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## Zaverchand Meghani: A Pioneer of Regional Novels and Cultural Preservation

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### **Abstract:**

The term "nation" includes all the characteristics of a country, region, or geographical area, as well as its cultural values, atmosphere, contemporary environment, and religious context. The identity of a nation is formed by a set of customs, traditions, languages, and geographical characteristics. In the context of India, a nation is a unified form of different regions. Countries have developed distinctive regional identities based on the languages they use. Regional languages also have several regional dialects. The point here is that the terms "region" and "nation" are not given, but created through a clever selection of historical subjects. The region has a "distinct personality", and the sources of that personality are the ecology and natural features of the land, the popular life that grew as a result of those features, and the history and traditions of the region. Many writers of Gujarati literature have tried to portray the thoughts of the region in their works. One of the most prominent figures in Gujarati literature, who tried to exemplify the idea of fusing regional identity and Culture with the soul of the state was Zaverchand Meghani. He spoke about the Sorath region in all his works and gave a brief account of the history of Sorath. This article attempts to analyze how Meghani was a leader in regional novels. He was really good at blending stories with local traditions and culture, which not only got people interested but also helped keep Gujarat's culture alive.

**Keywords:**

Sorath Region	Gujarati	Cultural Preservation	Regional Novelist	Folk Literature
Zaverchand Meghani	Ecology	Folklore	Gujarati Culture	Nation

**Introduction:**

A regional novel is generally thought of as a novel that is a part of the national culture. Readers of "regional novels" discover how a particular region's life is portrayed in the author's works and become aware of the distinguishable features in that geographical area. This region's distinctive qualities are the only things that set it apart from the rest of the nation. However, this can only happen when there is cultural diversity, which is a prerequisite for the proper growth of a regional novel. A regional novelist locates his or her subject matter in these geographical regions of the nation where various life patterns are present. The local novelist makes the most of this diversity, resulting in a remarkable quality.

Given the aforementioned, it follows that place plays a significant role in regional novels because it serves as a "*gathering spot of all that has been felt.*" While discussing the various aspect of a novel, Eudora Welty further points out that, A

*novelist is essentially bound up in the local, the real, the present, and the day-to-day experience of life. (Welty 254).*

As a writer of novels with a strong sense of place, Zaverchand Meghani can analyze the characters and events in the novel in great detail. Additionally, it aids him in putting the diverse, futile, and meaningless components of life together. Consequently, the author's sense of direction and the method of characterization "*pins down a novel to a particular region, real or imaginary*" (Verma 146) in this context we refer novel as "regional".

Numerous other elements, in addition to the setting or location, are also highlighted in regional novels. A regional novel emphasizes the setting, speech, and customs of a particular locality, not merely as local color but as important conditions affecting the temperament of the character, and their ways of thinking, feeling, and acting: 'Wessex' in Hardy's novels, and 'Yoknapatawpha a Country', Mississippi in Faulkner. (Abrams 113).

“*Hu pahad nu balak*”. (I am the child of mountain)

- Zaverchand Meghani.

A young Gujarati man who had recently graduated immigrated to Kolkata in 1918, amid the Russian Revolution and the beginning of the Gandhian Era, and found employment in an aluminum factory. He diligently toiled for three years, immersed in his work. He immersed himself in the floods of Bengal's literary renaissance during his free time. He studied Bengali and was directly influenced by institutions like Brahmosamaj as well as famous authors like Tagore and Dwijendra. His fascination with the influence of folklore on Bengali intellectuals led him to consider the possibility of studying the rich folk literature of Saurashtra, the region where he was born and raised—a peninsula of ancient antiquity on India's westernmost shores, in his own words. One morning, unable to control his eagerness, he gave the owner of the aluminum factory his letter of resignation and purchased a ticket to return to Kathiawar, which is now known as Saurashtra. This poet who embodied nationalism was Zaverchand Kalidas Meghani (1896–1947), who was respected with the honorific title of Rashtriya Shayaar.

His detailed study of Bengali literature led to an intense pursuit of literature. The study

of Bengali literature inspired him to travel back to his native region and conduct research on Saurashtra literature. In the letter he wrote to his friend, Meghani expresses his strong urge to return to his native Saurashtra. He wrote:

*It is getting dark. It is time for cows to return. Animals also come back from the forest. The sonorous voice of their harness bell sounds. The bronze plate of a temple also rings. I will come back as soon as I will get bored with the experience of this drudgery and mechanic type of life. I will also come back during the evening of my life. My master summons me. I will not miss the real path of my life. I recognize its call. Let me tell you that I am not alone in my lack of company. (Likhiten Hu Avu Chhu 94)*

Meghani was born in Chotila, a town with a topographical formation of rocky soil with a deep red color in the Paanchal region. The author was raised in a police outpost that the police force disliked as a gloomy exile. It was located in Mount Chotila's foothills, which is thought to be the home of Mother Goddess Chamunda. When discussing the impact of his hometown, Meghani writes:

*“One great influencing factor on me was my birthplace... Chotila, Chotila is the mountain region. I was born at the foot of the mountain. In my childhood, my siblings used to carry me around the mountain.*

*Later on, I saw the Panchaal district after 30 years but during my visit; I felt that my spirit was mountain spirit. I am thankful to my birthplace for inculcating mountain spirit in me.” (Meghani Vivechna Sandoh 3).*

Meghani has remained unsurpassed as a contributor to folk literature, even though the fact that many writers have done so as Meghani studied folk literature as a whole rather than in pieces, his contribution to it is still on par with that of his predecessors and contemporaries. Another significant distinction in Meghani's work is that, unlike other researchers, he examined and scrutinized the entire body of literature rather than just a select few genres. Due to Meghani's passion for studying folk literature, the two have become inseparable. Meghani stated in the foreword of ‘Saurashtra ni Rashdhar’ that he became interested in folk literature due to his love for the region and in particular his sense of regional pride.

Through his research into Saurashtra's folk culture, he was able to get a sense of the depth of the region's rich social and cultural history. He became aware of the importance of conserving the trove of sublime values, innate ideals, and past culture's mosaic after finishing the study. Meghani made the effort to preserve the essence of cultural and

social heritage through folk literature because it serves as a major source of inspiration for both the present and the next generation.

Manubhai Pancholi ‘Darshak’, an acknowledged authority on Meghani, very appropriately judges his status by viewing that: *“Every age needs its bard. The great bard of our age is Meghani. He does not dab with the era bygone. In one hand he holds the present and in the other the future. Meghani is the voice of the era” (Echoes from the Geers 336).* To him, the sources of inspiration remain the Paanchal Region. In his writings, Meghani makes the following suggestions about the influences that helped shape his creativity:

*I was nursed by the waters of Paanchal for only about five weeks after my birth...when I beheld Paanchal again; it was bathed in the dimming twilight of dusk.... Hills had continued to nurture my growth... The deep streams that penetrated the rocky hills and their gorges haunted by solitude were my childhood mates... A yearning to lovingly explore and record the chronicle, and not at all a childish nihilist craving to see a revival of that era, has been nagging me ever since. I am not abashed to admit it (Echoes from the Geers xxv-xxvi).*

His primary focus in his literary endeavors has been to portray all of Sorathi, whether

it be in ancient or modern times. In an article titled "Sarjan no Pradhan Sur," Yashvant Shukla observes that because of man's enslavement to the body, his world of experience is only as wide as that, which is quite usual. Despite having access to a much wider range of experiences than most people, artists, and writers are still subject to the same constraints as other people because they live on Earth.

### **The Influence of Sorath Region upon Meghani :**

To illustrate his perceptions, Thomas Hardy preferred the Wessex town's earth and folklife, while Meghani preferred the earth of Sorath and its folk life to give tangible form to his sensibilities. Through Sorath and its folk literature, he has contributed in a special way to not only Gujarati literature but also Indian literature as a whole. His folk tales, songs, plays, and novels all share the same setting and smell of Sorathi. The most distinctive feature of his work is the extensive use of colloquial language.

As Vinod Meghani has written: *Folk was one of the main forces that were used to reshape the cultural and literary life of the region. The Folk literature, in which the face of old Saurashtra is minutely mirrored, has done for it what its history cannot claim*

*to have done. There are details that history cannot claim to have done. There are details that history, the Male, does not care to preserve in his bales of records, and which folk literature, the Female, picks up and tucks away in her humble rags. (Meghani 2003 XV)*

In addition to being a fantastic local novelist, Meghani is also a fantastic folk literary artist. His stories are tragic comedies about human misfortune and misdirection, which have always been the same and true human emotions. Narayan rises from the specific to the general, and from the general to the universal. Everything that occurs in Malgudi affects the entire country of India and the universe. Everything that occurs in a character's head reflects life and the state of everyone's mind. Similarly, Sorath stands for India in general and west India in particular. Sorath is well-versed in every defining feature of Gujarati society. Meghani has expertly emphasized all characteristics, both physical and mental. The attire, including the kediyu, choini, chaniya choli, Jabba, dhoti, saree, various turbans, ornaments, Gujarati food, Dhoini (one type of bed), festivals, celebrations, marriage functions, religious activities for God, rituals, etc., have been explained thoroughly. The natural splendor of the Sorath region has received more attention from Meghani. The

fragrance of Gujarati culture or the Kathiawar region is present in Meghani's work in every way, giving people from other parts of India the opportunity to travel to Sorath or Kathiawar. He says, "*O' Lord Krishna visit Kathiawar someday; You Will surely Forget heaven*".

The novel by Meghani depicts the way of life in the Sorath region during the two decades leading up to the First World War. His writings have brought the Sorath region and its vanished folk communities to life. The entire community is depicted as suffering and appears willing to make sacrifices for the sake of self-respect to maintain the ancient and fundamental regional values in the face of modernity's changing landscape. As a result, the narrative of all of regional life serves as the main source of inspiration instead of a single individual.

### **Cultural Preservation in his Works:**

Zaverchand Meghani, a prominent writer and cultural figure, had a deep appreciation for culture, particularly in the context of Gujarat. While he might not have explicitly provided a single definition of culture, his works reflect a comprehensive understanding of culture as a multifaceted

entity encompassing traditions, language, folklore, values, and the interconnectedness of a community's identity. Through his writings, he ensured that these cultural elements were not only preserved but also celebrated for generations to come. Based on his writings and the themes he explored, we can infer that Meghani likely viewed culture as a combination of various elements that shape the identity, traditions, and values of a community or society. For Meghani, culture encompassed:

1. Traditions and Customs: Meghani often delved into the traditions, rituals, and customs of Gujarat's rural communities. He recognized that these practices were integral to the cultural identity of the region.

Example: Meghani's story *The Watch (Ghadi)* depicts the significance of a traditional wedding ritual in a Gujarati community. Through the protagonist's journey to find a watch, Meghani portrays the importance of customs in binding individuals to their cultural heritage.

2. Language and Literature: As a writer, Meghani emphasized the importance of language and literature in preserving cultural heritage. His dedication to writing in Gujarati and documenting folk tales and songs showcased his belief in the power of language to convey culture. Meghani's

dedication to the Gujarati language is evident in his vast literary contributions. His poems, stories, and essays celebrate the vibrancy of Gujarati as a medium for artistic expression and cultural communication.

Example: The song *Vande Mataram Gujarati* showcases his linguistic prowess in adapting the iconic national song into Gujarati, highlighting his belief in the power of language to resonate with people on a cultural level. Meghani's dedication to writing in Gujarati is evident in his numerous poems, essays, and novels. His work *Saurashtra ni Rasdhar* is a collection of stories, songs, and folklore that showcase his commitment to preserving the Gujarati language and the narratives that enrich its cultural identity.

3. Folklore and Oral Traditions: Meghani's collection of folk songs, myths, and legends demonstrated his acknowledgment of the significance of oral traditions in passing down cultural knowledge from one generation to another.

Example: In his collection *Halo Bolta Savaj*, Meghani compiled folk songs and legends that were passed down through generations. These folk narratives reflect his understanding of culture as an oral tradition that conveys history, values, and beliefs.

4. Art and Craft: Meghani's portrayal of rural life often included descriptions of local crafts, artwork, and artistic expressions that contributed to the cultural richness of Gujarat.

Example: In his novel *Gujarat no Nath*, Meghani portrays the craftsmanship of Gujarat's artisans, particularly the bell metal workers. By highlighting these artistic expressions, he emphasizes the cultural significance of local craftsmanship.

5. Values and Beliefs: Through his characters and narratives, Meghani conveyed the moral values, beliefs, and ethical principles that were deeply ingrained in Gujarat's cultural framework.

Example: The characters in Meghani's stories often embody the ethical values and moral principles of Gujarat's cultural fabric. In *Pimde Ghode*, he presents a tale that reinforces the values of compassion and honesty, which were deeply rooted in the cultural ethos.

6. Connection to Land and Nature: Meghani's writings often celebrated the relationship between the people of Gujarat and their natural surroundings, recognizing the symbiotic connection between culture and environment.

Example: Meghani's poem *Aa Dharati, Aa Boli* celebrates the connection between the people of Gujarat and their land. He

captures the symbiotic relationship between culture and the environment, emphasizing how the land shapes the identity of the people.

7. Culture: In Meghani's renowned work *Saurashtra ni Rasdhar*, he showcases his profound respect for Gujarat's cultural tapestry. Through his collection of folk tales, songs, and legends, he immortalizes the oral traditions and cultural narratives that bind communities together. His stories like "Khodal Ma" and "Koi Do Rang Ni Vaat" delve into cultural practices, religious beliefs, and the ethical values that have been passed down through generations.

8. Food: Meghani's poem "Ame Gujarati Jitya Ne" affectionately describes the culinary delights of Gujarat. He highlights the diverse flavors and dishes that define the Gujarati palate, including the iconic dhokla, the comforting undhiyu, and the soul-satisfying dal. His words evoke the warmth and familiarity of home-cooked meals, underscoring the cultural significance of food in bringing people together.

9. Attire: In *Gujarat no Nath*, Meghani explores the significance of the traditional nath (nose ring) worn by women in Gujarat. Through this novel, he not only narrates a captivating story but also delves into the

cultural symbolism attached to attire. The nath becomes a representation of tradition, femininity, and regional identity, emphasizing his appreciation for the cultural depth embedded in clothing choices.

In essence, Zaverchand Meghani's perspectives on culture, food, attire, art, traditions, nature, region, folklore and language converge to portray his deep-rooted love for Gujarat's cultural identity. His writings not only capture the essence of the state's heritage but also serve as a testament to his role as a cultural custodian, preserving and celebrating the multifaceted aspects that define Gujarat's rich legacy.

## Conclusion:

The most crucial aspect of Meghani is that, while characterizing any story, he depicts Sorath culture. He has displayed the customs, attire, and other aspects of Charans, Baharvatiyas, Kings, Rajwadas, Ahirs, and Brahmins. Every Gujarati will feel proud to be from this region after reading his description of the story, which has been given an emotional touch. Although he has depicted the bravery of the Bharvatiyas, it is still the end of the story that causes individuals to shed tears. This kind of human connection gives the

narrative a fresh perspective and illuminates the realities of people in India as well as Sorath.

The author has illustrated the key landmarks of the Sorath region using a variety of stories. While the river Machhu flows by the side of Morbi, the river Shetrunjai flows close to Bhavnagar. It features images of well-known cities like Junagadh, Rajkot, and Bhavnagar. Little towns like Bagasara, Palitana, Salaya, etc. Meghani demonstrated Festivals and fairs, arts and crafts, folk dances, music, food culture, and lifestyles make up a significant portion of the Sorath people's cultural background. The traditions and beliefs give the culture a more cozy feel and ensure that it is thoroughly infused with ethical beliefs. The folks of Sorath dress in a variety of costumes. In general, women wear Chania choli and men wear Kediya, Achkan, and Kurta.

Zaverchand Meghani's exploration of regional novels and Cultural preservation through folk tales was ground-breaking. Understanding Meghani folklore entails understanding Gujarati culture. To fully understand English literature, one must study Shakespeare's drama; to fully comprehend western criticism, one must discuss Aristotle's Poetics; to fully comprehend Sanskrit literature, one must

comprehend Kalidas's drama; similarly, to gain an understanding of Gujarati culture, one must study Meghani's works because he was a groundbreaker in discovering the huge under-researched heritage of Gujarati folklore. His novels reflect the Gujarati culture, including its dialects, duhas, decors, human values, sense of sacrifice, a spirit of adventure, zeal, and, of course, human flaws. The greater regional flavor is added to Meghani's book by its major regional characters than by all the regional factors that come in the themes and plots.

Meghani depicts typical Gujarati scenes to highlight the regional flavor, such as the conflict between the rural people's traditional and modern appearance, typical educational scenes, beliefs and religion, and his use of the Gujarati language. The novels by Zaverchand Meghani are important works of Gujarati regional literature. Looking at the regional appeal in Gujarati novels, the novelists like Meghani, Pannalal Patel, Ishvar Petlikar, and Madia introduced the picture of the region, either imaginative or real, in their novels to define the nation with its indigenous culture and civilization. Thus, we conclude that Meghani had succeeded in making the Sorath region immortal through his works.

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