

Title: The Progressive Writers' Movement: With Special Reference to the Urdu Literature

Submitted by: Rakhshanda Jalil

Under the guidance of: Professor Mushirul Hasan at the Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia

Findings

The purpose of this dissertation was to trace the birth, development and decline of the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM) in India, and study the reasons thereof. All through, the PWM was studied in the context of Urdu literature. This study of the PWM did not begin with the first All-India Progressive Writers' Conference in April 1936, nor even with the publication of a book called *Angarey* in 1932 which is generally regarded as the harbinger of literary radicalism in Urdu literature. Instead, it began with tracing the gradual emergence of political and social consciousness from the mid-nineteenth century, as reflected in the Urdu literature of this period.

The significance of the PWM is uncontested for most commentators on the literary history of India. This study has attempted to show that while the influences on those associated with the movement were diverse, the PWM was essentially an Indian phenomenon. The PWA, too, was a heterogeneous group of writers – some established, others upcoming; some already committed communists, others with socialist leanings and a great many with no discernible ideological moorings save an inchoate desire to change the world. They drew their inspiration from the world around them, and from political and social events both within India and the world outside

The findings of the study are briefly as follows:

- The PWM was responsible for introducing a new literary sensibility, one that was more attuned to the common man than ever before;
- It help up a more faithful, more ruthless, more accurate mirror to society than had hitherto been the practice;
- It brought together more people, especially the intelligentsia, than any other movement with the exception of the Aligarh movement;
- It drove its tentacles deep into different parts of the country and drew a response from the common man;
- The work produced by its members and fellow-travelers as well as sympathisers had a lasting effect on literary values decades after its decline;
- It played a vital role in inculcating the values of liberty, equality and justice;
- It drew attention to crucial issues of hunger poverty, inequality, exploitation, gender justice, education, human rights; and
- Most importantly, it provided an impetus to the national freedom movement by focusing attention on nationalism, love for the country and freedom from foreign rule.

The thesis concluded with the observation that ideas do not die when movements decline. No, As Plato had observed, ideas are the Principal Reality. In contrast to individual objects or material things which undergo change and flux, Plato believed that ideas are perfect, eternal and immutable. Indeed, notions of Liberty, Equality and Justice continue to ring true centuries after the French Revolution. Movements propelled by ideas may die or end or be curtailed, but ideas, such as the idea of progressivism itself does not die. Therefore, while the movement with its rigid formalism (to turn the words of the original *Manifesto* against those who helped draft it) may be a thing of the past, the spirit of progressivism is not dead and gone. It lives whenever a writer speaks out against injustice, inequality and oppression.

By way of conclusion, the principal findings can be said to be how the Party's diktat *vis-a-vis* literature was not acceptable, or at the very least not acceptable *in toto* by all writers and intellectuals. By tracing the fissures that began to arise both within the PWA and among those who were sympathetic to the progressive cause and ideology, we are able to see how even those free-floating intellectuals who had sympathy for communism per se and professed adherence to a liberal, left-leaning outlook began to display a definite bias towards free(r) systems. However, for every liberal there was a rigid practitioner of progressivism, and some members of the PWA could not escape the pitfalls of 'excessive devotion to a cause'. In its excess, to put it in a nutshell, lay the seeds of the downfall and eventual decline of a movement that began, ironically, by propagating rationality above all else.