

# Chronicles of Violence and Emergence of Revolutionary Movements: Tracing the Trajectory of Radical Trends in Literature

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 1

Month: May

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

Indra, JE. "Chronicles of Violence and Emergence of Revolutionary Movements: Tracing the Trajectory of Radical Trends in Literature." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. S1, 2025, pp. 37–42.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15550598>

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## Abstract

*"Take a hammer to change the World-  
So saying went Bhimrao"- Anna Bhau Sathe*

*For the establishment of egalitarian values in social and economic life, one has to revisit the history of revolutionary movements and read the revolutionary literatures that encompass the chronicles of violence, social, literary and historical movements. Revolution in the early twentieth century significantly influenced the entire country to undergo a transformation. Ideological and collective resistance will occur when the young intellectuals are influenced by many new ideas and political philosophies such as Marxism. This paper tries to explore the revolutionary trends in India and the impact of those trends in literature written during various timelines. Further it explores the diversities of ideology, influences and the effect of the revolutionary movements and how it became a tool of resistance against the hegemonic classes. It is an analytical and explorative study that includes history as its backdrop. It also examines and analyses the various methods of resistance. On the whole the paper tries to analyse the transformative influence of revolutionary movements on society and literature. For my study I have planned to take the novels *Ants among Elephants* by Sujatha Gidla and Indira Parthasarathy's *The River of Blood* etc as a site of revolution.*

**Keywords:** Revolutionary movements, Violence, Transformation, Resistance, Ideology, Literature

I am not a victim, I'm an immortal  
If you can bury me in the middle of the city  
I'll bloom as the bamboo grove that sing the melody of life.  
Print my corpse as this nations' cover, I'll spread as a beautiful  
future into  
The pages of history, Invite me into your  
Hearts I'll become a tussle of conflagration  
And rise again and again in this land. (Kalekuri Prasad)

For the establishment of egalitarian values in social and economic life, one has to revisit the history of revolutionary movements and read the revolutionary literatures that encompass the chronicles of violence, social, literary and historical movements. The process of revolution makes a great impact on the world and significantly

changes the society and its configuration by some means. Revolution in the early twentieth century significantly influenced the entire country to undergo a transformation. Ideological and collective resistance will occur when the young intellectuals are influenced by many new ideas and political philosophies such as Marxism. Resistance is the rebellious reaction against exploitation. These trendy social, literary movements foster the development of man and society. Hence to get rid of the exploitation, people have to be liberated from the clutches of the imperial, superior, exploiters such as society and institutions. Preaching against exploitation is a way of resistance and making a path is complex.

All work of art is propagandistic. All creative writers have an inborn quality as a propagandist. He/she has to be influenced by socio-cultural and literary movements. A writer's quality has been assessed either through distorted narration or standard narration. The recent or contemporary literature's emphasis is on the struggle for survival, routine, daily issues, discriminations and insults. Hence, most of the revolutionary movements portray the hopes and aspirations of the exploited masses. The struggle for survival, the insults they have to endure, their experiences and their outlooks are the essence of the revolutionary literary works. So, the literatures of the revolution bring in a social change and transformation. Any literature is "related to experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of those in the lower stratum of society... is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science and end as revolutionary" (Dangle).

Across the world, revolutions, protests, riots and conflicts are the symbol of transformations and the sources of social changes. All these movements, says Paulo Freire: "reflect the style of their age, reflect the peculiarities of their respective settings, manifest in their essence this preoccupation with the people as beings in the world and with the world- preoccupation with what and how they are being" (43). One should remember the sayings of Marx and Engels that "it is men that changed the circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating" (28). For instance, after the Civil War in the Americas, the violent confrontation between the police and the protesters in the Haymarket, Chicago has been considered as the world's first international amnesty movement in 1877. Haymarket martyrs' martyrdom and sacrifice is an important record in the history of protest and revolution.

Confronting aggressive employers, hostile churches and newspapers, armed forces and militarized police forces, these movements needed issues like the eight-hour day (a truly international demand), tactics like the mass strike (pioneered in Chicago in 1886), and heroes like the Haymarket martyrs, whose dedication to the labour cause was absolute and whose vision transcended national boundaries. The pioneers of the labour movement — from Barcelona to Havana, from Rome to Mexico City — found all these things in the tragic Chicago story. (James Green)

After Albert Parson's execution Lucy Parsons took the charge to protest and worked for the labour class and established Chicago's Working Women's Union. She fought for the Eight-hour Day and succeeded later to prevent excesses and abuses of working time. Next to the Industrial revolution, America's republic took its first uncertain steps, Russian empire's expansion and the French Revolution were enlisted in the revolutionary movements of the world. As a result of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, Spain became the first country to introduce the eight-hour work day. Philip II of Spain, in his "Ordenanzas De Felipe II" (Ordinances of Philip II) proclaimed the same for the workers. The Socialist and anarchist movements shaped transnational working class consciousness in the minds of the people in Chicago and later widely across the globe. As a result of many people's struggles, workers now put in eight hours at work and celebrate International Workers Day, which honours the accomplishments and difficulties of labour movements.

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" says Karl Marx (79). The literary artist dealing with history treats the subject as one of power struggles that leaves

its imprint on all artistic productions of that time. He creatively presents a time and a state under transformation. The Marxist critic George Lukacs argues that a literary work, especially writing of a novel, necessitates holistic representation of a time with all its “inherent contradictions, tensions and conflicts” (493). Hegemonic presence of the landed upper classes during the pre colonial and colonial dominations, the shadowy presence of an ineffectual monarchy which appears in the form of bureaucratic greed, the manipulative presence of missionaries could be seen in the novels *Ants Among Elephant*, *Kocharethi*, and *River of Blood* etc. People are aware of Keelvenmani massacre (1968) through Indira Parthasarathy’s award winning *River of Blood* and they were exposed to the issue of tea plantations labour in Manjolai, Tirunelveli in P.H Daniel’s *Red Tea*. To uphold feudal values in modern democratic India Khairlanji incident in Maharashtra and Karamchedu incident in Andhra Pradesh in 1985 were the evidence of chronicles of violence. There are other violence that can be listed out are Paralipudur (2011), Kambalapalli (2000), Laxmanpur, Bihar (1997), Kodyankulam (1990), Shaharanpur UP (2017), Delhi (2013), Manipur (2023-24), West Bengal, R G Khar (2024) etc. One could witness the physical reminder of the caste discrimination in Madurai, Tamil Nadu is the Uthapuram Caste Wall and Two/ three tumbler system (paper cups, coconut shell, own glass etc) in many places in Tamil Nadu and other States of India. A reader tries to understand the issues of discrimination and exploitation of the people of the lower strata of the society in Poomani’s *Heat* and he /she is aware of the atrocities done to the people of Kodyankulam (1990). In many cases, the rise or empowerment and political assertion by the marginalised/oppressed will result in oppression. The upward mobility of the marginalized and the political assertion threaten the people of the other group either caste Hindus (in the Indian scenario) or people in power. Thus, the increase of the suffering populace and the small number of benevolent souls, as well as the trend of resistance movements, are established in any nation’s social history.

In Indian literary and historical accounts, large-scale killings and bloodshed were perhaps the most notable events. These stories depict the widespread violence committed by Hindu caste members against women and other members of the lower social classes, while the upper caste was virtually nonexistent. The Agricultural Worker’s Association, the CPI, the Kisan Sabha, and eventually the CPI(M) led the peasant movements in Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, starting in the 1940s. In the Delta region which is known as the Granary of Tamil Nadu, during the Zamindari System, landlords and temple authorities possessed a number of acres of land that were fertile. The Ryotwari system that was introduced by the then Governor of Madras in 1820 helped the Zamindars to get large scale of land. Since the peasant cultivators were landlords, the people in the lower strata could not have land of their own compared to the landlords of the upper class and caste Hindus. Slowly the entry of the money lenders came in and possessed the land because the taxes were very high for the peasants to pay for the government on time. The British land revenue politics also did not help the poor peasants labour in any way. Later in history “Farm Labour Act” transformed the relationship between landlords and the servant labourers. Then the militant wage struggles emerged, slowly entered into Tamil Nadu and ensured jobs for the local workers, uniform wages throughout the district and higher wages. In 1966, Paddy Growers Association was founded and led to many controversial implications of unfair decisions. For instance, Gopalakrishna Naidu, the President of Paddy Grower’s Association in 1967 induced the conflict between agricultural labourers and PGA. Later the “Land Ceiling Act in 1961” by Congress Government fixed a ceiling of 30 acres and distributed the ceiling land to the peasants under the provisions of the amended Act helped few people to cultivate. After the amendment, agricultural labourers were distributed 6000 acres of sugarcane land held by Thiyagaraja Mudaliyar of Vadapathimangalam in Thiruvavur district was a significant one. Anti landlord (Zamindari) system, movements and demands partially eradicated untouchability and agricultural labourers’ issues.

Writers are influenced by every social struggle right from the early days. In *Kuruthipunal* written by Indira Parthasarathy in 1975 one could see the impact of the Keelvenmani incident clearly. The emergence of few movements and policies in the state/country such as the Self- Respect Movement, Dravidian Movement, Non- Brahmin Movement and Reservation policy helped people to get rid of the vices of the violence.

Keezhvenmani (a village in Nagapattinam District, Tamil Nadu) is frequently cited in discussions of Dalit oppression as one of the first and most brutal incidents in post-colonial India. However, as time has passed, insufficient record-keeping and conflicting stories have obscured the event in confusion and ambiguity. The event where landlords and their followers burnt alive 44 individuals, predominantly women and children from dalit farming households, is not solely a conflict of social classes. The connections between politics, caste, and class are so complex that it is difficult to distinguish between them. However, fundamentally, it serves as a horrifying symbol of the punishment inflicted on the oppressed when they begin to seek what is rightfully theirs.

Author Indira Parthasarathy's novel shines due to his authentic depiction of characters and events, particularly drawing from the Keezhavenmani massacre of 1968 where 44 Dalits perished in a confrontation between landlords and peasants. Parthasarathy's daring story prompts readers to reconsider the significance of revolutions and the challenges they face, as they are transported to a different era through the exciting journey of the main characters, Gopal and Siva. Contemplating the self-interest of those affected by social movements highlights the uniqueness of each revolution's origins. Continuing to contemplate whether revolutions and struggles can truly be unavoidable, the book focuses on the clash between the wealthy and the poor in rural India and the clash of ideals when individuals from urban extravagance come back as leaders of village reform. The author displays great storytelling skills, culminating in a powerful climax in the final pages.

The Zamindari system (feudal landholding practices) in the Indian subcontinent, especially in South India shows the power of a landlord. In Andhra Pradesh or Telanghana, Deshmukh (the local chiefs or the heads), the Kamma Rulers and Deshastha Brahmin Zamindars in AP and Karnataka, Brahmins and Caste Hindus in Tamil Nadu were the important people who uphold the feudal system in the Southern part of India. Muslim Deshmukhs (Doras) are another group of people who caused issues in Andhra Pradesh and Telanghana. Any upper caste with power and prestige as landlords, and connected with the local government officials are called Doras (Reddies, Velama-Rao/Dora). The people who worked as peasants (labour) had to depend on the Doras for credit, work, land and the enforcement of justice. They were powerful and were very much influential in executing a few actions. The poverty of the poor peasants and their dependence are the basis of their real pride. They do not like any kind of independence, assertion from the labour class.

The revolt of the 1940s in Andhra Pradesh especially in Telangana (then it was a part of AP) is a predominant issue. The reformation in the agrarian social structure is an important element of discussion during the revolutionary period in the South. Nationalism and communism have been a trend in the 1920s. *Ants Among Elephants* by Sujatha Gidla is based on the revolution of Naxalbari movements in the Telangana region. It is a famous non fictional work that narrates the life of the revolutionary Kambham Gnana Sathyamoorthy, PWG. The impact of Naxalism initiated by Charu Mazumdar (1918-1972), the proliferation of the nationalistic and communist ideologies across the South India especially in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh has ignited many young minds. The militants of the Andhra Pradesh despite their failure at a certain point in history, inspired and brought many changes in the lives of people of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana that is very much elaborated in *Ants Among Elephants*. Satyam purely believes and says: "What will happen? ... What is Forever? What is true and what is false? Only revolution is truth. Everything else may come and go" (215)

Few Nationalist movements in India are very prominent in playing their role to change the social life of the people. Tebhaga (1945-46) is one of the nationalist movements in India that worked against the local Jotedars and Zamindars under colonial rule in the 1940s. It was a movement that spread its vibrant nature of protest in many places of then undivided Bengal. Krishak Sabha Sangathan took its initiative and acted against the social and economic oppressions of the feudalistic society. The men and women of the poor sharecroppers' families were involved in the movement. Based on the famine in Bengal undivided, there were few works of art came in the 1940s including *Anandhmata* (1882) based on 1770's famine in India, Bibhutibhusan Bandhopadhyay's *Anshani Sanket* (1944-46) a film adaptation as *Distant Thunder* by Satyajit Ray in 1973 and Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So many Hungers* in 1947. There is a book by Madhusree Mukerjee titled *Churchill's Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* about the Bengal Famine of 1943 during the period of British colonial rule in India.

The Tholseela Protest is a great symbol of the human rights struggle in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. While there are no historical records to prove its existence, the story of Nangeli, an Ezhava woman who stood against the mulakkaram, is well-known in Cherthala and Kollam. In Kerala, the belief is that only Brahmin women of the upper caste could cover their breasts in public. Women of the Kshatriya caste were allowed to conceal their breasts but were required to bare them in front of Brahmin priests when going to temples. When entering the temple grounds, they had to take off their upper garments and wrap them around their waists. The situation was identical for Nair women as well. They also had to take off their upper garments before the Kshatriyas. Therefore, the upper castes operated within the caste hierarchy. The absence of Vishay and Sudras in Kerala meant that the lower caste system, or avarnas, was primarily composed of Ezhava, Nadar, Pulayas, and Kuravas. Clothing was utilized for the regulation of society. The garments worn by lower caste men and women were simply a piece of fabric that could be wrapped around their waist and extended to the knee. So, the women of the lower caste were always unable to conceal their chests. Nevertheless, a tax known as mulakkaram was implemented, which enabled lower caste women to conceal their breasts, but they were required to pay a fee for it. The pravathiyar determined the tax based on assessing the woman's breast size. Tax rates varied based on the scale. One of the heroic struggles in the social justice history was the "tholseelai Protest" in Kerala and Tamil Nadu then undivided Madras Presidency. Discrimination happened in the name of religion, caste and colour, rituals and myth. Later it became a regular practice in the society and women were treated as slaves. Women belonging to certain communities should not wear saree and if they wear, they levied tax. In 1822 the struggle against Breast Tax started and later they were allowed to wear saree. "The revolt from the Nadar community (Sree Vaikundar's protest) of Thiruvananthapuram too added fuel to breast tax opposition and Sreemolam Thirunal, the then King of Travancore, issued a royal proclamation on July 26, 1859 and took back the tax (Kishore). Thus, 'Nangeli', the mythic woman who protested or revolted using her own body against the atrocities of the oppressors turned out to be a heroic, revolutionary figure in Kerala. P.S Menon's novel *The Breast Tax* is the best portrayal of the real history of the oppressed. The story Nangeli has been adapted into many films such as *Breast Tax* and *Patthonbatham Noottandu* (2022).

Numerous resistance movements such as workers movements in the USA, Non-Cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience, Tea Labour Movement, some ethnic movements and peasants' movements in India, Apartheid movement in South America, the Indigenous People's Movements across the globe have emerged, calling for the creation of a new society, the right to participate in social and political activities, and new rights. The distinct identity movements were active for a long time. They included efforts against the concentration of political power, against the Westernization of Indian society, and in favour of unifying India as a single, cohesive nation.

The nineteenth and twentieth century saw a number of social reform movements that were inevitably resistance movements against many issues—against oppressive social practices and traditions, in favour of the pro-Western model of rational society, etc. Even the religious movements aimed to defend and reinforce the indigenous religious and cultural ethos against the invasion of Western religious practices. The historical documentation of struggles, revolts, protests, and revolutions through literary writings has served as a means of subversion and defiance against the dominant social groups, leading to the social and economic transformation of oppressed, subaltern and marginalized lives. Through their tireless literary and artistic creations, the writers also amplified the influence of those movements and inspired the masses to rebel in the name of transformation.

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