



## BACKGROUND TO INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY: AN OVERVIEW

English

**Bojja Pranathi  
Shubhasri**

M. A- English Literature Osmania University Hyderabad-500007

### ABSTRACT

Indian Poetry in English has evolved from spirituality to specificity as its major preoccupation and concern. If we look at pre independence poetry, we meet the stalwart figures of Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and the like who despite their deep patriotic concerns wrote poems evincing their focus on the matters of soul, God or ultimate truth. These poets were very close to the spirit and tradition of Vivekananda and Ram Tirtha who were in the thick of the India awakening in the renaissance period through forging an identity and unity not only within them but also between East and West cultures. The poetry of Sarojini Naidu and Tagore although drew heavily from the Indian scenes was suffused with romanticism to the extent of making it abstract to a large sense. During the post-independence period, as a result of the decolonization or at least an attempt at it, Indian poetry wore a different and fresh face with the coming of Nissim Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Kamala Das to name a few on the scene. These poets ushered in a total radicalization on the issues of language and content. Giving up old traditional rhyme, gush of romantic similes, rhetoric and high sounding and sweeping imagery, the shift could be felt in the concretization of thoughts and feelings expressed in a concrete style. Specificity of location and theme on the basis of one's cultural and historical reality has made the poetry of present day generation more readable and relevant. The present paper attempts to analyse the Indian English Poetry in brief.

### KEYWORDS

Cultural, English, Indian, Poetry, Reality, Spirituality, Specificity, Tradition, Women's Impact.

#### INTRODUCTION:

Indian English Poetry was different from the western counter parts in its theme, language, style of writing. The writer also wrote for the Indian audience, so it ought to have an Indian appeal which was likeable to all, for them the feature of Indianess made it exotic and gave a deep feeling and experience of real India. The best that a poet could hope to do was to try to be as natural and as honest as possible and to concentrate upon the poetical enrichment of material and also not to be content with decorative use of Indian imagery. The nativeness being the prime factor of literary communication, an Indian writer inadvertently communicates Indianess

#### History of Indian English Poetry:

Poetry is the expression of human life from times eternal. India Infact 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 or in George Bottomley's words "Matthew Arnold in a sarree" or as some derogatively observes "Shakuntala in a mini-skirt". The chief sources of inspiration were the British romantic poets: Wordsworth, Scott, Shelley, Keats, Byron. 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" romanticisms 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.

#### Poetry of first phase:

The first phase of Indian poetry was the period of literary renaissance in India. Derozio's poems, Kasiprasad Ghose's The Shair or Minstrel and other poems, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's The Captive Lady, Manmohan Ghose's Love Songs and Elegies are a testimony to the creative upsurge occasioned by the romantic spirit kindled by the literary renaissance. Toru Dutt alone among these romantic poets of the first phase puts an emphasis on India and her heritage by putting into verse a large number of Indian legends. The romantic Toru Dutt is also a predecessor in respect to the use of the tree in verse as demonstrated by "Our Casuarina Tree", a predecessor in respect of childhood memories recalled with nostalgia or regret.

#### Poetry of second phase:

The poets of the second phase, still romantic in spirit were Sarojini Naidu, Tagore, Aurobindo Ghose and Harindranth Chattopadhyaya. The poetic output of these poets was prolific. Romanticism of these Indian poets was fraught with nationalism, spirituality and mysticism. It was therefore different from English romanticism. Indian

romanticism widened the poet's vision. While Aurobindo's was the search for the Divine in Man and Tagore's was the quest for the Beautiful in Man and Nature. Both were philosopher poets. Sarojini Naidu's romantic muse underscored the charm and splendor of traditional Indian life and Indian scene. She had a fine ear for verbal melody as she was influenced not only by English poetry but also by the Persian and Urdu poetry. She excelled in lyricism. She was a true nightingale of India. Poetry written in the colonial period with a view to establish Indian identity by the Indian poets was an explosion or rather outburst of emotions: the nationalistic, philosophical, spiritual or mystical emotions. The appeal was to the heart of the readers. The poetry of Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore and Sarojini Naidu could not be romantic since they had to express the ethos of the age. They were not merely imitating the English romantics, Victorians and Decadents blindly. Their poetry was the best voice of the contemporary Indian time - spirit. It would be fair to say that Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu constitute a kind of watershed between the first two phases, in that they share their predecessor's individual nostalgia as well as their successor's sense of crisis and quest for identity.

#### Major themes dealt in Indian English Poetry:

One cannot deny the fact 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.

#### **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. Some of the poets come from different racial backgrounds but are nationals of India for example, Nissim Ezekiel is a Jew, Dom Moraes is an Anglo - Indian, Daruwalla and Jussawalla are Parsees, Eunice De Souza is a Goan Christian. The Indian poet writing in English therefore finds himself alienated. So the poetry of modern Indian poets naturally turns on the theme of identity crisis. Poets like Ramanujan, Parthasarthy and Arun Kolatkar are preoccupied with the problem of roots. Their examination of Hindu ethos has been in several directions. Ramanujan, for example, conjures up his early childhood memories with strong sense impressions. At the same time his mind keeps examining the strong and weak points of his cultural heritage. Parthasarthy too is obsessed with his roots in India while leading a westernized life style. His poem 'Rough Passages' is an attempt to deal with the theme of identity exposed to two cultures namely the Indian and the Western. The scrutiny of society is another subject matter of modern poetry.

#### **Conclusion:**

Hence Indian poetry in English with its bent towards specificity and concretisation of style, subject and situation has become more relevant and readable in the context of the burgeoning violence, intolerance, inequality of power relations and the still prevalent divisive and discriminatory practices on the basis of region, gender, class, race and caste in the present times. In the poetry of specifics lies the potentiality of radicalism and change much required these days. The only thing one wonders if it could be more accessible for the common readers in terms of the language and diction as many new generation poets like Ranajit Hoskote and even Sudeep Sen at times resort to pedantry and jargon in their poems.

#### **REFERENCES:**

1. Jha, Pashupati: "Poetry of Protest and Indian Women Poets", in the (Ed) Book Verma, M. R. & Aggarwal K. A.: Reflections On Indian English Literature: New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors pp. 125.
2. Singh, R.k: "The Poetry of Keki N. Daruwalla": jaipur, 2002 Book Enclave, pp.13.
3. Kamala Das, "The Descendants", Calcutta; Writers Workshop 1967.
4. Kamala Das "The Old Polyhouse & other poems", Madras; Orient Longman 1973.
5. Singh, R.K: "Introduction an article reviewing the poets works", Creative Forum: vol. IV, No. 1-4, Jan -Dec., 1991, pp. 13-15.