

Chapter-2

Progressivism: Abbas as a Progressive Writer

Progressivism may be defined as the political orientation of those who support progress towards the better living condition in society and its government. This term with positive implications has its supporters everywhere in the world. Its principles are antithetical to altruistic feelings which persuade the present generations to sacrifice at the cost of their own facilities for the sake of future generations. It emphasizes on the concept of egalitarianism which believes that everyone is equal and should enjoy the equal rights and opportunities. Thereby, the current generation has equal right to the enjoyment of life as do the future generations. According to progressivism hostilities arising from the law of the jungle such as clashes over immigration, racial targeting, religious riots etc. ceases to exist and reduces to negligibility. Besides this, a progressive society believes in acceptance and inclusion. It holds that all people are equal in principle and practice and there is no reason to fight to get things resolved which can be settled through cooperation and coordination. It is against aggressions of war and means of utilization of war, violence, bloodshed to settle disputes. The progressives suppose that wars play havoc with people of war zone areas. It damages and destroys environment, economic infrastructure etc. which are essential to sustain a healthy future. Kim Petersen quotes Dictionary.com as:

Progressivism is the political orientation of those who favour progress toward better conditions in government and society. This is a term that carries very positive connotations and would be difficult to defame. If

right-wingers wish to strategize against progressivism, the best bet would seem to be to co-opt it. (Petersen 2)

It rejects the classical Trickle-down Theory of economics. This theory is morally unacceptable because it does not help in any way to pass on the money from Capitalists to the Proletariats or from rich to the poor. This theory cannot replace rights of human beings and none of the backwards and downtrodden are benefitted by its effects for two and a half centuries. Capitalists had a faith-based mechanism to root-out the inequalities found in the market economy, while as progressives believe in dialectical reality and holds that the privilege of decent life commences with living people.

Progressivism is an umbrella term which contains within itself social movements like anti-poverty movement, anti-racial movement, civil and women rights movement, agrarianism, environmentalism etc. besides many political ideologies like communism, socialism, liberalism and social democracy. It believes in the gradual reformation of economic, social and political ideas through the action of government to improve the lot of majority. Progressivism contrasts with conservatism which resists change advocated by it and on the other hand it contradicts with revolutionary-left that rejects its gradualism. It always supports and favours peace and prosperity of masses. It is more principled than political. It focuses on the welfare and well-being of all masses and the value of human being are at the heart of progressivism. It gives priority to people and the basic needs they require to survive. There is no class hierarchy and no people enjoy privilege over others. In such a system, there is no appreciable unemployment and the employed ones are treated humanely irrespective of inflation rate or other recurrent crises in capitalism. There are less chances of poverty and no section of society will be entitled to accumulate material wealth more

than they required. In progressivism, everyone will get a job that respects dignity of labour. The requirements of humans are focused more than the needs of businesses because human beings are living, growing and creatures of feeling and the businesses are social and human constructs. They do not respire, think and are emotionless.

There are many social and political groups falling under the category of progressivism exhibiting some disagreements on few tenets of progressivism. But generally they agree on core tenets such as freedom and security; community and the commons; truth and justice etc. to strengthen its roots. Sometimes it also covers under its progressive banner the concept of libertarianism, anarchism, communism, liberalism, socialism and social democracy which disagree with uncontrolled capitalism and its agendas supported by movements that occupy the right-wing of political spectrum. The right-wing agendas include corporate globalization, imperialism, neo-liberalism etc. These have made their way into the structure of most of the societies on account of the political control they have gained in major industrialized economies. They support policies that give priority to free the economy for carrying out business and enjoying monopoly. The progressives consider parties like Labour Party in United Kingdom, the Democratic Party in USA and the Liberal Party in Canada as right-wing parties because they are so obedient and subservient to the corporate capitalistic model and corporate media which is bereft of progressive ideas. It is because of this marginalization of progressives they find it uphill task to spread their ideas. The corporate media even ignores progressive ideas due to its clash with the corporate interests of media owners.

Progressivism is a large collection of interests joined in a loose movement. It is not autocratic and monolithic in nature. Progressives always show feelings of sympathy towards soldiers fighting war. A great progressive author Norman Solomon says, “we

support the troops; we want them to stop killing and being killed. We want them to come home.” Progressives never prefer personal interests rather they give equal emphasis to interests of all. It is not feasible in progressivism to talk about we, I, my, and mine. It agrees to a set of common principles wherein personal benefits are as much respected as the benefits of others.

Progressives never support and advocate military personnel to drop bombs on the habitation of civilians, children, animals etc. They show very antithetical approach towards rape and torture of prisoners around the world. They do not encourage soldiers who while carrying out orders violate the Geneva Convent which include laws of war that should protect them if they fall into a precarious situation with the enemy. They are shocked at the rulers of war who made troops and common masses to fight each other In the name of religion, nationalism, caste, creed, culture etc. for the sake of their vested interest. They regard war as a misery and demeaning of people. It has no place in cosmos of progressives. There is no need of trained killers like so-called Security in the field of progressivism.

A progressive society always welcomes open-mindedness and constructive skepticism to have a complete access to information. It looks for an independent media wherein reporters and formalists must be given complete freedom to publish any authentic and reliable news, reports, stories etc. The existence of such media is very rare in corporate world and can be visualized in dream. It is most often governed by corporate world who want to disseminate wrong information and propagandize to influence public opinion. Progressives respect religion to maintain world peace and are of the opinion that every human being has full right to choose to express their religious spirituality. K.N. Panikkar pronounces:

The progressive thus meant realisation of social and political change which would put an end to the feudal and colonial order, and usher in a state of consciousness transgressing the conservative. The meaning of progress, therefore, was historically specific. The aim of progressive culture, however, was not limited to changing the conditions in the material world. It was equally concerned with elevating literature, theatre and other forms of culture to higher levels of creativity. (Panikkar 16)

According to the spirit of progressivism no human being can impose his will and religious faith on anyone else who want to enjoy their own religion. Progressives advocate questioning, openness to dialogue, critical thinking to enable common masses to identify right and wrong information. They hold that there is no justification for anyone to misinform people regarding any issue and it is highly prohibited. They disagree with close-mindedness, acceptance of information passively and personal attacks. It upholds openness to inquiry no matter what may come and prepares fertile ground for freedoms of human and non-human world. They cherish, nourish and protect all human freedoms especially right to freedom of speech. Although free speech is not an absolute right it must work as the cornerstone of progressivism. Since it is opposite to racism, therefore it agrees to restrictions on the freedom of speech if spiced with racism or hatred. Kim Petersen observes:

A progressivist society supports openness to inquiry. Principled freedoms are to be cherished and protected. One freedom that is particularly under attack, in many quarters, is the right to freedom of speech. Free speech, while not an absolute right, must be a cornerstone

of progressivism, especially for views held to be repugnant to progressives. (Petersen 3)

Progressivism is of the opinion that education being a fundamental right must be made accessible to all the citizens by creating conducive atmosphere for their effective learning. It must help students to explore and formulate their own views on the content, type and source of information. Progressives believe in democracy but they feel that it needs to be redefined afresh because its actual existence and extent of existence is highly dubious. They value genuine democracy, though their opinion of democracy and the process of its realization are different. They think the way to achieve a world of progressivism is solidarity and not with lust of power and wealth embedded deep in the nature of human being. Progressivism is a rejection of human nature which is wholly and solely driven by ego. It attracts the logic of the masses looking for a better life together in complete consonance with nature.

Progressivism talks about social justice and prefers motivation over punishment and believes in liberation of masses and creates situations for universal equality in life. Progressives advocate social welfare, women's right to vote, prison reforms and elimination of corruption in government. They mostly fight for civil rights and one such association of progressives is National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People. Kyle Gillette observes:

Justice dictates a relationship not only between the personal and the political, but also between reality and discourse. Truth includes not only facts but also more generally a stance of honesty and integrity, transparency in government, and a strong commitment to reason. Justice has a firm basis in truth, but reverses the relationship between reality and discourse. (Gillette 25)

Progressivism cultivates a good number of values called as progressive values but the core value pairs include freedom and security; community and the commons; truth and justice. Progressives value freedom of religion, speech, choice etc. They hold that every human being must enjoy full right to feel and speak frankly; travel and marry openly. They support the practice of security which includes freedom from hunger, exploitation, ignorance, violence, war and poverty. When they state that they value security, they mean to say that they value freedom from illness and chance disasters. They believe that skilled and talented ones should be permitted to succeed but do accept those unsuccessful and untalented ones is also mandatory and make their access easy to basic human rights and needs. They value communities of people stabilized by human bonds, social structures and a feeling of mutual interdependence. They are guided by sympathy and accountability stressing that “we are all in it together.” In progressive communities questions are raised on rules meant to govern the state. Progressives value the commons which means what we can share and cannot claim as private property to live our life luxuriously. The commons include environment, education, culture etc. They believe that the commons are hold in general by all the humans irrespective of religion, race, colour, creed etc. Kyle Gillette opines:

Freedom/Security refers to individual rights and protections; Community/The Commons refers to group interactions and how they relate to shared resources; and Truth/Justice refers to the formal rules of discourse that mediate between individuals and groups. (Gillette 13)

Progressives lay a great emphasis on the value of truth. Truth is the combination of fact, integrity, a strong commitment to reason etc. The value of truth shows a strong progressive desire for impartial and rational analysis. It is believed that reason and

accuracy are life giving and vital for the character of progressivism. Justice, a progressive value, operates in the world in the form it is legislated and survived. Progressives propose that every human being must be fair in his actions, deeds, judgments etc. They measure the justice of a law based on its effectiveness at proceeding progressive cause and on the degree to which it makes a logical sense. Progressive's well-being refers to the quality of life and its well-being is always holistic in approach and action. For example well-being of health, vitality, honesty, communication with others, intellectual engagement etc. Kyle Gillette argues:

Progressives should recognize that emotion is an intrinsic component of human decision-making, and should learn how better to use evocative narratives and make appeals that resonate emotionally, not just to trust facts and rationality to carry an argument. (Gillette 27)

Progressivism has often directed its progressive energy against social injustice, inequality, corruption, war etc. The foundation it is built on, ranges from women's suffrage to labour movements, civil rights to environmentalism, anti-war activism and subaltern rights. This movement believes in the empowerment and equality of the underdogs of society and proposes that the government must protect the common good of all from commercial greed and unchecked individual control of capitalism. They oppose and challenge legal injustice and its loopholes advocating their elimination. Progressives do not wait for change from top to bottom but change is brought about by working class or middle-class people from bottom.

Progressivism in America and Europe

The Progressive movement started in the political system of United States of America during progressive era which started in 1890s and continued till 1920s. It was a period

of social activism and political reform which aimed at the purification of government, elimination of corruption by exposing and weakening their autocratic superiority. The important progressives of then America were Theodore Roosevelt, Robert M. La Follette, Charles Evans Hughes, William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson. The movement felt need of modernization of out-dated ways in every sector with latest scientific facilities. This movement did not confine itself only to politics but it permeated its progressive tentacles into every field such as education, church, economics and so on. In academic field the authors gave way to the research professors who published progressive ideas in the new scholarly Journals and Press. In the beginning the movement functioned at local levels, soon it stretched out to State and National level and finally engulfed the whole Western Europe and even Asia. They drew support from the middle class people like lawyers, teachers, physicians, ministers and business people. A group of journalists called Muckrakers exposed wastage, corruption, and scandal in magazines, such as *McClure's Magazine* and *Time Magazine*. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), a novel, also played a crucial role. The Progressives toiled hard to bring about the necessary change in education with special emphasis on its various aspects such as hygiene, physical and health.

Progressivism in India

For the first time it was in 1930s when Indian writers faced and felt trauma of English colonial oppression. Consequently, they reflected the atrocities being imposed upon them in their writings such as Novels, Short Stories, Poems and Plays etc. People expressed their long buried emotions and thoughts either with pen or by joining Indian freedom movement. All such writers organized themselves under the banner of progressive writers association. This was the most gigantic and the strongest

movement after Sir Syed's Education Movement as per the reports of the Dawn in India. It has influenced both Urdu and Hindi writers equally and also those who were one or other way affiliated with it. These writers resorted soon to political gatherings and rallies besides their gatherings in Coffee-Houses openly. They wrote in Newspapers and Periodicals regarding the agenda of their writers association which used to keep circulating the entire sub-continent. In such an age when echoes of national struggle were felt in the entire sub-continent, the writers of the association became revolutionary and socialist. The writings of these writers focused on exploitation, oppression, military dictatorship, war and subjects related to cultural and political life of post-partitioned India. They were alienated and imprisoned for many times because of such revolutionary writings. This process of theirs continued even after partition. Some of the writers went to Pakistan and frequented 'Pak Tea House' in Lahore sometimes daily and sometimes on weekends. And in India the meeting place for the writers was 'Coffee House' in Delhi. They were out and out against imperialism and firm believers cum advocates of equality and social justice. This movement sought to inspire people by their writings advocating equality and attacking social, mental, economic and political backwardness. It was called 'Anjuman Taraqqi Pasand Musannifin-e-Hind'. The Indian progressive writers movement basically started in 1932 with a collection of short stories called *Angare* (Burning Coal) written by Ahmed Ali, Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jehan and Mahmuduz Zafar. It was a collection of short stories which became then very controversial and brought about hostility in India and was finally banned. Then its post-scripture took place in 1933 on behalf of the British, U.P. Government. It was then on April 5, 1933 when Ahmad Ali and Mahmuduz Zafar announced a league of Progressive authors in the leadership of Allahabad. It expanded later and became the Indian Progressive

Writers Association. Finally, it was in 1935 that the Progressive Writers Association was established in London by some great Indian intellectuals and writers with full support and encouragement of few British literary figures. The meeting of the writers association held in the Nanking Restaurant in central London includes figures like Mulk Raj Anand, Sajjad Zaheer and Jyotir Maya Ghosh. The PWA was comprised mainly of the Indian students of Cambridge, Oxford, and London University who used to meet a couple of times a month to discuss and analyze articles and short stories. These writers drafted a manifesto which was later on adopted in 1936. Ahmed Ali and N.M. Rashid quotes “The Manifesto of PWA” as:

Radical changes are taking place in Indian Society. The spirit of reaction, however, though moribund and doomed to ultimate decay, is still operative and is making desperate efforts to prolong it. Indian literature, since the breakdown of classical culture, has had the fatal tendency to escape from the actualities of life. It has tried to find a refuge from reality in baseless spiritualism and ideality.... All that arouses in us the critical spirit that examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, which helps us to act, to organise ourselves, to transform, we accept as progressive. (Ali 94)

The Indian Progressive Writers Association was launched as a reaction against excessive imperialistic exploitation, social evils, communalism etc. The movement had taken onus of bringing about unity in diversity, secularism, freedom from British rule. The PWA holds:

To establish organisation of writers to correspond to the various linguistic zones of India; to co-ordinate these organisations by holding conferences and by publishing literature; to establish a close

connection between the central organisations and to co-operate with those literary organisations whose aims do not conflict with the basic aims of the Association; to form branches of the association in all the important towns of India; to produce and to translate literatures of a progressive nature, to fight cultural reaction, and in this way to further the cause of India's freedom and social regeneration; to protect the interests of progressive authors; to fight for the right of free expression of thought and opinion. (PWA)

The Indian Progressive Writer's Association was established in London in 1935. The All India Writer's Association was launched in Lucknow in India on April 10, 1936 and the Progressive Writer's Association was set up in Calcutta in July 1936. Early leaders of the Association included Syed Sajjad Zaheer, Ahmed Ali, Mulk Raj Anand, Rashid Jehan and Mahumuduz Zafar.

Abbas: A Progressive Writer

K.A. Abbas was born on June 1914 in Panipat, Haryana. He is known to people as K.A. Abbas but he preferred to call himself as communicator. He was many in one at the same time by being a Journalist, Film-maker, Novelist, Short Story writer, Screen writer. He was born to an enlightened couple, Ghulam-us-Sibtain and Masroor Khatoon. His father Ghulam-us-Sibtain was son of Khwaja Ghulam Abbas who had the distinction of being one of the chief rebels of 1857 revolt and is the first martyr of Panipat to be blown from the mouth of a Cannon. On the other hand his mother Masroor Khatoon was the daughter of Khwaja Sajjad Hussain who in turn was son of Altaf Hussain Hali, the chief protege of distinguished Urdu poet Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib. Abbas's childhood ambition was to develop himself into a sportsman or a railway guard but he was trained to read the Arabic text of the Quran at the

irrational will of his father breaking his palace of dreams. Therefore, his early schooling took place at home in Arabic and theology which made feasible his direct admission in 2nd Standard in a Primary School affiliated with Hali Muslim High School in Panipat, Haryana, where he continued his education till 7th Standard. Abbas joined 8th Standard in Aligarh Muslim University at the age of eleven in 1925 and got his first article “Pool” published in the same year at the age of eleven in *Children’s Magazine*. He passed his B.A with English Literature in 1933 and L.L.B. in 1935 from Aligarh Muslim University. Just after that he took admission in M.A. English but unfortunately could not complete it because he was rusticated from the University for hoisting tricolour Indian flag on university students union. Abbas states:

Since the Arabic alphabet, was substantially the same as the Urdu alphabet, when I went to the primary school, I was given admission straightway in the second grade. That is how I could matriculate at the age of fifteen, graduated with a B.A. degree at the age of nineteen, and pass out of the Aligarh Muslim University with an LL.B. degree (at the compulsive behest of my father) at the age of twenty one. (Abbas 30)

K.A. Abbas had a firm faith on his strength and stamina and was not reactive but positive and proactive about his career. He did not accept his father’s career for himself who had chosen the profession of a lawyer for him. But he took up journalism as his career. The dream cherished by K.A. Abbas had eventually come true when he joined *Bombay Chronicle* for a remuneration of rupees 20 for four articles per month. This chronicle brought him in touch with contemporary politics and politicians like Jawahar Lal Nehru. During the same period he worked as a correspondent of *The Hindustan Times*. These two papers brought in him political maturity and

brainstormed his mind with social and political ideas. Moreover, the papers also made him aware about international events such as Fascism in Italy, Nazism in Germany and Militarism in Japan. K.A. Abbas worked as a reporter-sub editor till 1939. R.G. Mathapati states: “Actually Abbas's father wanted him to become a lawyer or a doctor, but as he was highly influenced by Saiyadain he decided to become a revolutionary, and as a first step, he took to journalism.” (Mathapati 2)

K.A. Abbas as a journalist got chance to work as a film critic in “Bombay Chronicle” edited by Syed Abdullah Brelvi. He with a sharp analytic bent of mind examined films minutely with a realistic eye and became famous for his outspoken criticism of inconsequential, shoddy, putrid film scripts. This brought about a huge loss to the chronicle resulting in his promotion to the post of editor of Sunday edition and a columnist writing “The Last Page” which continued till his last breath 1987. Abbas observes:

Meanwhile, my criticism of films was becoming more and more outspoken, disregarding all the warnings of, and restrictions imposed by, my editor. The result was that one day the producers gave an ultimatum “If Abbas continues as film critic we will not give a single inch of advertisement to the chronicle.” (Abbas 215)

K.A. Abbas’s entry into the world of filmography is a matter of chance. When he heard people taunting him that to criticize is easy than to write a film script, provoked and inspired him for writing a film script because challenge was very unacceptable to the boldness of Abbas. Thus he wrote the script of the movie *Naya Sansar* which was later accepted by Sasadhar Mukherji. This script bagged him Bengal Film Journalists Award. In this way Abbas was dragged into film world as a script-writer, director and producer. Hasib argues:

He was challenged by one of the film-producers to let them see him write a film story; for it was easier to criticize than to write. Try your hand at writing a scenario and then we shall see. Abbas was then young and easily provoked; he turned a film creator from a film critic. (Hasib 3)

Although K.A. Abbas was busy in writing for paper, films etc. he kept triggered his consciousness by creative writing such *An Indian looks at America* in 1941. He was very self-assertive in expressing his opinion on any issue, no matter whatever may be the consequences. It was because of self-assertive behaviour that he started criticizing film world as a film critic. This criticism proved beneficial to him but detrimental to paper causing its commercial loss. H.S. Chandalia observes:

Back at the Bombay chronicle Abbas was confirmed as film critic. He had started writing publicity material for some studios earlier. Abbas was given full liberty as a film critic because of his bold and frank criticism of films caused commercial loss to the paper and his promotion to the editor of Sunday edition. (Chandalia 10)

K.A. Abbas was an ambivert and an outgoing personality with mercurial touch of sensitivity. He had come across so many great personalities in his life right from Jawaharlal Nehru to the then American journalist cum novelist Ernest Hemingway. He moved out in 1938 for world tour and visited many countries such as America, England, France, Japan, China, Singapore etc. and came across many world famous dignitaries. Dr. R.G. Mathapati observes:

Abbas travelled round the world more than once as a messenger of universal brotherhood and interviewed several renowned personalities in literary and non-literary fields, including the Russian Prime Minister

Khrushchov, American President Roosevelt, Charlie Chaplin, Mao-Tse-Tung and Yuri Gagarin. (Mathapati 1)

Abbas and IPTA

The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) is a significant mass cultural movement which started in twentieth century India in 1943 with the intention to build awareness about social responsibility and national integration. It was founded by icons like K.A. Abbas, Dr. Bhabha, Anil de Silva, Ali Sardar Jafri and Dada Sharmalkar. The foundation Conference of IPTA was held on May 25, 1943 in Marwari Vidyalaya, Bombay (now Mumbai). Its initial impact was so powerful that a new form of expression took shape. It was to leave a lasting impression, making the arts an expression of the people's yearning for freedom, economic and social justice and a democratic culture. Over the last six decades many prominent artists, writers, musicians, directors, dancers and singers have been a part of IPTA. Lalit Joshi quotes IPTA resolution as observes:

The immediate problems facing the people are external aggression by the Fascist hordes who are the deadliest enemies of freedom and culture; internal repression by an alien Government which seeks to hold our people in subjection and prevent them from organizing an effective defence of their homeland; rapid disintegration of the entire economic life of our people and particularly the havoc wrought on the morale and the health of our people by the shortage of food and other essential articles; and lastly the absence of sufficient unity among the people's forces which alone can compel the imperialist to retire, stop the economic disintegration of the country and defeat the Fascist aggressors. (Joshi)

Chandreshwar in his *Bharat Mein Jan-Natya Andolan* divides the history of the peoples' theatre movement into three phases namely the first phase (1943-1947), which saw the birth and development of IPTA, the second phase (1948-1958) that encompassed the Indian peoples' theatre movement after Independence and the third phase which began in 1986 and continues till today. During the Bengal famine of 1943, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas along with other members of IPTA travelled all over India, performing plays and collecting funds for the survivors of the famine, which has destroyed a whole generation of farmer families in Bengal. This work of IPTA impressed Abbas positively and the Bengal famine influenced him negatively and so he based the script of his film *Dharti Ke Lal* upon two IPTA plays, *Nabanna* (Harvest) and *Jabanbandi* by Bijon Bhattacharya, and the story "Annadata" by Krishan Chander. Even the cast of the film has mainly actors from IPTA. It was the first and perhaps the only film produced by IPTA and remains one of the important Hindi films of that decade. It proved to be tremendously influential not only to future filmmakers who admired its neo-realist qualities but also to intellectuals of India's left-wing.

K.A. Abbas played a crucial role as a member of IPTA during Mumbai communal riots. He describes how the IPTA, PWA and fifty other cultural organizations came together during the communal riots that occurred at the time of 'Partition' to remove the mental barriers that divided Mumbai into 'Hindu Mumbai' and 'Muslim Mumbai'. Abbas says that they had different trucks one with Prithviraj Kapoor along with his two sons, Raj Kapoor and Shammi Kapoor, beating the drum. The IPTA truck had Balraj Sahni and Prem Dhawan and Chetan Anand and Dev Anand. The Urdu Progressive Writers were represented by Sajjad Zaheer, Ali Sardar Jafri, Kaifi Azmi, Sahir Ludhianvi and Majrooh Sultanpuri.

Abbas and Filmography

K.A. Abbas made the first move of his career as a journalist by joining *National Call* a New Delhi based paper just after completion of his B.A. He started *Aligarh Opinion* in 1934 while studying law which is regarded as India's first university students' weekly before independence. Then in 1935 after completing his education at Aligarh Muslim University, Abbas joined the *Bombay Chronicle* and continued with it till 1947. He started a weekly column in it which was known as "Last Page". When *Bombay Chronicle* was closed, he shifted the column "Last Page" to *Blitz* magazine. This column became the longest running column in the history of Indian journalism which he continued till the last breath of his life. The collection of these columns came then in the form of a book. Dr. R.G. Mathapati observes:

Abbas's all columns from 1941 to 1987 have been collected in the two volumes of *I Write as I Feel*, (which covers the twelve years of his career in the *Bombay Chronicle*). And *Bread, Beauty and Revolution* (covering the thirteen years of his career in *Blitz*). These two books of his are an encyclopedia of art, music, film, literature and everything "Last Page" that is related to human life. They show how deeply Abbas delved into contemporary life and its problems, undeflected caste, creed, language or province. (Mathapati 2)

He became a film critic but due to criticizing films frankly he was made the editor of the film section. He entered the film world as a part-time Publicist for Bombay Talkies in 1936, which is a production house owned by Himanshu Raj and Devika Rani. Abbas's career in the world of films started with *Naya Sansar* in 1940 and continued right up to his last incomplete film *Ek Aadmi* in 1987. He sold the screenplay of this film to Himanshu Raj and Devika Rani in 1941. In the meantime

Abbas started writing scripts for other directors *Neecha Nagar* for Chetan Anand and *Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* for V. Shantaram. He made his directorial debut in 1945 with a film based on the Bengal Famine of 1943 *Dharti Ke Lal* for the IPTA. In 1951, he established his own production company in the name of *Naya Sansar*, which produced films like *Anhonee*, *Munna*, *Rahi* (1953), *Shehar Aur Sapna* (1964) and *Saat Hindustani* (1969). He went on to write scripts for *Jagte Raho* and *Awaara*, *Shri 420*, *Mera Naam Joker*, *Bobby* and *Henna*. The filmography of Abbas includes *Naya Sansar* (1941) –Screenplay, Story; *Neecha Nagar* (1946)–Screenwriter; *Dharti Ke Lal* (1946)– Screenwriter, Director, Producer; *Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani* (1946)–Screenwriter, Story; *Aaj Aur Kal* (1947) –Director; *Awara* (1951) –Screenwriter, Dialogue; *Anhonee* (1952)–Screenwriter, Dialogue, Story, Director, Producer; *Rahi* 1953–Director; *Naghma* (1953)–Director; *Munna* (1954)–Screenwriter, Director, Producer; *Darwaza* (1954)–Director; *Baradari* (1955); *Jawab* (1955)–Director; *Sabse Bada Rupaiya* (1955); *Shahzada* (1955); *Shree 420*(1955)–Screenwriter, Dialogue, Story; *Jagte Raho* (1956)–Screenwriter; *Jallad* (1956); *Bada Bhai* (1957); *Pardesi* (1957) – Screenwriter, Director; *Mehfil* (1957) – Director; *Hathkadi* (1958) – Director; *Zindagi Ya Toofan* (1958); *Do Boond Pani* (1972) – Director; *Bharat Darshan* (1972) Documentary – Director; *Bobby* (1973) – Screenwriter, Story; *Kal Ki Baat* (1973) Short Film - *Char Dil Char Rahen* (1959) – Screenwriter, Dialogue, Director; *Zara Bachke* (1959) – Director; *Eid Mubarak* (1960) Documentary / Short – Director; *Qatil* (1960) – Director; *Gir Game Sanctuary* (1961) Documentary – Director; *Flight to Assam* (1961) – Director; *Pyar Ki Dastan* (1961) – Director; *Gyarah Hazaar Ladkiyan* (1962) – Director; *Roop Lekha* (1962) – Director; *Maya Mahal* (1963) – Director; *Teen Gharaney* (1963) – Director; *Shehar Aur Sapna* (1964)– Director, Screenwriter; *Hamara Ghar* (1964) – Director; *Tomorrow*

Shall Be Better (1965) – Director; *Aasman Mahal* (1966) – Director; *Bambai Raat Ki Bahon Mein* (1967) - Writer, Director, Producer; *Dharti Ki Pukaar* (1967) Short Film – Director; *Char Shaher Ek Kahani* (1968) Documentary– Director; *Saat Hindustani* (1970) – Director, Producer; *Mera Naam Joker* (Director; *Achanak* (1973)– Screenwriter; *Juhu* (1973) (TV)– Director; *Faasla or Faslah* (1974)– Director, Producer; *Papa Miya of Aligarh* (1975) Documentary– Director; *Phir Bolo Aaye Sant Kabir* (1976) Documentary– Director; *Dr. Iqbal* (1978) – Documentary – Director; *The Naxalites* (1980) – Screenwriter, Director; *Hindustan Hamara* (1983) Documentary / Short – Director; *Love in Goa* (1983) – Screenwriter; *Nanga Fakir* (1984) (TV) – Director; *Ek Aadmi* (1988) – Director; *Akanksha* (1989) (TV) – Dialogue, Screenplay; *Henna* (1991) – Story.

Abbas and his Achievements

K.A. Abbas has bagged many awards in the field of literature, filmography etc. The list of his honours and awards starts with *The Herald Cox Prize* in 1934 and moves on to include the award for the best dialogue of *SHRI 420*, President of India Gold Medal for *Shehar Aur Sapana*, Academy of Art award for direction in 1964 for the same film, Maharashtra State Award for his *Fakira* in 1964. He was awarded Haryana State Robe of Honour for literary achievements in 1969, the prestigious Ghalib Award for his contribution to Urdu prose literature in 1983. He brought laurels across the national border for example he was honoured with Vorosky Literary Award by Soviet Union in 1984. Abbas won three International Film Festival Awards held in Santa Barbara (USA), Gijon (Spain), and Gottwaldov (Czechoslovakia) respectively for *Hamara Ghar* in 1965, Padma Shree in 1969, by Zakir Husain -the then President of India. He was awarded Urdu Akademi Delhi Special Award in 1984

and Maharashtra State Urdu Akademi award in 1985 and the Soviet Award for his contribution to the cause of Indo-Soviet Friendship in 1985.

Progressive Propensity of Abbas

K.A. Abbas was a man of social concern and well-wisher of humanity. On seeing people dying of hunger in Calcutta in 1943 famine made him a cynic but a good social writer to depict reality in novels like *Naxalites*, *The Word is My Village* and *Dharti Ke Lal*. In 1945 when the whole Bombay was divided into Hindu and Muslim Mumbai, Abbas felt the real agony after having seen human killing human in the name of religion which found place in his writing like *Mein Kaun Hoon*. Just then after some two years Pakistan and India were born as a result of partition which sent both communities into unprecedented bloodshed. During this holocaust and carnage Abbas felt pangs and pains of bloodshed and mobilized secular artists, poets, actors of PWA and IPTA across the streets of Mumbai and supplanted hostility with normalcy and peace. H.S. Chandalia candidly remarks:

During the holocaust of the partition Abbas mobilized secular minded people, artists, poets, actors and writers under the banner of PWA and IPTA to march along the parts of Mumbai which were literally divided into the Hindu and Muslim areas. The attempt succeeded in restoring normalcy and cordiality between the two communities. (Chandalia 9)

K.A. Abbas was a strong supporter of unity in diversity bespeaking his love and respect for all religions which he has proved by talking to a Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdullah about benefits of merging with India. He never ever thought of balkanization of Mahabharata into Pakistan and India. He believed in peaceful coexistence and 'Modus Vivendi' like different flowers of a garden living cordially to

beautify it. Abbas Saheb's works upon examination shows his real journalistic cum ambassador attributes proved by his two visits to Kashmir to show Indian solidarity with them during Pakistani aggression.

K.A. Abbas as a progressive writer is one who understood and identified the miseries of common masses with the objective to project them before public and to suggest possible solutions for such problems. He never favoured colonial rule always looking for ways of freedom from it. He always opposed and condemned the social evils such as casteism, regionalism, communalism, gender discrimination. Progressives like Abbas never support any particular religion but respects every religion equally. Whatever they do for the betterment of society, they do it irrespective of prejudices and predilections. Their vision is global and their touch is humanistic. They believe in oneness and equality of man condemning the discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste, colour, sex. They love freedom of speech and expression and are its strong adherents. They are highly against exploitation, capitalism, war, bloodshed and patriarchal dictatorship. They believe in social justice and political leadership with progressive policies good for common man. These all criteria holds good for the writings of K.A. Abbas. Therefore, it can be confidently said that he was a real progressive writer. To justify and prove K.A. Abbas as a progressive writer one needs to have a look at his writings such as Novels, Short Stories, films etc. His writings will prove him the writer of social engagement. He has brought the man out of illusions described in myths and legends and has shown him the real human condition of the time with his intense desire to alter it to better level. Ahmad Hasib quotes V.P. Sathe's view as: "V.P. Sathe finds Abbas prejudiced in favour of films and filmmakers that made purposeful and progressive films, exposing social evils and making a fervent plea for humanism and justice." (Hasib 6)

K.A. Abbas has not depicted in his writings the utopian characters but has talked about the real world with real characters. There is a social purpose in his films and other writings suggesting the desperate need of upliftment of the marginals, poor, oppressed and so on. He believed that cinema besides being a source of edutainment can prove very useful in stirring up our social conscience. His works reflected the immediate need of progressive solutions to the problems of fascism and reactionary outlook without being cynical and insensitive. Even his films failed to make a market because of his social conscience and social preoccupation. Ahmad Hasib observes: “His films are financial failures; and according to one of his critics, he fails to strike a balance between the popular taste and his social preoccupation.” (Hasib 6)

The dream of Abbas he wants to fulfil about India is its freedom from British imperialism, economic injustice and human misery. This theme is somehow tangentially dealt with in his novel *Hamara Ghar*. He wanted to free his homeland, India, from whites i.e. British, Portuguese and French who exploited India for centuries. He reflected in his work “The Black Sun”, atrocities of British imposed on Indians such as the heart-rending episode of Jallianwala Bagh in 1919. This is what a progressive writer is expected and supposed to do. He touched upon the freedom struggle of India against British in his *Inqilab* and after independence in *Maria*. He has connected his writings in journalism, Short Stories, Films, Novels even the plays he wrote by a common thread of desire for social justice, freedom, equality etc. Ahmad Hasib argues:

There is a tissue of connections in his four creative activities, journalism, films, novels and short stories. This is also true of the plays he has written e.g. Barrister at law. All of them are inspired by the same desire for equity and social justice. (Hasib 26)

There were people like P.P. Mehta who levelled Abbas with charge of propaganda. But a person like Asloob Ahmad Ansari focuses on Abbas's progressive vision and thinks him successful writer of fiction. K.A. Abbas's progressive vision involves the shade of sympathy for the exploited, marginal, underdogs, tribal etc. He has given concrete shape to his progressivism in stories like "The Sparrows", "Flowers for Her Feet", "The Flag", "The Green Motor Car" etc. In "The Sparrows" he gives voice to Rahim Khan who revolts against his father's imposition of will on him though he failed. The character projected, questions the conventions of society, family, religion etc. He gives expression to his freedom of choice of carrier which has been crushed. The character even thought to marry a girl of opposite religion, believing in oneness of religion and humanity.

K.A. Abbas also championed the cause of women who have been suffering in the hands of man right from the beginning of the world. He has shown how woman is treated when she demands her basic rights such as freedom of choice in choosing her life partner etc. in "Flower for Her Feet" the character Chandra does not want to engage herself in the business of prostitution. She wants to settle with Babu to have her own family and children. But this was to make her stepfather pauper as his all luxuries were rested on Chandra's Sex work. So before her elopement with Baba, her stepfather has cut both of her feet. This is the gender injustice a progressive writer like Abbas is supposed to depict and highlight. The study of his Stories and Novels has brought forth the progressive vision of Abbas which is unlimited compassion, sympathy, feelings and concern for the underdogs, unprivileged and exploited. He has portrayed sympathetic characters in their real condition and profession. These include prostitutes, women, factory workers and labourers, Film-extras, the grass-cutters etc. They have been shown with their moral attitude. He rebukes the exploiters and the

privileged ones for their cruel, cunning and demonic face. The writing of Abbas arouses and evokes a wave of sympathy in us and hatred for the exploiters and privileged sections of society.

K.A. Abbas's progressive vision has not only dealt with the issue of victims of economic inequality but he also extends it to other social evils such as communalism, regionalism, fanaticism, separatism etc. In nutshell we can say that the progressive vision of Abbas was the improvement of human condition.

Influences on Abbas

K.A. Abbas was a writer of exploited and oppressed who fashioned his progressive social vision. However, the two important events considered as instrumental in shaping his vision in a particular direction are Soviet constitution of 1936 and the abdication of King Edward viii. He has himself accepted the influence of the two events and has jotted it down in his autobiography. He writes about the Soviet Constitution as:

On the 25th November, 1936 in the Kremlin Palace, 2040 delegates gathered to adopt the new constitution of the USSR which was later to be known as the Stalin constitution. It marked a distinct stage in the progress of the Soviet Union in the economic, political, cultural and social spheres. Later on, I read an elaboration of this constitution in the two volumes by the Webs Sydney and Beatrice. This was indeed the flood tide of socialist thought and communist ideology in the world. The doubts, the deviations, the distortions, the abrogation of "socialist legality", the cult of personality were all to come much later. At that it

seemed God (or Stalin) was in his heaven and all was well with the future of world! (Abbas 131-132)

It is basically Stalin's constitution that has fashioned the social mental set-up of K.A. Abbas. The second event that is said to have influenced Abbas and structured his ideological thinking was the voluntary abdication of Edward VIII, a British King, just for the love and betterment of working class. Abbas felt happy to listen about the unexpected generosity of king behaving humanly and said:

Another event took place at that time that not only monopolized the front pages of the world press but fired the imagination of the progressives and youth. For the first time in history, a king- the king of Britain, Edward VIII voluntarily gave up his throne for the sake of his love for a divorced lady. The lovely Wally Simpson. This was a story which was enough to set the mind of any hot blooded youth on fire. Added to the romantic angle were the rumours that king Edward, as Prince of Wales had displayed unusual traits, that he had leanings towards socialism and hated the iron-clad conventions of royalty and society. He was known to have taken a real interest in the lot of miners in Wales- the most miserable have-nots in Britain. We liked to believe that it was not merely for Wally Simpson that Edward had to lose his throne but for his sympathy for the working class. (Abbas 132)

The two important events viz Edward's socialistic bent of mind and Stalin's constitution aroused in K.A. Abbas the feeling of concern for the oppressed marginal, poor, working class women etc. He was very excited about the socialism believing it to be solution of all problems like panacea. He wrote: "I still feel enthusiastic about certain causes-freedom, socialism and peace among them." (Abbas 8)

There were some other people also who left a lasting influence on the mind-set of K.A. Abbas. The one among them is Upton Sinclair inspired by journalism for writing. He was the role model after whom Abbas wanted to fashion himself. Abbas observes:

Among the American writers, the one who influenced me greatly was Upton Sinclair. He was the writer after whom I consciously modelled myself. He was writing for a cause and his inspiration also comes from journalism. I met him in Los Angeles in 1938 and my main aim in going to California was not to see Hollywood but to see him. (An interview)

The group of writers who influenced mental make-up of K.A. Abbas include progressive writers whose writings were sincere in portraying the miseries of common masses. Their writings highly exposed all the social evils of the society. K.A. Abbas himself accepted the influence of these writers while giving an interview. Abbas pronounces:

Yes the progressive writer's movement which started in India in 1936 significantly influenced me. I came into contact with the left movement, with communism and with Marxism through the PWM, though I can say that I was never a dogmatic communist party or the socialist party or for that matter Congress. From the beginning I had differences with them all and never allowed any party to dominate me. But the influence of the PWM was certainly there because what I wrote I read out at the PWM meetings. (Indian Literary Review)

There is not a single force which can be labelled as the lone one to design and develop his literary taste but it is basically a cumulative influence of many personalities. However, there are four important incidents that made him a writer which he himself accepts. R.G. Mathapati states:

If I concluded all the things which made me a writer and gave a shape to my literary taste I put them like this. Firstly, Literary and cultural atmosphere of my home. Secondly, the spirit of nationalism, which was a leading movement of the time. Thirdly, ill health that I have inherited from my asthmatic mother. And finally, the failure of love.

(Mathapati 1)

K.A. Abbas's status of being writer is a product of many influences. It is difficult to associate his creative writing with any particular author or writing. He sucked his artistic influence of writing from different sources. R.G. Mathapati states:

Among the social realist writers and writings that influenced Abbas and enkindled in him the spirit of social responsibility and explained to him the role of art and artist in changing the social destiny were Ralph Fox and his *The Novel and The People*, Upton Sinclair and his *Lanny Budd* series, Charles Dickens, Premchand and Ratannath Sharshaar, most of whose novels Abbas had read during his college days at Aligarh. They shaped his future career as a socially committed writer. Among the contemporary Socio-Realistic writers who influenced Abbas the most are Mulk Raj Anand and Ahmed Ali (in English) and Krishan Chander and Ismat Chughtai (in Urdu) are very important.

(Mathapati 2)

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