's language. Novels also helped people to understand about the culture of other parts of the country.

Pleasures of Reading:

Novels became a popular medium of entertainment among the middle class. Detective and mystery novels often had to be sent for reprints to meet the demand of readers. Many novels were printed as many as twenty two times. The novel also helped in spreading the silent reading.

As late as the nineteenth century and probably in the early twentieth century, people often read out a text for several people to hear. But gradually, people adapted to read in silence.

Women and the Novel in India:

Women were singled out and advised to stay away from immoral influence of novels as they were seen as easily corruptible. Old women listened with fascination to popular Tamil novels. But women did not remain mere readers of stories written by men, they also began to write novels. In some languages, the early creations of women were poems, essays or autobiographical. Stories of love showed women who could to some extent control their lives. Some women authors also wrote about women who changed the world of both men and women. Rokeya Hossein, a reformer, wrote a fantasy in English called 'Sultana's Dream' showing a world in which women take the place of men. In the south, women and girls were often discouraged from reading novels.

Caste Practices:

Many authors began to highlight the plight of lower caste people in their novel. In some of the novels, conflicts arising out of marriage between a lower caste and an upper caste were highlighted. Some people from the lower caste also became authors; like Potheri Kunjambu from Kerala, wrote a novel called Saraswati Vijayam in 1892 mounting a strong attack on caste oppression.

National pride and novels:

In India, many novels were written for glorification of India's past. Many novels were written in all the main Indian languages in different parts of the country that helped in the growth of national feelings among the readers.

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Some of the greatest novelists of modern India were protagonists of the national movement like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. He infused the ideas of nationalism and freedom from colonial rule in novels like 'Anandmath' and 'Kapalkundala'. In Bengal, many historical novels were about Marathas and Rajputs. These novels portrayed the nation to be full of adventure, heroism, romance and sacrifice. Bankim's Anandmath is a novel about secret Hindu militia which fights Muslims to establish a Hindu kingdom. This novel inspired many kinds of freedom fighters. Several other novelists wrote for the same cause. The novels also helped in the nation building process by taking up the cause of the poor and downtrodden people, women and such sections of society who were being exploited by rich aristocratic people. Novels also attacked the racial superiority of the English people.