

A STUDY ON ENGLISH POETRY IN INDIAN SENERIO

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a comprehensive survey of Indian English poetry. The paper tries to see :1) how Indian English poetry emerged as a result of contact with different foreign cultures and 2) how it went developed as an independent variety of English literature with the passage of time. The paper shows the emergence and development of Indian English poetry through its survey of different phases and so the author has provided samples from the writings of different important phases with due regard to the themes that they have touched on.

INTRODUCTION

In order to develop a historical overview of the genre called Indian English Poetry, it would be in place to, first of all, try to build a rudimentary understanding of the nature and scope of Indian English literature of which Indian English poetry happens to be an essential part. Historically speaking, Indian English Literature began its journey as a “by-product of an eventful encounter in the late eighteenth century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India” (Naik, 1982,p.1).As a result of this eventful encounter between Britain and India, Indian English was born as a hybrid which enabled communication between the English masters and their Indian subjects so much so that with the passage of time, it gave birth to a variety of English literature now recognized as Indian English Literature. One is reminded of what F.W. Bain had forecasted about English and its proliferation the world over “India, a withered trunk suddenly shot out with foreign foliage” (Naik,1982, p.1); in fact, one form of this foreign foliage is Indian English Literature in all of its different vibrant forms like poetry, prose, drama, short story and novel.

As to the question why it is called Indian Literature in English has a simple answer. The authors in case of this literature do of course write in a foreign language like English but their style of expression, way of thinking and sensibility are all the way Indian in nature so their writings would be categorized as Indian English Literature, as for example, if one examines the writings of Henry Derozio, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Das and many others who originally hail from India but write in English, their Indianness would be quite explicit from their use of English language and the sensibility they embed to their expressions. With this small introduction of what actually Indian English Literature is and who qualifies to be enlisted and studied under this particular category of literature, it would be now quite relevant and smooth also for us to proceed to document an overview of the genesis and evolution of Indian English Poetry as a very important part of Indian English Literature.

That early texts of Indian English poetry were imitative is beyond doubt; but to say that these early Indian poets were mentally slave to the extent that they did not raise voice against the different forms of injustice and oppression of colonial institutions in India is also not true. There might be some poets who might have appreciated and praised the British rule in India; but there are many also who not only questioned it but directly spoke against the same also. An example of an Indian English poet's disdain of the colonial culture and way of thinking could be explicitly marked in these lines taken from Cowasji Nowrooji Vesuwala's collection of poetry *Courting the Muse* (1879) which presents a chaos in the whole operative administrative system:

There Devil's great and God is all unknown
There Virtue hissed and Truth has little sway
There Modesty is but feigned, and Vice alone
Shines out all foremost in glittering array
There men and women adulteries atone
And sins confess, so awkward to essay

(Mapping 108)

MODERN ENGLISH POETRY

The modern Indian English poets have imitative Whitman, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W. B. Yeats. They have also the guardian streets to the new Indian poetry. The new poet has their faith in a vital language to compose their poetry. The new poetry by Indian poets adheres their own principles. There is much experimentation in an effort to achieve modernity. Modern techniques derived from such English craft men as Eliot, Auden and Dylan Thomas, as well as from the film Industry and the advertising industry is being used. This experimental approach, this quest for originality and newness, this stress on individuality and the rejection of all that is traditional often leads to fantastic results. There is much “image-hunting” and “word hunting” in contemporary Indian English poetry. But there are a number of good poets also like Don Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan, Krishna Srinivas, Mahanand Sharma and others. Amalendu Bose writes:

Modern poets in their poetry are free to use English which is not mechanically but organically out of a natural inwardness which gives a poem its immediacy of experience. The poets of the modern time have been suddenly lifted from an exclusive to an extensive range of creative experience. They have been raised from a conservative to a cosmopolitan culture to confront the new shape of things and to acquire a new view of human destiny. The age has changed and requires a new change. This has largely been met by the poet. They have no influence of the British poets and they have their aim at working in their own way. They prefer originality and experiment in word-craft intensity and strength of feeling, clarity in thought structure and sense of actuality, freshness, sensibility, concrete, experience, trained intelligence and vitality are essential for good poetry.

Good poetry is not always lucid and clear. Nevertheless, the amateur poet ought to aim at clarity and lucidity concrete and relevant images are usually superior to vogue immensities, simple disciplined forms within which much freedom can be exercised, help the poet to discover what he feels more than sprawling accumulation of lines. Rhyme and other devices may be discarded only if structural compensations and very special effects are provided instead. Development within a poem is a sign of maturity in the poet” Modern poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarthy, K. N. Daruwalla, O. P. Bhatnagar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Monika Verma, Gauri Deshpande (2002) and many others have revealed tension in their respective poems. Their poetry has inborn Indianness.

Although some of them like A. K. Ramanujan settled outside India but even then, they explore in their poetry their roots in India. K. N. Daruwalla rightly thinks: -

Then why should I tread the Kafka beat or the wasteland

When mother you are near at hand one vast, sprawling defeat.

The fact of the matter is that the history of Indian English poetry reveals that even though it was imitative and romantic in its early phase, it was still a mature and responsible development in the literary landscape of India. There is the stigma that Indian English poetry is derivative in nature as English is not the native language of the concerned poets and writers. It is true that when Indians started writing poetry in the English language, they found their source of influence in the British Romantic poetry; and the imitative phase of Indian English poetry was deeply immersed in the Romantic colour and sensibility. One may very well assert that Romanticism became the model/proto-type for the Indian English poet, which was, in other words, the trend of the times. In this connection, Gokak makes a remarkable comment:

“It (Indo-Anglian poetry) starts as romantic poetry simply because it was born under Romantic influences. It becomes Victorian because English Romantic poetry became Victorian. It decided to go through a period of „Decadence“ because the nineties were a period of „Decadence“ in English poetry. After Decadence came the period of Georgianism and Indo-Anglian poetry, loyal as always, suddenly became Georgian. When English poetry became modernist, Indo-Anglian poetry had no alternative but to do the same.” (Arora, 2016,

Vol. I, p.13)

ESSENCE AND INDIAN OVERVIEW OF POETRY

Poetry has a unique essence and charm which can't be expected from prose. While both of them are the two faces of a coin but one having advantage on the other doesn't make sense. Iyengar in one of his books says: - “While it may be readily conceded that prose is the stale food of the courtiers of the mind, yet the point needs urging that without the wine of poetry life would lose its saviour and become merely a tasteless traffic of hours accumulating into years that presently make a whole lifetime. Let us grow by all means food grains and cabbages, for we need them for our body's sustenance: after all, though man shall not live by bread alone he cannot live without it either”(Iyengar Srinivasa, 2014).

Without any doubt Indian English poetry is remarkably great. Both the pre-Independence and post- Independence poets have a visible mark of distinction between their ideas, themes, values and applications. The pre-Independence poets articulated Indian themes in a Romantic and Victorian modes and adhered to their form and prosody and other poetic patterns. The poets of the second phase were explorers and experiment oriented figures. They started to extensive experimentation which led them to diverge from the old conventional methods of self-expression. However, coming out of the influence of the west was never easy as the pre-independence poets were the imitators of western poets like William Wordsworth. The post-independence poets had the influence of poets like Yeats, Pound, Eliot & Whitman. Frankly speaking if we talk about the Indian English Literature which covers not only poetry but other forms of writings as well however, it won't be wrong to confess that Indian English Poetry is the oldest form of Indian English Literature.

The history of India English Literature is not very old it's just one and a half century old. If we dug to find out the first piece of writing in English by an Indian, we surely find Sake Dean Mahomet as the first Indian who wrote in English the book titled. 'Travels of Dean Mahomet.' It's a fact that for anything new there is an inspiration behind. Indian English Literature had also something to inspire to write and publish in a language which doesn't belong to India. English rather English Literature influenced the people of Indian particularly that elite class living near the British colonies. This class of Indians under the marked influence of Western writers started to write which was just an imitation.

"Indian English poetry was born under a romantic star. It was highly influenced by the poetry of the English romantics like Wordsworth, Keats, Shelly and Byron. It began with verse-romances and lyrics written in the romantic vein. Toru Dutt's poems are the best case in the point. For example, the following lines from her poem 'The Lotus' (Rajani and Mehta, 2014).

Love came to flora asking for a flower
That would of flowers be undisputed queen
The lily and the rose, long long had been
Rivals for that high honour

As the time advances changes take place in every sphere of life, literature is no exception to this. Initially Indian Poetry in English was mere imitation of the western poets however as we advanced Indian English Poetry flourished and attained the lushness and developed into a separate genre. “The early Indian English poetry, thought imitative of the manner and method of English romantic and Victorian poetry, mainly dealt with the Indian or oriental themes. Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, SosheeChundur Dutt, Ram Sharma, R.C. Dutt, Kashi Prasad Ghose, Manmohan Ghose and B.M. Malabari were the pioneers and trend setters in Indian English Poetry of nineteenth century” (Khatrri, and Arora, 2010).

Afterwards Indian English Poetry entered into the new era of expansion, as such assimilation and experimental process commenced. If self-expression was all important to the poets of imitation, the poets of assimilation period started to probe into their culture which ultimately gave rise to the self-critic class of poets of the modern period.

“Pre-independence Indian poetry in English had poetic styles of its own. The English language was sufficiently Indianized to be able to express the reality of the Indian situation. At the same time the Pre- Independence poets cultivated proficiency to express themselves in English. The colloquial and conversational style was cultivated by R.C. Dutt, the simple and transparent style of Toru Dutt, the jewelled and sophisticated style of Sarojini Naidu, the picturesque style of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya have remained the excellent examples of the Anglicization of Indian poets of pre-independence phase” (Gokar, 1970a).

The pre-independence and post-independence phases play a vital role in the Indian English Poetry in a way of its development as a distinct genre. Indian English Poetry from the times of Henry Derozio’s till present has crossed all the barriers and reached to the level where even the British look at it with curiosity. Without knowing about the author one cannot say if it’s written by the native English speaker of an Indian. Praising some wonderful pieces of works by Indian poets, Bruce King writes:

“The only answer to those who claimed that Indians could not write authentic poetry in the English in which they had been educated, was to write poetry as good as that of British, American and Irish poets but to write it about Indian lives and conditions” (King, 1987).

CONCLUSION

Thus, it is the direct influence of the people of the west (Englishmen) under whose influence the English Literature paved way to what is known as Indian English Literature. The direct influence of English Literature under the colonial rule inclined a class of Indian people to learn and explore the western literature which ultimately inspired them to adopt and write in this alien language (English). Not only this western literature exposed the Indians to the new medical and scientific age which also attracted the attention of the learned Indian class.

The initial writing of Indian English writers was mere imitation of the western art form of the novel. At this phase of time an Indian English writer couldn't be differentiated for that of the British one, the reason being the direct influence of the British and the readers were mostly the British or those Indians who were Indian in flesh& blood but British in taste. Gradually Indian English writers freed& liberated themselves from the influence of the west and wrote purely in their own essence. Indian English Poetry shifted from imitative to assimilative to experimental phase. The pre-independence and post-independence phases play a vital role in the Indian English Poetry in a way of its development as a distinct genre. Indian English Poetry from the times of Henry Derozio's till present has crossed all the barriers and reached to the level where even the British look at it with curiosity.

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