

Indo-English Poetry: Expanding the Poetic Horizon

Abstract

The prime objective of this piece of work is the identification of Indian English Poet and their artistic creations. The effort of Indian writer in English in the field of composing poetry is praiseworthy, indeed. After the advent of Indo-English Poets, Indian thought and emotions, her rich cultural heritage and Indian sensibility above all the unfathomable knowledge present in the Indian vernacular have been shaped in the alien words. Indo-English poetry is originated in the early nineteenth century when the chaotic India is being ruled by the enterprising Britishers. The poet like Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo in the pre-independent era and Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, K.N. Daruwalla, O.P. Bhatnagar, A.K. Mehotra, R. Parthasarthy, Arun Kolatkar and Jayanta Mahapatra in the post-independent modernity appeared as luminous stars in the arena of English Poetry.

However, real poetry appeared in the post-independence period. Poetry became increasingly robust varied and responsive to the time. The contents of their poem includes human relationship, love, sex, Indian mythology, socio-political world, rampant corruption, exploitation, degeneration of values and many other thematic conveyances.

Keywords : Indo-English, Treasure trove, Indelible mark, Colonial hang-over, Jingoism, Indian sensibility, Mythology, Poignant, Picturesque, Bilingual, Feminine sensibility, Traumatic, Poetic craftsmanship, Alienation, Surrealism, Allusiveness.

Introduction

The English men came to India for the purpose of trade and commerce; set up their colony under the guidance of East India Company and started ruling all over the country for two marathon centuries. They exploited her treasure trove - the natural resources, the minerals and the revenue, but they left an indelible mark in her golden pages of history. Thanks to Macaulay, the president of public Instruction committee and Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the enlightened youth of India whose timely suggestion and recommendation was widely appreciated and approved by lord William Bentick, the then Governor General of India. They introduced English education in India for their own benefit of getting cheap English speaking labourers fit only for clerical jobs and for the promotion of their religion through their missionaries. However, English language has been reigning supreme over Indian soil even long after the complete departure of colonial hang-over. Indeed, India has gained a lot from them. Now, English language has been the blood of Indians without which there is every possibility of anemia of the anglicized Indians.

In spite of all jingoism and vested interest of the English people, their language has not only spread in every nook and crannies of India but it has been a global phenomenon. The efforts of Indian writers in English in this sphere are praise-worthy, indeed. Indian thoughts and emotion, her rich cultural heritage and Indian sensibility above all the unfathomable knowledge present in the Indian vernacular have been shaped in the alien words. In the opinion of James H cousins, " Indian writings in English should be Indian in spirit, Indian in thought, Indian in Imagery and English in words" (Quoted by Varghese. P.179). This is what exactly done by the Indian writers. So in the field of poems, a new term came to lime light called 'Indo-English poetry' or 'Indo-Anglian poetry means poetry originally in English by poets Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality.'

Since the first publication of Henry Derezio's poems in 1827, a volume of poems were added to the treasury of Indian poetry in English .The pioneers of this poetry movement are Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo in the Pre-independence era; and Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanhjan, K. N. Daruwalla, O.P. Bhatnagar, A.K. Mehotra, R. Parthasarath,



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Arun Kolatkar, Jayanta Mahapatra and a few others in the post-Independence modernity. They had objectified their subjective feelings collecting the raw material from both Indian culture and abroad. In this context, Bruce King says,

"Many of the poets left India either for study and travel abroad or out of dissatisfaction, some of the writers settled abroad while others returned, having made a significant choice which would be central to their subsequent history and the development of Indian poetry in English. Among the early poets Nissim Ezekiel, Kersey Katrak, Srinivas Rayaprol and Keshav Malik returned while Dom Moraes remained abroad for many years. Later Adil Jussawalla and R. Partha Sarathy went to study in England with intention of residing there. They got disillusioned and returned to India. Others like G. S. Sharat Chandra and A. K. Ramanujan became American residents" (Bruce King, P.1-2)

Though Derezio's Poems(1827) 'The faker of Jungheera', 'A metrical Tale' and 'other poems'(1828) Michel Madhusudan Dutt's 'The captive ladie'(1849), Kashi Prasad Ghose's 'Savitri', Nobe Kissen Ghose's, 'The last Day: A poem' Tagore's 'The Gardener', 'Soldier's Farwell', 'The Crescent Moon' and 'Gitanjali', Man Mohan Ghose's collected volume, song of love and Death(1926)" herald the beginning of the Indo-English poetry, in the true sense it came to lime light after the arrival of the poet like Taru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo. What Chaucer did for the English poetry, Taru Dutt was for the Indo-English poetry. In the opinion of M. K. Naik "It was Taru Dutt that Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authenticity. (History of English Literature) She is a successful story-telling poet whose works primarily deal with Indian ethos, Hindu mythology and legends. Even though she had embraced Christianity, she portrays minutely the character of Savitri, Prahalad, Jaga Dhyahuma, Narad Muni and Lakshman in her poems. Her famous poem Casurina Tree exhibits her love of nature and childhood romance.

However, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949, A.P), the first lady governor and Nightingale of India is best known for her four volumes of poetry, 'The Golden Threshold' (1905), 'The bird of Time' (1912), 'The Broken wing'(1917) and the posthumous, 'The feather Of Dawn'. Her poetry is full of poignant feelings and picturesque Indian imagery. She is famous for her folk song like 'Corn Grinders', 'Indian weavers' 'Festival of Serpents', 'Song of Radha', 'The milk maid', 'Lile', 'The palanquin Bearers' She is a romantic poet. The lovers in her poems are exemplary figures of Hindu mythology and her beloveds are all enduring ladies like Sita and Radha.

Another significant poet of pre-independent era was Sri Aurobindo, the mystic(1872-1950). His knowledge of Greek, Latin, French and Italian and scholarship in Sanskrit and English helped him to amalgamate the oriental and occidental thought. Prof. Norman Jefferies called Sri Aurobindo, the greatest common wealth poet of the 19th Century. His prose work 'The Life Divine' and his epic 'Savitri' 'Urvashi', 'Love and Death', 'Baji Prabhou' are very famous for

their yogic concept of life. C. D. Narsimhaih rightly admires Taru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Sri Aurobindo in his well-known book. 'The swan and the Eagle' Moreover, K.R.S Iyengar, V. K Gokak and M. K Naik have lauded the poetry of Sri Aurobindo and his contemporaries like Sarojini Naidu as poets of Importance.

Real poetry in English appeared in the post Independent era. The post-Independent Indian English poetry has proved increasingly robust, varied and responsive to the time. In the early sixties, poets like Nissim Ezekiel and P. Lal achieved national and International recognition. Ezekiel, both a poet and critic is a synthesis of Jewish and the Indian, the eastern and western, the urban and the rural. His poetry is a landmark creation in Indian English poetry as he could write approximating to the demands of the present day world. He could bring into a modern sensibility in confronting the confusion, bewilderment and disillusion of the time. In the words of K. N. Daruwalla "Ezekiel was the first Indian poet to express a modern Indian sensibility in a modern idiom."

Poetry, love and marriage the three major themes are properly dealt with in his very first volume, 'A Time to Change'(1952) His famous poem 'The Double Horror' gives a bird's eye view of the corruption in the outer world. His second volume 'Sixty Poems'(1953) shows the influence of W.B. Yeats, Herbert, William Blake and Carlos William. They exhibit his interest in sex with a free and frank discussion of it. His succeeding volume 'The Third' (1959) and 'The Unfinished Man' (1960) show his poetic career with greater maturity in respect of content and technique. He becomes a matured urban poet who imparts depth of meaning and artistic excellence to deal with human relationship, love, sex and city life. In his later poetry 'Hyman in Darkness' (1976), 'Later Day Psalms'(1982), he is more reflective and philosophical. To him "poet is a rascal clown, a frightened child who would neither sleep nor eat."

In the late sixties Indo-English poetry was universally recognized and equated with the literature worldwide. The poet like Kamala Das, A. K. Ramanujan, Adil Jussawalla Dom Moraes and Gieve Patel proved themselves to be competitor of International poetry and composed poetry with equal ease, mastery and command. Kamala Das, a bilingual poet of her native Malayalam and English is best known for her three volumes of poetry, 'Summer in Calcutta' (1965) 'The Descendants' (1967) and 'The Old Play House' and 'Other Poems'(1973). She is a rebel whose poetry voices against the growing cult of violence, degeneration of values, rampant corruption and dirty politics. She is the pioneer in projecting clear, frank and straight forward expression to feminine sensibility in all its varied manifestations. Her artistic creations are recording of her traumatic experience, her unfulfilled love, exploitation and frustration of life. Like Nissim Ezekiel and A. K. Ramanujan, she is a confessional poet. Her confessional poetry can be compared with Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and Judith Wright.

A.K. Ramanujan, an Indian expatriate for long, is too, another bilingual poet of kannada and English "By the time I was 17" he says, I spoke Tamil downstairs, English upstairs and kannad outside." His poetry is an expression of Indian sensibility, sharpened and nourished by western education and environment. He is aware of the decadent social milieu of cotemporary India and is pained at the deterioration of Indian mythology. He is terribly attracted towards the folklore to shape them his inner forms, images and symbols. His poems like 'Death and the good citizens', 'small Scale Reflection on A Great House' 'of Mothers among Other Things', 'The Striders' and 'Chicago Zen' show his remarkable artistic talent.

Indo-English poetry reached at the pinnacle of glory and greatness after the appearance of outstanding poets like R. Parthasarathy, Arun kolatkar, keki.N. Daruwalla, Shiv k.kumara, Dilip chitire Pritis Nandi and Jayant mahapatra. "English" in the words of Dr. Kamala Prasad Mahapatra, "is no longer the language of colonial rulers, it is a language of modern India in which words and expressions have recognized National rather than imported significances and references alluding to local realities, tradition and ways of feelings. Such Indianisation is discernible in the poetry of kamala Das, Pritis Nandy, Keki N. Daruwalla, Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra and A. K Ramanujan." (Nature culture metonymy P. 7)

R. Parthasarathy's poetry is conspicuous for the vividly metaphors immaculate command over language and lyrical intensity. To him, poetry is a legitimate expression of universal human experience. His masterpiece 'Rough passage' (1977) consisting of three parts and variety of themes, excellence of poetic craftsmanship, precision and suggestiveness of: 'Exile', 'Trial' and 'Home coming' depicts the feeling of alienation and loss of identity caused by his sojourn to England. His early poetry consisting mainly of slender romantic lyrics like 'late Lovers' 'Epitaph' 'Let's Be stranger, Always' and 'lovers' are conspicuous for delicacy of perception, lightness of touch, striking images and a romantic view of love. Adil Jussuwala says, in this connection:

"The strength of his poetry lies almost entirely in its visual Juxtaposition and the startling images. His lines don't sing. He cultivates deliberately prosaic style, an undertone of rhythm itself. So at their best his poems become memorable Individual poems. (The new poetry, Reading in common wealth Literature e. d William Walsh o.vp.1973, p.83)

Arun Balkrishan Kolatkar has imparted a new dimension to Indian English poetry by employing surrealism defamiliarization and new-modernist approach. His famous works 'A Boat ride', 'Jejuri', 'The kala Ghoda poems' and 'Sapa satra' and 'The Priest' occupy an imperishable place in Indo-English poetry. His 'Jejuri' won the common wealth poetry prize. Amit Chaudhary in his article "on strangeness in Indian Writing" says:

"In English kolatkar's impetus and ambition are somewhat different; it is to create a vernacular with which to express with a flexible amusement, a sort of urban wonder at the unfinished, the provisional, the

random, the shabby, the not-always-respectable but arresting rupture in our moments or recreation work and as in "Jejuri" and even "Pilgrimage" (The Hindu, Literary Review, oct-2, 2005). Use of Imagery and irony are two outstanding features of kolatkar's poetry. He imparts visual and sensuous effects to the ordinary and common place and turns it into aesthetic experience. He efficiently and deftly uses verbal irony in the 'Boat Ride' 'Jejuri' 'The 'Kala Ghoda poems' and 'Sapa Satra'. He portrays human nature and character with subtle touches of irony in 'The Priest' and 'The Priest's son'.

Kaki N Daruwalla one of the most substantial of modern English poets has significantly widened the scope of Indian English poetry in a variety of ways. His experience as a police officer helps him to portray vividly and minutely the contemporary Indian socio-political world with touches of irony and sarcasm. He exposes the evils of communal tension, riots, exploitation, greed, dowry and criminalization of politics. His 'Curfew in a Riot Town City' exposes the communal violence which causes disintegration of social life. In 'Migration' too, he deals with the disintegration of village community. Similarly, his 'The unrest of Desire' and 'Crossing of Rivers' (1976) depict the pleasure of love and warmth of relationship. Moreover, his 'The parijat Tree', 'Winter poems', 'The Ghagra in spote', 'Aag Matam' are suffused with Indian sensibility.

Likewise Shiv K Kumar appears as a luminous star in the arena of Indian English poetry. His volume 'Articulate Silences' (1970), 'Cobwebs in the Sun' (1974), 'Subterfuges' (1976) and 'Wood Peckers' (1979) reveal mastery of both the confessional mode and ironic comment. He attacks heavily on the unprincipled politician of his times. In 'Epitaph on Indian politicians' he attacks the politicians:

"Vasectomized of all genital urges
for love and beauty he often crossed
the floor as his wife leaped across beds"

One of the most widely published Indian English poet of our time is Jayanta Mahapatra. Like Nissim Ezekiel and A.K.Ramanujan, he is very popular at home and abroad but unlike Ezekiel and Ramanujan, mahapatra is very obscure to pursue for complexity and allusiveness of his poetry. With a short span of three and half decades, he has published seventeen volumes of poetry. He now ranks among the best known common wealth poets. The Orissa Landscape, the Orissa cultural history and background, the social life of Orissa, and the rites and rituals of the people of Orissa constitute the most significant theme of his poetry.

However, the contribution of a few more Indian poets such as Manohar shetty, Dom Moraes, Monika Varma, Sanatan Rodrigues, vikram Seth, Melanie Silgado, Meena Alexander, Margaret Chatterjee and others cannot be ignored in the field of Indo-English poetry.

Conclusion

Thus, Indian English poetry has undergone many trials and tribulations. The colonial exploitations, the cultural and linguistic diversities, above all the religious variations are some of the setbacks on the

way of Indo-English poetry. Though Indo-English poetry owes its origin to Henry Derozio's poem published in 1827, it got 'a local habitation and name' with the publication of Nissim Ezekiel's 'A Time to Change' in 1952. Between Derozio and Ezekiel, we have Kashi Prasad Ghosh, Michel Madhusudan Dutta, Toru Dutta, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chatterjee and Sorajini Naidu. The whole poetic scenario changed with the advent of our Independence and the establishment of commonwealth group of nations in post 1950 period. Nissim Ezekiel became the first modern Indian English poet in the Post-Independence period. The luxuriant growth of Indian English poetry has been felt after the publication of A.K.Ramanujan's 'Selected Poems' (1977), Daruwalla's 'Crossing of Rivers' (1976), Partha Sarathy's 'Rough Passage' (1976), Shiv K. Kumar's 'Subterfuge' (1977), Jayanta Mohapatra's 'Relationship' (1981). They brought recognition both at home and abroad. Hence, Indo-English poetry in the second half of the 20th century has created a separate identity of its own and has widened the poetic horizon of the English.

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