

Indian English Poetry from Pre-Independence to Post-Independence Period: A Brief Study

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ABSTRACT

When we speak of Indian English poetry we speak of something big, something mega so as it absorbs almost everything what we come across. Perhaps, it would be more appropriate to say 'what is not in Indian English Poetry?' Indian English Poetry is the treasure house of true Indian cultures, ethos and mythos. The colorful Indian life from one extreme to that of the other is placed and arranged masterly in Indian English Poetry. It is one of the most important literary developments in the subcontinent after colonization, which is an outstanding source of Indian English variety rich in depiction of Indian ethos, mythos and sensibility. Broadly speaking Indian English poetry is one of the branches of Indian English Literature the understanding of which is imperative for the better disposition of Indian English poetry. Indian English Literature is roughly divided into two phases *viz.*, pre-independence phase and post-independence phase which explain the development of Indian writings in English. This paper shall focus on the progress of Indian English Literature in general and Indian English Poetry in particular during the pre-independence and post-independence phases.

Key Words : Literature, Colonization, Indian English Poetry, Indianness, Ethos, Mythos

INTRODUCTION

English literature has influenced the Indians since colonization. The British rule over India added a new chapter in Indian history that was going to make a significant change in the coming times. If on the one hand Indians were administrated by the British but at the same time it became the source of enlightenment in the field of both science and literature. After getting inspired and influence by the English language Indian writers started to write in this alien language. Indian English Literature covers all the forms of writings *i.e.* poetry, prose, biographies, history, novels, essays etc. initially the Indian English Literature was not different from that of the British however with the passage of time it emerged as a different class of writing. Poetry written in English by the Indian poets developed from mere copying to a class where it attained its uniqueness. Indian English Poetry has its unique mystic and spiritual essence. The

development of Indian English Poetry can be studied in two phase's *viz.*, Pre-Independence and Post-Independence Phase.

Indian English Literature is the product of hard labor of all those Indians who wrote in English language, which was not their native language but an alien one. Not only this, there is an equal share of those great Indian origin writers (settled abroad) who spread the beautiful Indian culture to the west. Indian English literature encompasses all what was/is written by Indian writers in English, living here in India and abroad. This literature includes poetry, novels, letters, articles, essays etc. Indian English Literature has not always been so sophisticated and polished what we see today, the beginners had to face hardships however, with the passage of time the birth of Independent form of Indian writing in English took place. Indian writers not only mastered in the field of poetry but also in the field of prose writing. Indian English poetry is

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very rich in expressions of Indianness, its culture, politics, ethos any mythos. After colonization Indian English Poetry emerged as one of the most important developments in the world of literature. Indian English Poetry spread the musk of Indian ethos, mythos and sensibility to the world of west.

Poetry has a unique essence and charm which can't be expect 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 say: -

“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 savior and become merely a tasteless traffic of hours accumulating into years that presently make a whole life-time. Let us grow by all means food grains and cabbages, for we need the 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 and 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 those 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 Madusudan 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” (Khatri, 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.

To fathom the Indian English Literature & particularly poetry, properly we need to look into the phases of their development, which are Pre-Independence and Post-Independence phases.

Pre-independence Phase:

India is a multi-lingual county each one has its own individual history and literature making influence on culture and society, the colors of which we see in the Indian poetry. India under the colonial rule no doubt struggled hard for their identity but at the same time under the colonial influence Indian society got introduced to the

world of new ideas through the portals of English literature. During the colonial period Indian literature got influenced by the western society culturally, politically and socially. The western education influenced Indians which resulted in gradual adaptation of western culture. Pre-Independence Indian English writing was the outcome of the cross – fertilization of two cultures – Indian and English. English came to India as the representative of bourgeois culture, art and democracy. Commence

The publication of Henry Derozio's poetry titled 'Poems' in the year 1827 is the beginning of Indian English Poetry. He was an inspiration for all those young Indian lover of English language. Besides his great art of composing a nice piece of poetry he was someone who had a deep and true love for his country, his sonnets 'The Harp of India', 'To India- My Native Land', 'My Country in the Day of Glory Past' express his ardent love for Indianness:

*"My country! In thy day of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow
And worshipped as a deity thou wast.
Where is the glory, where that reverence now?"*

V. K. Gokak observes, "The first quarter of the 19th century was the period of incubation for Indo-Anglian poetry and Derozio was the moving spirit then." The poets of this period include poets like Kashiprasad Ghosh, Gooroo Churn Dutt, Raj Narain Dutt, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt occupy an important position during the second quarter of the 19th century.

"Pre-independence Indian poetry in English had poetic styles of its own. The English language was sufficiently indianised 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 jeweled 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).

Spirituality is one the favorite subject of the Pre-Independence poets even though the same is true for the New Poetry as well. Spiritual poets like Swami Vivekanand, Swami Ramirth, Sri Aurobindo wrote poetry flooded with India's mysticism and spiritualism. The

following line by Sri Aurobindo in a poem 'The Golden Light' has the true spiritual essence:

*The golden light came down into my brain
And the grey rooms of mind sun-touched became
A bright reply to wisdom's occult plane,
A calm illumination and a flame'*

Post-Independence Phase:

It is not difficult to differentiate pre-independence poetry from post-independence poetry, as the post-independence poets have freed themselves from the clutches of "Englishness" and have started writing in a very Indian manner. The poets in this period have started to express themselves freely in an Indian manner, word borrowing is one of the characteristics of their poetry. We can see the pure Indian words being used very beautifully in English poetry by the Indian poets of this phase. Bruce King rightly says: "English 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, alluding to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling. Such Indianisation has been proceeding for several generations" (Gokar, 1970b).

The periods after independence was the phase of experimentation. "The third is the experimental phase, which begins after the Independence. There has been a conspicuous outbreak of poetic activity demanding the urgency of national self-definition and reflecting a painful heart-searching.

Rajyalaxmi said:

Our models have been neither exclusively Indian nor British, but cosmopolitan. Europe, Africa, America and Asia have all become a part of our cultural consciousness, offering impetus and stimulation. Our poets 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 acquire a new view of human destiny. The age has changed and requires a new image. This has been largely met by the poet" (Rajani and Mehta, 2014).

Another development in the post-independence poetry was the rise of female poetic voice. Women poets were becoming the voice of those women maltreated by the society. Post-Independence English poetry was a sort of revolt against the old one as the poets turned self-critics. These poets were past, present and future oriented.

Thus it won't be wrong to say that post-independence poetry is a new genre to which even the English readers look with curiosity. There are number of Indian English poets who have played a vital role in popularizing the Post-Independence Indian English Poetry. Thought it was not easy to free themselves from the influence of Englishness but the poets like Purushottam Lal (1958), Shiv K Kumar (1921), Nissim Ezekiel (1924), Jayant Mahapatra (1928), A K Ramanujan (1929), Purushottam Lal (1929), ArunKolatkar (1932), R Parthasarathy (1934), Kamala Das (1934), K N Daruwala (1937), Dom Moraes (1938), AdilJussawalla (1940), Gieve Patel (1940), Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (1947), PritishNandy (1947) and others emerged as the strong pillars for the construction of pure Indian English Poetry.

Nissim Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion*, Jayant Mahapatra's *Relationship*, A K Ramanujan's *The Striders*, Kamala Das's *The Invitation*, R Parthasarathy's *Rough Passage*, K N Daruwala's *Boat-Ride along the Ganga* etc. are some of the well-received pieces of quality of post-independence era.

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& bloodbut 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. 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).

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