



# CONTEMPORARY MINORITY LITERATURE IN INDIA: A STEP TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper aims to highlight the importance of Minority Literature as an instrument of social transformation. Minority Literature can serve as a window to the world of minority community. It has the potential to enhance understanding among often conflicting cultures. The argument underscored in the present study will not only help one recognize the value of plurality and appreciate it but also realize ethnic diversity as a positive attribute that is indispensable for strengthening multicultural societies where coexistence is indispensable. The paper advocates considering majority and minority not as binaries but as complementary to each other.*

**Keywords :** *Minority Literature, multicultural societies, ethnic diversity, binaries and complimentary.*

## INTRODUCTION

The constitution of India guarantees the right to equality to all Indian citizens irrespective of their class, caste, gender, religion, abilities, or nationalities. The United Nations Organization has also declared that every human being is equal and free from all forms of discrimination. But discrimination is deeply and firmly rooted in most societies because of the hierarchical divisions existing there. These rifts are especially conspicuous in multicultural societies like

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India; certain groups or communities of people experience discrimination and are exploited by the socially powerful sections. In the socio-cultural context of India, too, one finds that some sections are pushed to the periphery of the society because of their religious status. Based on religious status Indian society can be broadly classified as majority community and minority community.

Minority is a small group of people within a community or country, differing from the main population in race, religion or political persuasion. In Indian Constitution Article 30 has described minority with reference to the religious and linguistic context only. Indian government has setup National Commission for Minorities. It has notified six religions as minorities. They are Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains. The total percentage of minority population of India is approximately 20% with Muslims population being around 14.2%, Christians population 2.3%, Sikh around 1.7%, Buddhist 0.7%, Jains 0.4% and Parsis around 0.006%. The researcher feels minority communities should not be considered in terms of numbers or body count but must be treated as well as represented through the same standards as that provided to the majority thus rendering social justice henceforth treating the minority also as equal humans.

Before heading towards understanding Minority Literature, let us first try to understand the word Minority. According to the Oxford dictionary minority is a condition or fact of being smaller, inferior, or subordinate; smaller number, or part; a number which is less than half the whole number. Minority in simple words means to be in a group which coexists with a more powerful majority group but is subordinate to the majority group. Social sciences use the term minority by underscoring subordination as the chief deficits of minority group. So minority can be understood as a group that is less powerful as compared with the majority and hence is relatively more vulnerable to oppression. Minority can be understood in relation with terms like language, gender, race, religion, caste, class, economical status, geographical factors etc. At a higher level minority can be theoretically understood as a group which is not in a dominant position, which is less than half the whole number, having culture, language, race, religion distinct than the majority group and whose members have a will to preserve their specificity. In case of India the term tends to have religious connotations.

## **Minority Literature**

The literature constructed by minorities living within a society and with the majority community is considered as minority literature. The word Minority Literature was proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and was used in a very limited sense for analyzing the works of Kafka (Cergol 2014), later this term was used as an umbrella term to include minority communities in terms of race, religion, gender age and other oppressed sections of



society. Literature written by someone belonging to the minority group is considered as Minority Literature. In case of India the category tends to be represented as a religious one (Ashfaq 2015). The valuation of minority literature is significant as it provides a sense of identity to the minority communities. It provides a voice to their agony and can be seen as a glimpse of their struggle for existence. Being away from the mainstream, they are the subjugated lots and often experience discrimination. Subordination in any form is harmful and unacceptable in a civilized society because it creates social instability.

The valuation of Minority Literature is essential as it helps us in understanding their perspective. The untold experiences of minorities are visible through minority literature. Minority literature opens our eyes to new truths as experienced by the minorities and it leads us closer to humanity. Literature is a useful tool with dual action first it mirrors the oppressor and the second one is that it guides and inspires the oppressed. These dual roles are accomplished by minority literature.

Writers have played a significant role in representing the agonies of minority communities. Writers belonging to majority as well as minority communities all over the world have articulated the plight of minorities through their creativity. In Indian context non-minority writers like Anita Desai in her work *In Custody* 1984, Rukun Advani *Beethoven among the Cows* 1994, Gita Hariharan *In times of Sage* 2003 and *Fugitive Histories* 2009 and Rajkamal Jha in *Fireproof* 2007 represented minority plights. These works can be seen as set against the background of divisiveness and as a glimpse of minority's struggle for existence. These texts document the impact of communal hatred on minorities and highlight the precarity of their existence. Such works by non minority writers sympathetic to the minority can be considered as a travellers view of the minority community. The minority writers and their community are thoroughly steeped in politics of domination and subordination, politics is a major and unescapable element of minority writers, their psyche and their social formation which the non-minority writers have never experienced, so the minority writers are in a better position of representing their respective communities through their literary creativity. The experiential window available to the minority writers is not available to the non-minority writers hence minority writers portrayal has greater authenticity compared to the non-minority writers.

The creative efforts of writings belonging to the minority communities has generated a huge corpus of literature. Their attempts have acquired critical attention as well as that of the common reader. The present period is marked by the emergence of host of minority writers who strive to provide a voice to the hopes, aspirations, fears and anxieties of the respective communities through their writings.



Minority writers have played a significant role in representing minority communities. Minority concerns are being articulated through their works. A close analysis of minority literature reveals the obnoxious conditions that the minority communities have to face. The experiential window accessible to these writers is not available to others, hence these writers are in a better position to project their respective value system. These writers stand as a representative of their community and try to unfold the complicated reality. They have revealed their discriminatory situation rendering their silenced conditions visible to the society. It is crucial to listen to their voices, comprehend their ideologies and understand their perspective for social transformation.

Contemporary minority writers that have been articulating the concerns of their respective communities through their writing must be highlighted. There are a lot of writers writing both in English as well as in regional languages. English translation of regional literature can also prove to be helpful. The major writers from the minority communities writing on the contemporary themes include Faraaz kazi (The Other Side), Javed Akhtar (The New Decree), Rakshanda Jalil (The Rebel and her Cause), Anjum Hasan (Lunatic in my Head), Meher Pestonjee (Feeding Cows, Piano for Sale, Outsider), GS Bhullar (Agni kalash), Shalini Jain (Dear Silver lining), Devki Jain (Quest for Healing), Deena Mehta (Brides are not for Burning), Adil Jussawala (Trying to say Goodbye, Sea Breeze Bombay), Urmila Pawar (The Weave of my Life), Bama (Sangati), Imran Hussain (Water Spirit), Sharan Kumar Limbale (Man you should Explode, Akkamarshi), Rahman Abbas (Rohzin) and many more. Their endeavors need to be acknowledged.

The most common conflict that the entire world confronts today is the clash among different cultural ideologies. Self-glorification and denigration of others is the root cause of discrimination. To come out of the present status quo, it is essential to listen to different voices, and comprehend their ideologies. Understanding various perspectives is important to negotiate with each other. The only way of ensuring harmony between different communities is to encourage dialogues. Prejudiced notions have developed antagonism towards the minorities. One of the reasons for such misconception is lack of proper understanding due to misrepresentation or stereotype representations of minorities. There is a need to change the dominant narrative and stereotype about minorities. Proper representation is essential for better understanding of perspectives of the minorities, the culture of the subalterns, their value system and their ideologies. Proper representation can also vitally contribute to developing positive attitudes and promoting mutual co-operation; further, it will encourage the emergence of an inclusive culture.

If there exists a culture of narratives that represent minorities as a threat it would give rise to strife and violence. Such narratives will lead towards attitudes that consider Majority and Minority as binaries. So it is important to invent a narrative that envisions a different way of

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relating Majority and Minority not as binaries but as complimentary to each other . This would ensure harmony and peaceful coexistence.

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