

INDO-ENGLISH POET'S AND THEIR POETRY'S

Pandya Disha Prashant

Principal, Parivar Vidhyalaya (Gujarati Medium), Vadodara, Gujarat

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Abstract

Poetry is the expression of human life from times eternal. India in fact has a long tradition of arts and poetry from ages. Colonialism gave a new language, English for the expression of Indians. The poetry written by the Indians in English in the last 150 years may be said to have three phases: the imitative, the assimilative and the experimental. Modern poets are considered as the post independent poets who turned anthologists and self styled. It has earned its own distinct characters. A large number of Indian poets in English appeared in sixties and after. The paper presents poets and their poetry style.

Keywords: *English, India, Indo-English, poet*

Poetry is the expression of human life from times eternal. India in fact has a long tradition of arts and poetry from ages. Colonialism gave a new language, English for the expression of Indians. The poetry written by the Indians in English in the last 150 years may be said to have three phases: the imitative, the assimilative and the experimental. The period from 1850 to 1900 is the imitative phase when the Indian poets were romantic poets in the Indian garb. The British romantic poets like Wordsworth, Scott, Shelley, Keats, Byron etc. were the chief sources of inspiration for the Indians. The period from 1900 to 1947 is the assimilative period when the Indian poets still romantic tried to assimilate the romanticism of the early nineteenth century British poets and the "new" romanticism of the decadent period for expressing the consciousness of the Indian renaissance between nationalism and political changes which ultimately led to the attainment of political freedom in 1947.

Now, Indian English Poetry is more than two hundred years old. It is believed that Henry Derozio's 'Poems' was the first volume in 1827 in Indian English Poetry. To understand the development of Indian English Poetry and its proper perspectives, it is necessary to consider its origin and continuity. Some critics consider Indian English Poetry into two parts: Pre Independent and Post Independent. A group condemns the poetry written before independence while some hail the poetry written after 1947. V.K. Gokak in his introduction to 'The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Verse' and also in his studies 'Indo-Anglian Poetry' traces the growth and progress of Indian English Poetry. He classifies the pre independent Indian poets as neo-symbolist and neo-modernist. The neo-symbolists have mysticism and neo-modernist's vision is coloured by humanism. Derozio, Toru Dutt, M.M. Dutt, Aurobindo, Manmohan Ghose, Tagore, Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyay and R. C. Dutt etc. are considered as the notable names in pre-independence poetry. Modern poets are considered as the post independent poets who turned anthologists and self styled. It has earned its own distinct characters. A large number of Indian poets in English appeared in sixties and after.

Early Indian English Poetry

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio(1809-1831) is the noteworthy first Indian English poet. He was a son of Indo Portuguese father and an English mother. He had started

writing in his teens. Before joining as a lecturer in Hindu College, Calcutta he worked as a clerk. Here his spirit of enquiry, his passion of ideas, his reformist idealism and his romantic enthusiasm fired the imagination of many of his students. As a result the public opinion compelled the college authorities to dismiss Derozio from his service in 1931. He started a daily 'The East Indian' and suddenly died of cholera. Derozio lived too short poetic career which was of hardly half a dozen years.

Indian English Poetry in the Period of Freedom Struggle

This is the second phase of the Indo English poetry. 'The Dutt Family Album' (1870) is the first notable poetry work of this period. It is the only instance of family anthology in Indian English Poetry. This is a collection of 187 poems by three Dutt brothers. They are Govind Chunder, Hur Chunder and Greece Chunder and their cousin. These poets can hardly with India. They treat their Indian material as something poetically serviceable. Their major subjects are Christian sentiment, nature and Indian history and legend. Reading and music were her hobbies. She learnt English in France and England. She sailed for Europe in 1869 and returned to India in 1873. She died at the age of twenty one when her talent was maturing. There are two collections of poems on her name. Out of which one appeared in her own life time. However it was not in the nature of original work. It was 'A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields' (1876) which comprised 165 lyrics by about a hundred French poets. These lyrics are translated by her. To Edmund Gosse, the volume is 'a wonderful mixture of strength and weakness'. Toru Dutt's Keatsian progress during the last two years of her life is revealed in her posthumous publication 'Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan' (1882). The themes of these poems indicate that Toru Dutt is the first Indian poet who used Indian myth and legend extensively. Though she was brought up in Christian living or in a half anglicized environment, she gives the treatment of instinctive and spiritual understanding of the legends. Toru Dutt's poetic technique shows a sure grasp more than poetic mode. Her diction is naturally of the Victorian romantic school. She shows her prosodic skill in using different forms like ballad, blank verse and the sonnet. They belonged to the then Bombay Presidency. But it is said that Bengal was the first home of Indian English literature. Moreover it continued its dominance on the Indian English poetry for many more years. Sir Aurobindo has a parallel record of poetic achievements as a translator and narrative poet, as a metrical and verbal craftsman, as a lyricist and dramatist and as a 'futurist' poet. 'Urvashi' and 'Love and Death' are his beautifully articulated narrative poems. 'Baji Prabhu' is a first rate action poem, 'Percus, the Deliverer' is a blank verse drama. 'Thought the Paraclete' and 'The Rose of God' are the finest mystical poems in the language. His long poems 'Ahana and Ilion' are the best examples of classical quantities' meters. 'Savitri' has created a new kind of epic poetry.

Mahatma Gandhi called him as 'The Great Sentinel'. He touched and enriched modern Indian life in many ways. He was poet, dramatist, novelist, short-story writer, composer, painter, thinker, educationist, nationalist and internationalist also. He as a bilingual poet occupied the significant place in Indo-Anglican poetry. 'The Child' and a few other poems are written in English. His 'Geetanjali' (1913), a prose poem, compelled a world – wide attention and he won the Nobel Prize for literature. His prose works too were written originally in English for international public. Tagore's verse in English had lyrical quality; it had rhythm of free verse. He dealt with

simplicity, seriousness and passion. He used colloquial idiom and archaic vocabulary like 'thee' and 'thou'. Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) started her career as a poet but later she became a prominent politician of Gandhian era. She had recognition in England much earlier. Her first volume of poetry, 'The Golden Threshold' (1905) was followed by 'The Bird of Time' (1912) and 'The Broken Wing' (1917). In this period Indian English literature came into existence. India's rediscovery of her identity became vigorous. The Indian English literature began to progress, though by absorbing, learning and imitating from the West.

The Post Independent Indian Poetry in English

Like American, Australian and Canadian English literatures, Indian English literature used to express the British influence. But the post independent poetry of modern India discarded the so called influence of the West. The post independent Indian poetry in English shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, etc. of the society. The poetry gave wide range cultural trait through symbols, situations, themes and others. They presented the real world conditions, i.e. the contemporary India. Indian legends, folklores, situations, idioms, and themes became the features of Indian English Poetry. Naturally the variety of myths, symbols, images, emotions, sentiments became associated with Indian tradition and culture. The poets' attempts were consciously Indian. Even the conventional poetic language was replaced by colloquial. The modern Indian English poets reflected perspective and milieu after the independence. Due to the changes in the modern world, the nature, living standard and behavior of the man was being changed. The persona in this poetry was also changed. His inner conflict, alienation, failure, frustration, loneliness, his relations with himself and others, his individual, family and social contexts, his love, etc. became the themes of the poetry. At the same time the modern Indian poetry in English became complex, harsh and defiance of tradition. Indian poetry in a true sense was being appeared by the fifties. Indian expatriate poets do not write from the position of distinct foreign community, such as the exiled black or West Indian novelists, but their writing reflects the perspective of someone between two cultures. They may look back on India with nostalgia, satirically celebrating their liberation or asserting their biculturalism, but they also look skeptically and wryly on their new homeland as outsiders, with a feeling of something having been lost in the process of growth. The ability to tolerate, accommodate and absorb other cultures without losing the consciousness of being Indian mark the expatriate poets.

The post independent Indian poetry in English is abundant but the quality of its minor verse does not match its abundance. B. K. Das remarks, 'Indian poetry in English is Indian first and anything else is afterwards. Its base is pan-Indian and it has audience all over the country.' Moreover, the Indian English poet is concerned with 'Indianness' of his experiences. Indian poetry in English stands in comparison with the poetry of the third world countries. Thus, the first period of Indian English literature may be said to the end of 1850s. During this period in India, the British rule was accepted generally most of Indians thought that it was a great boon. The holocaust of the Revolt ushered in different ideas. Ultimately the combined results during the next two generations took place. After the Revolt of 1857 India's rediscovery of her identity became vigorous. The thought of freedom and nationality overwhelmed the literature. The Indian English poetry also learnt enough from the

West through imitation and assimilation. The post independent poetry in Indian English established its own character and voice. It has abundant in quantity and up to some extent in quality also. It has made its own place in the realm of world literature. It has three manifestations. The modern poets are brilliant commentators on Indian scene. The future of Indian poetry in English is very bright.

The Role of Bilingualism in the Growth and Development of Indo English Poetry

Bilingualism is another important factor that influences Indian– English poetry. Many Indian – English poets are bilingual or trilingual in their speech and writings. They write in one of the Indian languages besides English language. So quite naturally, the poet’s other languages affect his or her writing in English to a certain extent. However, it is construed and argued that the poet’s bilingualism exercises a negative impact on the poet’s writing in English, compounding the poet’s creativity and impairing his craftsmanship. Contrary to such a view, A. K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Gouri Deshpande who are bilingual poets have produced English Poetry of high quality that won them global acclaim. For the Indian Poets writing in English for the English speaking world, the “real” English-speaking world outside India always holds a special attraction. The modern Indian – English poet, fascinated by the real English-speaking world of the west justifiably longs to be at the centre of English language. However, he refuses to cut himself off from his own country. Thus, the modern Indian-English poet is torn between two worlds. Some of these Indian English poets settle down either in England or in America and the rest remain in India. However, their allegiance continues to be mixed. The Indian – English poets who have settled abroad temporarily or permanently continue to be insiders though they live outside. On the basis of the poet’s settlement and choice of milieu, the Indian-English poets may be divided into three groups; those who have lived in the west for a few years – particularly during their formative years and returned to India, those who have decided to make their home in the west and those who have never lived abroad for any substantial period.

The Indian English poets with their mastery of the English language and the fruitful cross-fertilization of the English language with Indian-culture learnt to think and feel in English and transmute their felt experience. So Indian English poetry can hardly be dismissed as a meaningless, unintelligent stuff of sentiments and emotions and abstract metaphorical and philosophical out-pourings. Invested richly with complex, mosaic Indian experience, shaped by Indian sensibility and steeped in Indian ethos and Indian milieu and enriched by Indian traditions, customs and myths, Indian English poetry has grown into a significant branch of Indian English literature. He belongs to the mystical school of Sri Aurobindo Ghose and Rabindranath Tagore. He never blindly aped master seer-poets of India and he evolved himself into an individualistic, authentic voice. He is a poet gifted with a vision which is largely mystical like that of Aurobindo Ghose or Rabindranath Tagore. Though he dwells on mystical, universal subjects and spiritual heritage of India, he is modern in his sensibility, perceptions and modes of communication. He portrays contemporary reality in his poetry. He achieved compactness of verse, through economy of words. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, unlike most Indian English poets, is a traditionalist and a modernist as well. Like Sri Aurobindo Ghose and Rabindranath Tagore, Harindranath is a Seer-poet with a vision. Harindranath’s poetry is a fathomless ocean

with currents of water surging on its crest, clusters of billowing waves beating eternally against its shores and with millions of pearls lying hidden deep down in its bottom. This researcher has attempted sincerely and dedicatedly a series of dives into the poetic ocean of Harindranath to pick up a few of the poetic pearls. Still a vast treasure of innumerable pearls invites the researchers to embark on further explorations.

The Major Themes of the Indo English Poetry

It is very much clear that Indian poetry in English in the post independence period is different from the poetry in the pre independence period or rather colonial period. All literature, as Taine, the French critic said, is the product of the triad, the race, the moment and the milieu and since for the Indians the attainment of independence in 1947 marks a great watershed in the annuals of India's political history, the period preceding independence was naturally full of political ferment and turmoil and the urge of the nationalist Indians to acquire a distinct national identity to avoid being brow - beaten by the imperialist forces. The Time - spirit that permeated colonial India and began to permeate independent India were different. The sources of inspiration derived from the Indian ethos were ipso facto different. What England and America witnessed in the early part of the 20th century, India witnessed in the post independence period. Indian English poetry therefore acquired a new dimension of modernity and modernist trait in the 50s when the English and the American poetry had acquired it in the 20s.

Pre-independence Poetry Themes

Poetry in English written in the colonial period, though of a different order, cannot be just dismissed as insignificant however imitative or derivative it may be. Whatever its deficiencies, it has no doubt certain areas of excellence in the works of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, Tagore and Ghose. Literary history shows how the succeeding generation tends to run down and disown the preceding generation, the predecessors. Most of the early poetry was inspired by the Indian freedom struggle and the western romantics. Derozio, Kashiprasad Ghose and the Dutt family wrote romantic poetry highlighting the Indian culture and ethos. The themes were vivid like Indian legends and myths, epics like Ramayana, childhood memories under the Indian sun etc. Sarojini Naidu with a deep sense of rhythm wrote romantic poetry basically. She also wrote about the unique Indian culture and nationality. Tagore and Aurobindo Ghose were philosophers and mystics. They put in the Indian philosophy of oneness of God, religion, childhood, spirituality etc. In fact they both are even today the most widely read and critically evaluated Indian English poets.

Post - Independence Poetry Themes

The post - independence poetry underwent a sea change as far as the themes are concerned. The poets are faced with the crisis of identity so their poetry is one of quest, a search of their self, a search for their cultural roots. The reason for such a theme of Indian poetry is not far to seek. The Indian poets who express themselves in English have their cultural roots in their community. Many of these Indian poets have been educated abroad but since they belong to the middle - class, they find themselves alienated within their own immediate circle and even from the westernized ethos.

Alienation and exile, the crisis of personal identity and of cultural identity, childhood memories, familial relations, and love, nostalgia for the past and cultural traditions

therefore constitute the themes of Indian poets. In the case of some poets, the sense of alienation from the family or the community becomes so overwhelming that they turn completely inward. The result of such inwardness is a highly personal poetry, confessional in tone and obsessed with loneliness and insecurity from which the escape is sought either in the erotic fantasies or the self-probing of a tortured soul. Such is the poetry of Kamala Das, Eunice de Souza and Shiv Kumar. The poets of the 80s seem more interested in depicting and evaluating their family background, personal and social landscapes. So do the poets Agha Shahid Ali, Dilip Chitre. Mahapatra portrays the rural Indian landscape of the state of Orissa. The poets thus reveal their awareness of raw Indian identity. The poetic sensibilities are oriented along three distinct avenues: the modes of affirmation in terms of myth and history, quest for the self in and through love, modes of negation in terms of longing for dissolution and death. In other words, modern Indian poetry has centered itself around self in relation to society, history with family as the core unit and in relation to self, its own propelled emotions and feelings. So the themes of modern Indian poetry are secular and more introspective - contemplative.

Indianness in Indian English Poetry

Modern Indian English poetry is Indian first and everything else afterwards. In Indian English poetry Indianness is a matter not only of diction and syntax but also of imagery, myths and legends. The thoughts are Indian but drapery is English. M. K. Naik has raised three basic questions about the Indianness of Indian English poetry. Some critics disregard the Indian sensibility and argue that Indo-Anglian writers have imitated British and American literature. They have committed to the western consciousness and catered the western readers. But this is a blind criticism. Most of the writers have written on Indian traditions and cultures. They have presented a justifiable, artistic image of India to the people outside India. Hence Indianness is striking feature of Indian poetry in English. According to K.R.S. Iyengar, 'to be Indian in thought and feeling and emotion and experience is a novel experiment in creativity'. Indian English literature is conditioned by Indian Geography, Indian style of life, culture, the grammar and speech habits of Indians. They write only in an alien and borrowed medium, that is, English language. Most of the pre-independence poets took inspiration from Indian mythology, legends and philosophy.

The Indian poet's Indianness may also find expressions through his imagery. The feudal imagery in Tagore establishes his links with the medieval Indian saint poets; Naidu's imagery stamps the Indian soil. While the archetypal imagery of light and darkness in Aurobindo's poetry shows his affinities with all mystic poetry. His use in 'Savitri' of images drawn from science shows his modernity. The quality of Indianness can be seen in the ethos of the best Indian poetry in English. Tagore's 'Gitanjali,' Aurobindo's 'Savitri', and Naidu's lyrics are the finest examples of Indian ethos in pre-independence poetry. In the post-independence poetry, Ramanujan shows how an Indian poet in English can derive strength from going back to his roots. The post-independence poets write not only for Indian but for non-Indians also and their appeal is universal. It is true that the achievements of the early Indian poets in English are not quite satisfactory. Their poetry is imitative and derivative.

The post independence poet faces a special problem related to the expression of an Indian sensibility. He lacks Indian sensibility. His poetic roots are superficial. His

themes are alienation, restlessness and disillusionment. His poetry is city-centered and urban-oriented. But it does not mean that he does not belong either to India or to the west. The most important thing is the use of English language. He has to use English to convey the feel of the culture. Since 1950, there is a change in the poets, attitude, outlook, themes imagery and the use of English language. His language is typical Indian English. He creates new idiom. He brought everyday conversational language very close to poetry. Moreover, the Indian poet is concerned with the Indianness of his experience. The validity of Indian poetry in English depends on the creation of Indian English idiom. In the post-1960, poets have succeeded in it. In Ezekiel's poetry, we see a number of Indian words; Kamala Das and Kumar use a new kind of unconventional vocabulary in their love poems. Indian English poetry has now taken its themes and various Indian subjects from legends, folklore to contemporary Indian situations. The images of India pervade in Mahapatra's poetry. He evokes history, myth and the tradition of his land of birth. He speaks of the myth of Sun God and Konark temple. Daruwalla evokes Indian landscape in his poetry. Kamala Das's feminine sensibility finds its true expression in her love poems. In a poem 'Ghanashyam', she invokes Lord Krishna with a heart filled devotion and joy. Indian sensibility is transparent in her poetry. She plays her roles of unhappy woman, unhappy wife, mistress to young men, and mother. She is a poet of love. From the woman's point of view, she uses English as an Indian speaks, writes and perhaps understands it. Shiv K. Kumar deals with the theme of landscape and national identity in 'Trap falls in the Sky'. In 'Relationship' Mahapatra creates myths out of folk-tales in Orissa.

Experimentation in Indian English Poetry

Prof. V. K. Gokak, in his introduction to 'The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Verse (1970)' and in his 'Studies in Indo-Anglian Poetry (1972)' traces the growth and progress of Indian English poetry. He claims that Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are the great innovators of the art of versification. Prof. V. K. Gokak classifies Indian Poets as 'neo-symbolist' and 'neo-modernist'. They were the poets of mysticism and humanism respectively. Tagore's 'Geetanjali' is a transcreation in English. Poets like Prof. P. Lal and K. Raghavendra Rao dismissed the old Indo-Anglian school of poetry. The poetry became the private voice to demonstrate their age, its mass approval and hysteria. It was a reaction against the Indian poetry written in English before and during the nineteenth century.

The Independence in India brought new movements in literature, for example the new uses of language. The new minds required new voices and new voices discovered the poets' genius to register the idiom of their age intimately. The 'new' poets of the post-independent India have won recognition both in our country and abroad. They speak in new voice. Their idiom, style, syntax speak of their freedom. The Indians won not only political freedom but also cultural freedom to create literature. Post-colonial Indian English poets registered a protest against the imitative poetry influenced by the British and American poetry. Modern Indian English poetry depicts the contemporary India. The tradition and culture of India is depicted in order to establish its own identity. The Modern Indian English poetry has acquired the distinct features and its own voice. The ethos of the post-independence Indian English poetry and pre-independence Indian English poetry are different. The modern Indian English poets became self-conscious about their language and form. They tried to

make a creative use of English in the most effective manner. The themes of these poems are very quite new regarding innovation and creation of modern poetry. Modernity, Indianness, Use of Indian idiom, Bilingualism, Exile and certain motifs are the distinctive features of Modern Indian English poetry. Indianness has been very distinct feature of Modern Indian English poetry. These poets reveal the Indian sensibility in their poetry. History, myths, legends, folklores all go together to establish a distinct Indian idiom and identity. Modern Indian English poetry is truly Indian which draws artistic material from its heritage. Mostly the Indianness is expressed through imagery. The Indian idiom has been the validity of Indian poetry in English. Very few of the modern Indian English poets write in English only. Most of them are bilingual poets. The poet like Nissim Ezekiel writes only in English. Otherwise all these poets wrote in their regional languages as well as in national language. These poet tried to mold enrich Indian English in a true sense. The Modern Indian poets are classified on the basis of their exile.

Conclusion

Thus, the Indian English poets with their mastery of the English language and the fruitful cross-fertilization of the English language with Indian-culture learnt to think and feel in English and transmute their felt –experience. So Indian English poetry can hardly be dismissed as a meaningless, unintelligent stuff of sentiments and emotions and abstract metaphorical and philosophical out-pourings. The living contemporary situations are largely presented the modern poetry in Indian English. The poets try to bring innovations in both form and content. They are conscious in creating new images and idiom. There is variety in Indian poetry and they write in living Indian English. Some of these poets are recognized by offering the commonwealth and the Third World Countries like international awards in literature.

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