

Historical Perspective of Progressive Literary Movement*

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During the 1930s the oppressed masses of India were wriggling under the yoke of feudal society and foreign slavery. In this period of hardship and struggle, it was quite natural for progressive intellectuals to come together. “Hindi Sahitya Sammelan” was making its efforts to unite the writers. Apart from Progressive Writers' Association and Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, another organisation “Parimal” was also active in organising authors on its platform. In the post *Chhayawadi* era, the background of the struggle amongst these organisations, helps us to understand the progressive and regressive ideological trends prevailing within the creative literature of the time.

The pressure of demands of independence and social revolution was crucial to formation of various organisations before 1936. PWA was established to fulfil the historical duty of the same demands at the cultural and intellectual level. A close study into the creative literature written before the establishment of PWA 1936, the reveals two important issues: “farmers problem” and “question of independence” taking centre stage. All important writers of the period were trying to portray these issues realistically with all inherent conflicts. What explains this sudden intimacy of middle class creative writers with the farmers? Why did expression of

**The history of the Progressive Literary Movement cannot be written by ignoring organisational aspects and various contexts of Progressive Writers' Association (PWA). The research articles, thesis and books published on Progressive movement have not covered its organisational aspects and contexts. Probably the first time, my book “Pragativad aur samanantar sahitya” (Macmillan, 1978) has tried to see progressive literary movement of Urdu-Hindi in its proper historical context and PWA in the leading role. Various cultural activities, creative writings, details of interventions made during various movements and manifestoes and documents of PWA and its contemporary organisations have been compiled in this book. This book is now available (Rajkamal Prakashan, New Delhi) both in paperback and in hard bound edition.*

“intellectual sympathy” or “revolutionary solidarity” with the farmers suddenly become so relevant? At the root cause of these trends lie the existing circumstances.

Some people say that the guiding principles of the PWA and the progressive movement have been borrowed from abroad and are driven by the Communist Party of Soviet Union. It was not the logical culmination of the conflict of the reality of the then India, the imperatives of national life and the necessities of Hindi heartland. Naturally, such critics also draw their own conclusions. As it was something that came from outside, therefore the progressive movement grew in the direction unfavourable to ethnic spirit of Hindi and that is why it fell in a short period.

Right now, instead of going into the details of these accusations, recriminations, objections and solutions it would be more relevant to see whether any efforts were made to form the organisation before 1936 or not? Whether ‘Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’, its forums and centres were making efforts to develop progressive elements of the national liberation movement in the right direction or not? Was ‘Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’ not the centre for dissemination of sectarian and revivalist tendencies? Was new ideation and creative innovation in contemporary literature not facing strong opposition from ‘Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’? Instead of showing solidarity with the provincial languages, dialects and their literature, was HSS supporting the policy of keeping Hindi a paramount position?

Chhayavaad was being opposed by the office bearers of ‘Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’ and veteran writers of the older generation. Awarding “Virsatsai” and terming “Pallav” unsuitable for the award was the extreme expression of such opposition. Writers of the new generation were frustrated by the conservative attitude of ‘Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’. Writing on the contradiction of literary scene of the period, Ramdhari Singh Dinkar rightly said that ‘the conflict between the representatives of the old and new school was apparent in 1928.’¹

In 1929 at the election of the office bearers of ‘Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’ representatives of the new generation win. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi was elected the President while Ramvriksh Benipuri elected as Publicity Minister. In the same year, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was elected as the President of the Indian National Congress. Conservatives were ousted from both the areas, politics and literature. Nirala enthusiastically welcomed this change by saying: “we have not seen such victory of youth in India for centuries.”²

But unfortunately, President Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi could not live long. He was killed in a communal riot at Kanpur.

Therefore, the situation reversed and once again “conservatives” occupied various positions of ‘Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’. These tradition loving devotees worked tirelessly to protect the literary system of ‘samasyapurti’, opposed the free verse (*muktchhand*), started “Ghasleti literature” movement to oppose the “chocolate realism” of Ugra. They also tried to malign the image of Premchand by calling him a kidnapper of writings of foreign storytellers. Dinkar has tried to understand the psychology of this uproar of 1930s: “these aged literary figures sitting on the throne are the the principal cause of our neglect and disrespect “. Because of this, the new writers used to spit out venom against these old writers in their essays. Gulab Ratna Vajpayee ‘Gulab’ wrote in *Narayan* published from Calcutta:

*So jao he vriddhvikal
Is prachand andhad ke sammukh,
Grishma kal ki vayu viphal³*

(Vibrant creativity of a new generation is ragged storm and Elders are trying to stop him in vain. And who are these older people? Aged literary figures sitting on the throne).

At the level of ideology, and point of view conservatism, revivalism, Hindu fundamentalism etc were being promoted and protected not only by ‘Hindi Sahitya Sammelan’ but also by editors of the older generation. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru has mentioned the literary environment of 1933 in his autobiography. This also testifies the above facts.

‘Ratnakar Rasik Mandal’, a literary society based in Benares, had felicitated Pt. Nehru by presenting him a Welcome Letter. Report of the event was published by Premchand in *Jagaran* on 20th November 1933. Pt. Nehru has mentioned this in his autobiography:

I had pleasant informal talks with its members. I told them that I hesitated to speak to express on subjects I knew little about, but still I made a few suggestions. I criticized the intricate and ornate language that was customary in Hindi writing, full of difficult Sanskrit words, artificial, and clinging to ancient forms. I ventured to suggest that this courtly style, addressed to a select audience should be given up, and Hindi writers should deliberately write for the masses and in language understood by them. Mass contacts would give new life and sincerity to the language, and the writers themselves would catch some of the emotional energy of the mass and do far better work.⁴

He further writes :

I also mentioned that probably modern Bengali, Gujrati and Marathi were a little more advanced in these matters than modern Hindi, and certainly more creative work had been done in Bengali in recent years than in Hindi.⁵

Reports of Nehru's speech were published in the daily *Aaj* and *Bharat*. Conservative Hindi litterateurs caused controversy over Nehru's above remarks. Nirala also got perturbed but the cause of his anguish was different. He said that not reading the new literature which was being written in Hindi with its new ideology, patriotism, public sentiment etc. and targeting conservatives was not right. Pt. Nehru had kept his eye on this controversy. After the end of the controversy he wrote:

The whole outlook was narrow, *bourgeois* and parochial, and both the journalists and the authors seemed to write for each other and for a small circle, ignoring the vast public and its interests.⁶

There must be an opposition for the literary environment which was dominated by 'narrow vision' and 'courtly style' and driven by Hindu fundamentalism and feudal cultural biases and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru has rightly opposed this in his autobiography. The questions raised by Pt. Nehru on poetic imagination of 'Mother India' were quite relevant because the oppressed masses could no longer be induced and inspired from *nilambardhari* (blue clad) Mother India. He writes:

It is curious how one can't resist the tendency to give an anthropomorphic form to a country. Such is the force of habit and early associations. India becomes *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, a beautiful lady, very old but ever youthful in appearance, sad-eyed and forlorn, cruelly treated by aliens and outsiders, and calling upon her children to protect her. Some such picture rouses the emotions of hundreds of thousands and drives them to action and sacrifice. And Yet India is in the main the peasant and the worker, not beautiful to look at, for poverty is not beautiful. Does the beautiful lady of our imagination represent the bare-bodied and bent workers in the fields and factories? Or the small group of those who have from ages past crushed the masses and exploited them, imposed cruel customs on them and made many of them even untouchable? We seek to cover truth by the creatures of our imagination and endeavour to escape from reality to a world of dreams.⁷

When we see this vision of nationalism clubbed with the nationalist vision of the literature of that time, we learn that the literature was domi-

nated by narrow approach, the vision of nationality were not reflecting people's consciousness and in fact the narrow class interest of the Hindu elite was prevailing. Later in 1939-40, Pt. Nehru's vision of mother India got reflected in the writings of Pant and Nirala in the form of '*Bharatmata Gramwasini*' and '*Devi Saraswati*' respectively.

The appeal made by the enlightened politicians and intellectuals through Pt. Nehru' was not accidental. Around 1930 it was the turn of young writers to take responsibility to identify and understand the difference between the 'Democratic Nationalism' and 'Hindu Conservative Nationalism'. They were also supposed to make others understand this difference. Of course the biggest hurdle in this path was 'Hindi Sahitya Sammelan' and the force behind this organisation was Rajrishi Purushottam Das Tandon. He held a dominant position not only in various literary & educational organisations but also had a say in the Congress leadership.

In this background of the 1930s, when conservatives, fundamentalists and revivalist forces had dominated the literary organisations' it was natural for new writers to think about publishing magazines and forming literary groups for proliferating their ideology.

Newspapers and magazines talking of socialism, democracy, communism, freedom, and liberation of the peasants were being suppressed by the British government. Guarantee was sought from journals like '*Jagran*', '*Hans*' etc. in 1932. News daily *Aaj* was forced to close its publication. How delicate was the situation, can be estimated by the fact that between 1930-1934, 348 news publications were closed under the sedition law.⁸ Moreover, distribution of books of Maxim Gorky, Maurice Thoreau, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and V.I. Lenin were declared illegal and books available in the market were seized. Tagore's book '*The Letters from Russia*' was banned.⁹ Premchand through his journal '*Jagran*' exposed the policy of repression of the press: "But here I feel, it is my duty to say that in an environment like this where sword is hanging over the head of every editor, there can't be a true political development of the nation."¹⁰

In this atmosphere, Premchand intended to form an association for two objectives: 1. to protect freedom of expression, 2. to open cooperative publication house.

Premchand and Ramchandra Tandon had a dispute over the issue of forming the association of writers. Ramchandra Tandon wanted to form writers association to protect authors from exploitation by the publishers. Premchand was not in favour of forming an association of writers which is anti publishers and which functions on the patterns of a trade union. To him the basic question was of 'protection of self' and "opening of large

cooperative publishing house". But there was so much fuss made about the plan that it had to be abandoned.

Ram Naresh Tripathi, Kishoridas Vajpayee and Premchand were nominated as coordinators for the formation of writers' association. But Ramchandra Tandon with his strong opposite views made all three coordinators inactive. Munshi Premchand analysed the basic question behind all these things in his editorial in *Hans* of December 1934. He also highlighted the harsh condition of publishers and emphasised the basic needs of forming an association of writers. Ramchandra Tandon was so annoyed with this editorial that in his letter dated December 31, 1934, he asked Premchand not to become an advocate of the crocodile publishers.¹¹

Freedom struggle against imperialism, suppression of democratic rights of writers and problem of freedom of expression, people's nationality in place of Hindu revivalism, freedom of all Indian languages and dialects against the aspiration of Hindi imperialism, relationship of reciprocity amongst all Indian languages rather than only all-India Hindi writers' association and formation of all-India level, all language writers association were the questions which not only Premchand but so many enlightened leaders, intellectuals, journalists and writers of that period were struggling with. Therefore, the question of the writers' association, scope of which was narrowed in by efforts of Ramchandra Tandon had come to naught. After that, Premchand, while struggling with real questions began to focus on setting "Bhartiya Sahitya Parishad". In what direction Premchand's mind was working in 1935, has been indicated by Amrit Rai. He also suggests that the conference of Sahitya Sammelan was going to be held at Indore in April 1935 on the central question of the unity of literature of all the languages. Munshi Premchand could not reach there. Informing about the output of the convention, Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi wrote to Premchand that with the support of Gandhiji and the efforts of Jainendra Kumar, a meeting of inter-state council had been called. People wanted to make *Hans* the mouthpiece of the Parishad. The letter was welcomed by Premchand. He handed over his *Hans* to this new *yajna* of unity for this new obligation. Since October 1935 *Hans* became the mouthpiece of the Bhartiya Sahitya Parishad.¹²

First Attempt to form PWA in London

In India under the leadership of Premchand, efforts were being made to organise Indian authors and to move towards unity and reciprocity among Indian languages. However in Soviet Union, Soviet Writers' As-

sociation was formed in 1934 under the leadership of Maxim Gorky. On the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the Soviet Writers' Association, congratulations and solidarity messages were sent by likes of Romain Rolland, Andre Gide, Henri Barbusse, George Bernard Shaw. Another such attempt to organise the writers was made in Paris in June 1935, led by Henri Barbusse. 'World Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture' was called in Paris. The conference was held during June 21-25. Among the conveners of the conference were the world famous authors like Gorky, Rolland, Andre Marlaux, Thomas Mann and Waldo Frank. Sajjad Zaheer has written that the convention had expressed the voice of authors against fascism, and in support of the exploited people of oppressed nations.¹³ In this conference the standing committee of progressive writers from all around the world was formed and English author E M Forster was made its president. Its central office was established in Paris.

To protect the interest of the authors against imperialism and fascism, concerted efforts were started globally. In 1935, few Indians having socialist ideology decided to form "Indian Progressive Writers' Association" and to make it a constituent member of 'World Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture.' Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand were given responsibility to call its meeting and also to implement the decisions taken at the meeting. Mulk Raj Anand was elected as President and Sajjad Zaheer as Secretary. A manifesto was prepared in the same meeting. Munshi Premchand was closely following all these activities. With full sympathy for the association, he was spreading its objectives through his journal *Hans*. In January 1936 issue of *Hans*, he even published the summary of the Manifesto of PWA formed in London.

Welcome of PWA in India and Support of *Hans*

Some people think that the decision to form PWA was made in London and the same was implemented in India. Such people do not understand the complex relationships of various elements and sources, they immediately resort to simplification. Premchand was playing a central role in the formation of the association in India while Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand were involved in the activities of PWA in Paris, Moscow and London.

Premchand was not satisfied with the formation of an association alone. He wanted to see every effort of bringing "new age in literature" linked with each other. *Hans* was playing the role of an organiser. *Hans* had published a comment:

We were puffed with joy to know that literature has succeeded in bringing new freshness and awareness among our well-educated and thoughtful youths. To fulfil this objective, the foundation of The Indian Progressive Writers' Association has been laid in London, and seeing the Manifesto sent by it, we hope if this association stick to its new route, the new age of literature will arise.¹⁴

As far as question of language is concerned, Premchand was in favour of Hindi-Urdu unity. He had supported all efforts made by the Indian Academy. Hindustani Academy, a common platform of Hindi and Urdu had an annual celebration in January 1936. Premchand also attended the function where he met with Firaq, Ahmad Ali, Dayanarayan Nigam and Sajjad Zaheer. They had a discussion to establish PWA all over India and at wider level. It was decided to meet after two days at Sajjad Zaheer's house. Maulvi Abdul Haq and Josh Malihabadi were also present in the meeting. Though Munshi Dayanarayan Nigam was not too excited, but Premchand's mind was full of joy and while signing the draft Manifesto he said with laughter: "I am an old man and you people are running speedily. How can I match your pace, I will break my knee."¹⁵

From the writings of Shivadan Singh Chauhan, it is clear that "after Sajjad Zaheer's return to India 'Indian Progressive Writers' Association' had already been formed in the last days of December 1935 in Allahabad. The draft Manifesto was also signed by Nirala and Pant."¹⁶ It had also got assurance of cooperation from the eminent personalities like Tagore, Nehru, Jaiprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Dev.

New Democratic Trend in Literature, Premchand and Protest Against Fascism

It is not accidental that when Premchand returned home after delivering a lecture at Purnea Conference (22-23 February, 1936) of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, he noted down a poem of Iqbal which had a democratic leaning. He started thinking afresh on the social obligation of literature:

If poetry does not have power to create awareness then it is lifeless. Whether you depict *hala*, *kafas* or the nightingale, it should be powerful enough to make the life restless. This is not the time to shed tears before lady loves. We lost several centuries in this business lamenting the separation and ended nowhere. Now we need a poet like Iqbal who can put life into our dead bones. See, how this poet has depicted Lenin pleading before God and God is so inspired with him that he ordered his angels:

Wake up and let poor of my world awaken,
 Let shake the walls of *kakh-e-umara*
 Let heat the blood of slaves with belief
 Let fight *kunjishkfaromaya* with the king
 The age of the democracy is coming
 Erase the map of *kohen* wherever you see.

(The age of Democratic political authority is coming, erase everything which is archaic and conservative – underlining such ideas at that time was really a great thing).

Premchand was playing a crucial role for the unity of the Indian intellectuals and litterateurs who were against fascism and imperialism. International Writers' Conference was already held in Paris. Now Brussels was hosting a world peace conference in 1936. Pandit Nehru was echoing the voice of India in Brussels as the representatives of the Indian national liberation movement. Indian leaders could not remain silent especially when the movement was being spearheaded by the great leaders like Romain Rolland and Henri Barbusse. A manifesto signed by Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore Ramananda Chattopadhyay, Nandlal Bose, Prafull Chandra Ray, Jawaharlal Nehru etc., was sent to Brussels. The manifesto condemned the repression on writers and journalists by the British. It even condemned censors and custom officials. It said:

Ghost of the mega war is hovering over the whole world. Fascist dictatorship is busy in collecting weapons rather than food. Instead of enriching culture, it is now demonstrating its militarist form with the aim of empire-building. The method resorted to by Italy to suppress Abyssinia is a setback for all those who believe in intelligence and civilization. Conflict and rivalry of big imperialistic powers, promotion of narrow nationalist attitude, increasing amount of war materials- all these are prior indications of the grim circumstances. On behalf of our countrymen we want to say that we hate wars. We do not support it as it is against our interests. We are totally against India's participation in any of the colonial war as the future war will ruin the civilization.¹⁸

Nagpur Session of 'Bhartiya Sahitya Parishad'

On the other hand, the conference of the 'Bhartiya Sahitya Parishad' was held in 1936 in Nagpur. At that conference, a pamphlet was distributed with the signature of Premchand, Narendradev, Maulvi Abdul Haq, Pandit Nehru and Akhtar Hussain Raypuri. This pamphlet urged literary activities to follow progressive direction.

The above appeal had a great impact on the conference. Almost all

the major literary figures participated in the debate taking into account this appeal. The resolutions passed in the conference were also in support of progressive literature. These resolutions were greatly influenced by the Congress Socialist Party and the Communist Party.

Agyeya had sparked a controversy about the conference. Reporting in *Vishal Bharat* he wrote that the resolution of the revolutionary literature had fallen and the people of Communist and Socialist ideology could not achieve much.¹⁹ Akhtar Hussain Raypuri attacked him on the misleading reports of the proceedings of the conference. In his article published in July 1936 issue of *Vishal Bharat* he clarified that reality was something else. He wrote that the Parishad had put up two proposals:

1. 'Bhartiya Sahitya Parishad' will never promote the literature which is opposed to the high ideals of life, which is bad in taste or which disrupts communal harmony. The Parishad will support creation of only such literature which resolves the questions directly related to public life.
2. The Parishad will function either in Hindi or Hindustani.

Out of the two, the first proposal was bound to be opposed. Akhtar Hussain Raypuri presented his arguments by saying: 'It is the reader who has to decide whether or not this proposal is dictatorial. No writer is willing to call his writings as ideal less, boring, and answers of dead questions. Despite this, you have built the walls of good (su) and bad (ku) inside your brain. Whenever you call one thing good and the other bad as per your standard, you are sowing the seeds of dictatorship. Such types of morality gives birth to intolerance.'²⁰

Banarsidas Chaturvedi and *Agyeya* had opposed the proposal of writing revolutionary literature in that meeting. According to them the revolutionary literature is hollow and preposterous. Responding to their criticism, Akhtar Hussain Raypuri wrote:

The argument for opposition of revolutionary literature by terming it producer of hollow and preposterous literature does not hold good. When is our country producing revolutionary literature? The poems and stories published in the name of '*art for art's sake*' contain petty and suppressed desires which has nothing to do with live and direct questions of public life. The hollow and meaningless literature is coming because the writers of such literature are neither aware of their own soul or the soul of the world. They are wrapped under the fatty skin of self (*swa*) and a huge world is gradually heading towards its ideal. The revolutionary writing will grow and develop with the revolutionary movement. Presently it is in nascent stage because the thunder volt of the revolution is blinking in a remote space.²¹

Formation of PWA in India

Keeping this background in mind, it is necessary to understand the historical perspective of the formation of Progressive Writers' Association and formal declaration of the commencement of Progressive Literary movement.

Communist Party of India was banned in June 1934. The whole Party had to go underground. In 1934 itself most of the activists of the Communist Party, some Socialists and the extremist Congress leaders had constituted Congress Socialist Party within the Congress. In 1936, they started a Hindi weekly *Sangharsh* from Lucknow to promote the Marxist ideology. Narendradev, Jay Prakash, Ram Manohar Lohia, Benipuri etc. had established links with the officials of this Congress Socialist Party. The session of the Congress was to be held in Lucknow. Though Communist Party was underground, its sympathisers were given a free hand to continue their political agenda through the Congress platform. Perhaps because of this reason, the Marxists and the non Marxists within the Congress Socialist Party started confronting each other.²²

During these days, the Party had introduced a variety of plans to create an open organisation by mobilising various mass organisations for establishing public relations, promotion of Marxism-Leninism, intensifying the ideological struggle against the reformist leadership and increasing its influence on intellectuals, students and farmers. Among these organisations, there was also an organisation of writers. Sajjad Zaheer was given the responsibility of conducting its operations.²³

He was a young man who had recently returned to India after spending years in modern European culture and British life style. Sajjad Zaheer had written 3-4 short stories in Urdu but his knowledge of Marxism was good. He was neither connected with the agricultural population nor with the urban masses. He was even unaware of the problems being faced by Indian authors at the level of creativity. Despite these flaws and complaints, the good part was that he understood the importance of Premchand's leadership in India. They felt the need for an organisation of writers for the creation of realistic literature. Sajjad Zaheer wanted to lay the foundation of PWA with the support of the fellow Indians who had returned from London. He writes about them:

They were often those young men who had already returned to India before us and we considered them likeminded and sympathisers of progressive movement if not writers or artists.²⁴

Thus the progressive intellectuals began the task of running the

progressive literary movement and the organisation. These intellectuals were not writers. Hansraj Rahbar had mentioned the names and duties of these: (1) Dr. Ashraf, the Professor of History at Aligarh Muslim University (2) Dr. Mahmuduzzafar, Vice Principal of a college at Amritsar and his wife Dr. Rashid Jahan (3) Prof. Hiren Mukherjee, who after getting a degree of barrister from Oxford used to practice at Calcutta. (4) Dr. Yusuf Hussain Khan, who got a doctorate from Paris on Bhakti and Sufi religious movement. and (5) Hathi Singh, who later married Pandit Nehru's sister Krishna and who had returned to India after completing his education from Oxford.

It was quite natural for Sajjad Zaheer to get support of university students and professors due to his contacts with these well educated elites and intellectuals. In Allahabad, he got support from people like Ahmed Ali, Firaq Gorakhpuri, Dr. Syed Ejaz Hussain, Prof. Ehtesham Hussain, Waqar Azim, Pant, Shivdan Singh Chauhan and Narendra Sharma to run PWA.

Sajjad Zaheer in his book 'The Light' (*Raushnai*) has thrown light on the objectives of formation of PWA.

Such were the thoughts that occupied the minds of most young progressives in the early period of this literary movement. So, when we took the first step towards organising this Progressive Literary Movement, some things assumed prime importance: that the Movement should relate to the common people of the country- the labourers, the peasants, and the middle classes, and that it should oppose those who exploited and oppressed these people, that the literary efforts should create awareness, unity, and the enthusiasm for taking practical steps among the people, and that it should combat all those tendencies that give rise to despair. To ensure all of this was our prime duty. This then led to the conclusion that all this was possible only if we consciously took part in the struggle for the independence of the homeland, as well as in movements for improvement in the interest of the common people of our country. We realised that we could not remain silent witnesses, that it was necessary to assume the role of soliders in the war for independence as far as our capabilities would allow us. This does not mean that writers must turn into political workers, but it does mean that they cannot ignore politics. The progressive writer must have love and a deep empathy for humankind. It is not possible to be a progressive writer unless one desires freedom, the good of mankind, and democracy. That is why, knowingly and openly we were trying to link the Progressive Literary Movement and movements for independence and democracy in the country. We wanted Progressive intellectuals to meet

labourers and peasants the poor and oppressed common people and to become a part of their political and cultural life, to participate in their meetings and processions, and to invite them to their own processions and conferences. That was why we stressed in our organisation that in addition to their creative activity, it was necessary for intellectuals to come closer to the life of the common people. As a matter of fact, this was essential for the birth of new literature. For the same reason, we did not want the branches of our organisation to turn into bunches of reclusive intellectuals. We want them to be active, so that gatherings of writers would be attended by others as well, so that the works of writers would be openly discussed. We wanted writers and poets to meet the common people, to become a part of them, to reach them, and to learn from them. Despite being an organisation of writers, and concentrating heavily on creating literature, we did not wish to see our organisation turn into an Anjuman Taraqqi-i-Urdu or a Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. On the contrary we wished to see it become dynamic literary organisation with a direct and permanent bond with the common people.

We tried to structure our organisation in accordance with these ideals.²⁵

Lucknow Congress session was held in April 1936, and the first conference of Progressive Writers' Association was held parallel to it. Pandit Nehru was elected as the chairman of the Congress session and Premchand was made the chairman of the Progressive Writers' Conference. During the same time *Akhil Bharatiya Kisan Sabha* was formed in Lucknow. Prof. N. G. Ranga was appointed its President and Swami Sahajananda Saraswati as Secretary.

Why was Pandit Nehru brought as President in Lucknow Congress session? Which forces were standing with Pandit Nehru? Pattabhi Sitaramaiyya has written on the political climate of 1936 "Socialist ideology was dominating everywhere. The wave of student's federation and youths associations was catching on."²⁶ Bhagat Singh's execution, suppression of mass movements and failures of civil disobedience and salt movements had exposed cruel, repressive and violent character of British imperialism.

In such a situation in 1936, making Gandhi as President of Lucknow session of the Congress was in no way favourable to the interests of the Congress. Moreover it could have led to the loss of Congress's popularity. "It was expected that Pandit Nehru will act as a bridge between the new and old and Gandhism and Communism and thus surprisingly, he became eligible for the Presidency of Lucknow session of the Congress."²⁷

The whole country charged with new strength and new leadership was impatient to intensify the struggle for freedom. In this charged atmosphere farmers, students and writers were all busy with forming their own organisations. Disillusionment with Gandhism, spread of socialism and its increasing popularity and also made an impact on Hindi-Urdu writers. Lucknow conference of PWA was received with warm welcome from journalists, intellectuals and writers of Hindi, Urdu and other regional languages.

Due to large contact base in Allahabad, the PWA started functioning here smoothly. But in Lucknow situation was very bad. Not a single local writer came forward initially. Dr. Mahmuduzzafar and Dr. Rashid Jahan from Amritsar had distributed pamphlets and collected donations. They also made the welcome committee of the conference.

By this time, thousands of workers reached Lucknow to join the Congress conference. Narendradev, Jaiprakash, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, Miyan Iftkharuddin and Sarojini Naidu pledged to join the Progressive Writers' Conference.²⁸

The presidential address of Premchand in the first conference of Progressive Writers' Association was historic. The sense of realism which was developing within the boundary of idealism was now taking proper shape. It began to attract the new generation to the thought process of Social Realism.

Premchand said that 'criticism of life' was the best definition of literature.

He said about Progressive writers' Association that this name is wrong. Writer or artist is inherently progressive.

...art confirms aesthetic instinct but there is an aspect of utility in the aesthetic instinct. The existence of beauty is not absolute but it's relative. For a rich person, some object is the source of happiness and for the others it may cause suffering.

Premchand emphasised on making changes in the criterion of beauty. He said, "we will have to change the criterion of beauty. Present criterion is based on richness and luxury."

Moreover, he also attacked the aesthetic sense of the ruling class. Premchand said, 'for them, aesthetics lies in a beautiful lady, but not in a poor sweating lady who is making her child sleep while toiling in the land. They have decided that undoubtedly beauty lies in painted lips, cheeks and eyebrows but not in tangled hairs, dry lips and withered cheeks. All

this is narrow vision defect.' And lastly, addressing the progressive writers he said, 'We are soldiers carrying the flag of the society.'

Attack on the literary conservatism, individualism and dull aesthetic vision and demand of literary interest from writers leading to the revolutionary romanticism and towards social idealism was the gist of the presidential address of Premchand. The reflection of the Premchand's address could be seen in the Manifesto of the Progressive Writers' Conference. The objectives of PWA are clearly defined in its Manifesto:

1. To organise the institutions of Progressive Writers' of all over India.
2. To promote progressive writers and translators and fight against reactionary tendencies to support freedom struggle of the nation.
3. To assist the progressive writers.
4. To protect freedom and independence of thought.

In the struggle between the reactionary and progressive forces, a writer should not be neutral. It was the historical necessity. PWA strongly felt and fulfilled this responsibility.

Translation from Hindi by Nalin Vikas

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