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History and Tradition of Regional Novel: A Review of Regional Novels in Hindi and Punjabi Literature

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Abstract:

Regional novel refers the life of a particular region through literature and is a popular type of novel, in western as well as Indian literature. This particular type of novel aims at the depiction of various aspects of socio-cultural life of a particular region. The ethos of the region is very much part of the creative work. In Hindi Literature Phanishwer Nath Renu started writing Regional Novels and Short stories. His most eminent novel *Maila Anchal* is considered as the milestone in the tradition of Regional Novel. Punjabi literature also has got influence of regionalism. In modern era under the influence of some social factors *Anchalik* novels were written. In all Indian languages these types of novels can be found. In Punjabi literature Surinder Singh Narula can be recognized as the initiator of this genre. In his *Peo Puttar* a very interesting and well description of regional life of Amritsar can be noticed.

Keywords: Region, Regional Novel, Plot, Culture, Society etc.

Regional novel refers the life of a particular region through literature and is a popular type of novel, in western as well as Indian literature. This particular type of novel aims at the depiction of various aspects of socio-cultural life of a particular region. In regional novel the focus of writer is not on a character or an event rather it is a representation of whole life of a given geographical unit. The plot, theme as well as style of regional novel are quite different from novel in general.

Regional novel is defined as the fiction set in recognizable region and which describes features distinguishing the life, social relations, customs, language, dialogues, dialect or other aspects of culture of that area and its people. Detailed description of a place, setting or region, weather urban or rural which bears an approximation to a real place. Characters usually of working or middle-class origin, dialogue represented with some striving of realism, and attempted verisimilitude (Snell 1). A well-known Indian critique Dr. Vishambharnath Upadhyay has defined it as, "Regional novel is meant by those novels in which there is a wholesome characterization of a particular populace or life of a region" (qtd in F. Singh 13). Wholesome characterization means geographical, cultural, social, political and economic conditions which affects the life of every particular society. Defining English regional novels Phyllis Eleanor Bentley says, "It is a novel, which concentrating on a particular part, a particular region of a nation, depicts the life of that region in such a way that the reader is conscious of the characteristics which are unique to that region and differentiate it from other in the common motherland" (6).

So regional novel can be seen that type of writing which concentrates on the people in a specific location. This could be a city, a town, or even a single household. A regional novel focuses on the customs and style of speech related to that specific location and also depicts the ways in which a particular environment forms the lives and choices of people belonging to a particular region.

Aspects and characteristics of Regional Novel:

In his book *The English Regional Novel* Phyllis Eleanor Bentley has described some characteristics of regional novels. He says that as other novels, regional novels have their own characteristics about which we have to get well acquainted to know the proper meaning and purposes behind these types of writings and also to know the special features which can help the readers to differentiate it from other novels. Understand the characteristics of the regional novel we must ascertain how far the element of the novel are affected while regionalism in it is present how far and how deeply the local color dies, the elements of the novel is character, plot, setting and narrative with the theme is the circumscribing factor, the theme is the aspect of life the writer seems to eliminate, the plot is the chain of actions lined by cause and effect which influence the theme the character or the imagined but typical human being who perform the action, they do know against background of times and place which constitutes the setting, the whole being related in words so arranged is to forms a narrative is prose (Bentley 14).

From above definition an estimate can be made about the main elements of the regional fiction. Bentley has provided us basic parameters on which we can recognize the ability of a regional writer in the depiction of regionalism which affects each and every element of the novel. It is not merely local color but all the elements character, plot, setting and narrative helps to generate a proper realistic portrait of that particular locale. Theme is the very integral part of the story, an aspect of life because the concern of the writer is to depict the life of a particular

society, plot is based on the cause and effect of particular situations or problems and a chain of actions is interwoven in this chain, these actions put so many effects and influence of these effects can be noticed on the theme, and also on characters who can be an imagined human being. And setting is integral to the story which is the chosen locale prepares a realistic background of the story, these all elements altogether makes a proper regional fiction. A detailed description of each element is given below.

Setting: The emphasis is frequently on nature and the limitations it imposes; settings are frequently remote and inaccessible. The setting is integral to the story and may sometimes become a character in itself. So in regional writings setting is purely related to the particular region in which all events are located so as the characters or all events are centered to that very location, but in other writings as the characters and events moves from one place to another so they are not static to any particular location or region (Divedi 17).

Characters: Local color stories tend to be concerned with the character of the district or region rather than with the individual. Characters may become character types, sometimes quaint or stereotypical. The characters are marked by their adherence to the old ways, by dialect, and by particular personality traits central to the region. In regional fictions the characters are generally belong to that particular region in which they are located by the writer, whereas in other novels it is not compulsory. In other novels generally characters can be from any geographical part of the country and with the movement of characters the location also moves from one to another place (Divedi 16). In regional novel characters are attached to their roots on social, economic and political levels due to their customs, believes, costumes and social interactions whereas in other writings they could be related to foreign lands. In regional novels characters generally use regional words, phrases and idioms which provide a picture of a specific life style of a specific geographical area.

Narrator: The narrator is typically an educated observer from the world beyond who learns something from the characters while preserving a sometimes sympathetic, sometimes ironic distance from them. The narrator serves as mediator between the rural folk of the tale and the urban audience to whom the tale is directed.

Plot: Whereas the plots are concerned in a regional novel, the novelist based it on the regional issues based on the universal approach. Many stories may inter-weave in regional stories. Stories may include lots of story-telling and revolve around the community and its rituals. There are many sub-plots are interwoven with the main plot.

Language: In regional novel the setting is located to a particular region and language of that particular region puts great influence upon the characters. The characters become the spokesman of that place on writer's behalf. This vernacular comes naturally without any effort. Our folk literature can be seen very rich in words and many languages. From this rich treasure of folk literature the writers have dedicated so many words, phrases, idioms and folk songs, by

which growth of these regional languages have become visible. By this type of use of various languages Hindi language will continuously be in a growing stage and will become enriched with various words, phrases and idioms and would get interaction with many regional languages (Divedi 20).

Themes: Many local color stories share an antipathy to change and a certain degree of nostalgia for an always-past golden age. A celebration of community and acceptance in the face of adversity characterizes women's local color fiction. Thematic tension or conflict between urban ways and old-fashioned rural values is often symbolized by the intrusion of an outsider or interloper who seeks something from the community. The regional novel offers a heterogeneous perspective of the world, and also addresses questions of cultural identity.

So from the above discussed characteristics of regional novel an estimate can be made about the main elements which help us to trace the ability of a novelist that have he succeed to make his writing a proper regional novel or not. These factors help us to locate the regionalism in a particular novel.

Although the terms regionalism and local color are sometimes used interchangeably, regionalism generally has broader connotations. Whereas local color is often applied to a specific literary mode that flourished in the late 19th century, regionalism implies recognition from the colonial period to the present of differences among specific areas of the country. Additionally, regionalism refers to an intellectual movement encompassing regional consciousness beginning in the 1930s. While literary critics recognize the dual influence of romanticism and realism in regionalism and local color fiction, many differ to varying degrees in their definitions and distinctions of the literary forms. Some critics consider local color fiction to be a subset of regionalism; others use the two terms interchangeably. To the extent that a distinction can be made, commentators contend that regionalism incorporates the broader concept of sectional differences, while local color fiction emphasizes the charm and idiosyncrasies of local characters and customs. Dr. Nagina Jain writes

There is a very thin thread difference between local color and regionalism. For local color the writer uses the natural or social conditions, language or culture to prepare a realistic background for his factious world in such a way that at one place it becomes recognizable for the outside world and on the other hand it can play a role as a stimulus for the rise of interest in story-telling. Here regionalism does not enter as an authoritative factor but it concerns to make the ideas more believable and give a concrete shape to the aims of the writer behind the novel. Then adoption of regionalism in such situation cannot be consider more than just local color (qtd. In F. Singh15).

So from the above discussion the distinction between regionalism and local color can be noticed, using in a very minimum amount of local color by presenting customs, vernacular and culture is not sufficient for entitling a novel as regional novel. In such situation most of the

novels would fall in this category. In a local color fiction by making a particular region as center point of a novel is just for the sake to attribute colorful representation means not as a factor but just for an instrument of beauty or decoration. Local color can be seen as an important element of regionalism. All the other factors together with local color make a regional novel. But only local color can't be a proper substitute of regionalism.

In free India, democratic form of government was constitutionally accepted viewing that this form would promote well-being and prosperity of the nation. India is mainly a country of diverse cultural forms and languages. Basically, most of the population in this country resides in the rural areas, so the role of villages is quite significant in the formation of democratic government. Therefore, the government was obliged to shift their focus for the welfare of rural areas. Besides intellectuals, writers could not resist their temptation to represent villages which were deprived of all basic requirements, and forced to live the kind of life, not meant for ordinary human beings.

The concept of regional writing is not a new phenomenon, as it has been well practiced and popularized in the late 19th and 20th century English literature. Thomas Hardy has created an immortal region Wessex in all of his novels. His Wessex has become the most dominant character by itself. In Indian Writing in English, R.K.Narayan is regarded as a regional novelist. Like Hardy's Wessex, Malgudi is the chosen region which forms the background to the works of Narayan, whether novels or short stories. Regional literature was actually a crucial movement in the literary history of post-independent India following a revolutionary change in socio-political life. Associated with the representation of rural, the peasant, the poor and geographically marginal, the fiction understood as Anchalik was peopled by tribal, farmers and the fisherman of the regions.

Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native* are two examples of regional novels. Eudora Welty and William Faulkner are often held up as examples of Southern regional writers generally. More specifically, Appalachian poets include Ron Rash, Danny Marion, Lynn Powell, and Rita Sims Quillen. "A novel which is the product of its fidelity to a particular geographical section, accurately representing its habits, speech, manners, history, folklore, or beliefs. In one sense, the test of "regionalism" is that the action and personages cannot be moved, without major loss or distortion, to any other geographical setting" (Harmon). Instances of such localities are Wessex in Thomas Hardy's novels, Mississippi in Faulkner's and Malgudi in R.K. Narayan's novels. Regionalism had become fashion in Hindi, Bengali, Marathi and Telugu languages.

If we look at American regional literature it take us back to colonial times and does in fact, begin their, but it is not until after 1900 that the regional writing of today began to grow out of Naturalism or Realism in that important letters. Regionalism movement can be described as a phase of growth of national literature, in America, began in about 1890, and had its roots in the

19th century. Regionalism was a particular phase of Naturalism-realism in which authors and poets examines specific regions of the United States.

The first phase of regionalism starts before 1890. Before 1900 there was great influence of writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Herman Melville and Mark Twain. But after 1920 the influence of European writers was over and some writer tried to the American traditions in their novels and short- stories. Some great works of American regional literature are Alfred Henry Lewis's *Wolfville Days* (1902), and Walt Whitman's *Leaves Of Gras* Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), Thomas Bailey Aldrich's *The Story Of A Bad Boy* (1869), Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), and *Life On The Mississippi* in (1899), Joseph Kirkland's *Zury* (1855) (Leach) .

If we take a survey of British literature Thomas Hardy's novels can be described as regional because of the way he makes use of regional elements in relation to a part of the West of England, that he names Wessex. On the other hand it seems much less appropriate to describe Charles Dickens as a regional novelist of London and the south of England. R. D. Blackmore (1825 – 1900), was one of the most famous English novelists of the second half of the nineteenth century, and he shared with Thomas Hardy a Western England background and a strong sense of regional setting in his works.

The authors whom Keith groups together in his discussion on regional novels are the most prominent contributors in this field. Keith includes discussions not only of standard authors such as Scott, Emily Bronte, Eliot, Hardy, and Lawrence, but of lesser-known writers who are just now being reexamined: R. D. Blackmore, Eden Philpotts, Sheila Kaye-Smith, Mary Webb, and John Cowper Powys (Millgate).

Tradition of Regional novel in Hindi literature:

These artists, thus, selected the regions of their choice, be it mountainous, hilly, plain, forest side etc. and depicted them realistically in their works. In case of Indian Regional literature it arose in late colonial and early post-colonial periods. If it is an imaginary world that comes alive in Thomas Hardy's novels, the Indian regional writers Phaniswarnath Renu, Tarashankar Banerjee and Kuvempu indulge in Retelling the stories of actual regions like Maryganj, Shivkalipur, and Malnad. The ethos of the region is very much part of the creative consciousness of the author.

In Hindi literature, the tradition of regionalism comes with Mannan Dwivedi's novel *Ramlal* published in 1914 and supposed to be the first regional novel in Hindi literature. His another novel *Kalyani* (1920) also reflects some regional elements. This tradition of regionalism came to light with the publication of Shivpujan Sahay's *Dehati Duniya* in 1926 and Premchand's *Godan* in 1936. Premasharm, Karmbhoomi, and Rangbhoomi are other novels of Premchand which depicts the life of the people of Banaras and the village life of nearby areas.

Earlier these novels were not discussed as regional novels, because only very few regional elements were introduced in these novels.

After independence, a number of Hindi novelists have followed the tradition of regionalism. In the novels of Premchand, VrindavanlalVerma, Nagarjun, and PhanishwarnathRenu, one can find the regions like Banaras, Bundelkhand, Mithila, and Meriganj respectively. RajendraAvasthi has rightly said, “Various regions of our country are the trademark of our rich culture, urban traditions have not ever influenced our cultural heritage fully and also this huge cultural superstructure can’t be formed on its bases” (qtd in F. Singh 26). VrindavanlalVerma’s regional novels are Lagan, Sangam, Kundlichak, prem Ki Bhent, Sona, Amarbel in which he talks about the region of Bundelkhand. Nagarjun shows the real picture of Mithila in his novels Ratinath Ki Chachi, NaiPaudh, Baba Batesarnath, Balchnma, Dukhmochan etc. and depict the village life which is full of sufferings. But in 1954, with the publication of MailaAanchal by PhanishwarnathRenu, the concept of regional novel was introduced in Hindi and it was considered as the first regional novel in hindi.

In MailaAanchal, Maryganj is the place where all activities take place. Renu seems to have been inspired by his knowledge of P.C. Roy Chaudhury'sMarygunj, which he creates in his book Inside Bihar. In a way, the story of the region invoked here provides the reader an opportunity to look deeper into the life and culture of the people in the past. It in fact helps in establishing a link with the unheard history of the people and the region in turn. With publishing of PhanishwarnathRenu’sMailaAanchal regional novels in India emerged and these have achieved a critical attention.

After publication of MailaAanchal regional novels become a matter of discussion among critiques. Then Sri Shiv Prasad Singh’s AlagAlagVaitarni (1967), Sri LalShukal’sRag Darbari (1968), RamdarshMishar’sJal Toot ta Hua (1967), which also dealt with depiction of village life can be categorized as regional novels. In this tradition Dr. RamdarshMishr’sPaaniKePrachir, also falls in the category of regional novel which is the perfect depiction of Gorakhpur district, the region taken up by the writer is the beautiful mid area of Rapti and Gauri rivers. RajendraAvasthi’sSurajKiran Ki Chaav, and Jungle KePhool also depicts the lively picture of wild life of Madhya Pradesh. (Sexsena 212-213)

In regional novel or short story, however the author through his close and intimate observation of the soil, the people their way of living, culture and problems gives a vivid and graphic picture of vegetation, folk-lore and folk-arts of a backward tribal community little known to the outside world. There is no hero in the traditional sense, the region or the community itself emerges as the focus.

Tradition of Regional Novels in Punjabi Literature:

Punjabi literature does not remain untouched from the tradition of regionalism. Regionalism has great influence on different genres of Punjabi literature but Punjabi novels are the best examples of the depiction of regionalism. Surinder Singh Narula, Sohan Singh Seetal, Hari Singh Dilbar, DalipKaurTiwana, Karamjit Singh Kussa, Gurdial Singh, Jaswant Singh Kanwal, Ram SarupAnkhi, Om ParkashGasol, and Mohan Kahlon are some novelists who have regional setting in their plots. Most of them have written about Malwa region eg. Gurdial Singh, Ram SarupAnkhi, Jaswant Singh Kanwal, and Karamjit Singh Kussa.

In Punjabi language regional novels made its appearance first of all. Kartar Singh Duggal's *Aandraan*, a novel written in the Pothohari dialect and steeped in the localism of the same region, its geography, economy, ecology, customs and conventions, was published as far back as 1948. Before the entrance of Gurdial Singh in fiction world, Punjabi novel was going through the tradition set by Bhai Veer Singh, Nanak Singh, Jaswant Singh Kanwal and Sohan Singh Seetal. The basic nature of this tradition was revolving around the idealism, realism and welfare. From Bhai Veer Singh to Jaswant Singh Kanwal the only transition that can be noticed is a journey from romantic to realistic writings (Kaur 17).

Surinder Singh Narula's novels are based on Marxist ideology. He can be recognized as the initiator of this genre. In his *PeoPuttar* a very interesting and well description of regional life of Amritsar can be noticed. His novel *Neeli Bar* also depicts the life of the people of West Punjab.

Gurdial Singh has emerged as the leading novelist of Punjabi literature. He can be defined as the best regional novelist of Punjab because his novels present a real picture of Malwa region. He artistically depicts this region in his novels. His all novels are set in the Malwa region of Punjab. His novels *Marhi Da Deeva*, *Anhoe*, *Rete Di IkkMutthi*, *Kuwela*, *AaddhChananiRaat*, *AathanUggan*, *AnnheGhore Da Daan*, *PauhPhutale Ton Pehlan*, and *Parsa* present an actual picture of Malwai culture.

Malwa comes alive in his novels both as a place in history and as a cultural metaphor. However, the self-limiting nature of the Malwa region doesn't in any way prevent Gurdial Singh from giving an artistically wholesome expression to the complexities of life he has set out to explore. Its stubborn, unyielding land, sandy soil and prickly air, low-roofed mud houses and vast open fields, mingle and overlap with stifling caste prejudices and intriguing questions of land ownership possession to create a befitting backdrop to this incomparable saga of human courage, resilience and sacrifice. However, the self-limiting nature of the Malwa region does not prevent Gurdial Singh from giving an artistic expression to the complexities of life he has set out to explore. (Nayar 7).

Jaswant Singh Kanwal presents socio-cultural life and problems of Malwa region in his novels *Haani*, *Lahu Di Lo*, *Civil Lines*, *Raat Bakihai*, *Pooranmaashi*, *Taushali di Hanso* etc. Sant Singh Sekhon has depicted hard working farmers of this region in his novels *Lahu Mitti*. He explains how these lower and middle class farmers are being exploited by the landlords, and moneylenders. Mohan Kahlon's novels *Bedite Breta*, *Gori Nadi Da Geet*, *Machhli Ikk Dariya Di* belong to a particular area of Gurdaspur district which is presently located in Pakistan. In these novels he put light on the affairs of the people of Jatt and Gujjar castes residing in this region. Dalip Kaur Tiwana describes how women are being victimised because of rigid traditional and patriarchal system of Malwa region. Her novels *Jimi Puchhe Aasmaan*, *Eho Hamara Jeevna*, *Doosri Seeta*, *Peele Patteyan Di Daastan* etc. exhibits the problems and sufferings of women in this male dominated society. Karamjit Singh Kussa portrays the pain and agony of peasants in his novels *Rohi Biabaan*, *Raat De Raahi*, *Agg Da Geet* etc. He shows how the women of poor peasants are forced to have physical relations with their landlords and how lust of money spoils relationships. Ram Sarup Ankhi is also a personality of fame in the field of Punjabi regional novelist who has set all his novels in Malwa region of Punjab. His novels *Kothe Kharak Singh*, *Sulgadi Raat*, *Salfaas*, *Jamina Vale*, *Kankaan Da Qatleam*, *Dulle Di Dhaab*, *Gelo*, *Partapi* etc. are some examples of his regional novels in which he describes social, cultural, political, economic, and religious life and problems of Malwa people.

Thus it can be said that both in Hindi and Punjabi Literature there is a healthy tradition of Regional novels. In Hindi regional novels various regions of the country have been explored. In Punjabi regional novels the regions of Malwa, Majha, Pothohar and Doaba of Punjab are explored. The culture of these regions as well as geography and history can be traced through these regional novels. The linguistic study of these regions can also be done through these novels as folklore and uses of regional words are the eminent features of these novels.

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A regional novel attempts to depict a specific geographic region and the people that inhabit it. A regional novel is typically set in a single area of a country and portrays the customs, culture, historical background, dialect and behavior of that region. Early examples of the regional novel include the works of Anglo-Irish writer Maria Edgeworth. Edgeworth's early-19th-century novels were among the first to realize the possibilities of relating character to a specific environment. Scottish novelists John Galt and Sir Walter Scott were also heavily influenced by regionalism.