Research Paper English Literature

# Indian English Poetry : A Review

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**ABSTRACT**

Indian English poetry is remarkably great. The pre-Independence poets expressed Indian themes in the Romantic and Victorian modes and adhered to their form and prosody as well as the post- independence poets manifests extensive experimentation, divergence from the conventional modes of expression and exercise of liberty in form and content, and use of language. The conflict between tradition and modernity at various levels- social, cultural, familiar, national and cosmopolitan is well marked in the works of these new poets. They also show the influence of western poets like Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Whitman, Hughes, Cumming, Platch etc. One of the most significant events in the post independence Indian English poetry is the rise of women"s poetic voice. Indian English Poetry is the oldest form of Indian English Literature. Indian poets writing in English have succeeded to nativize or indianize English in order to reveal typical Indian situations. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio is considered the first poet in the lineage of Indian English poetry.

**KEYWORDS** Indian Theme, Post Independence, Tradition, poetry

**INTRODUCTION**

Nissim Ezekiel is considered to be a pioneering figure in 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 saree" 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" romantics 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 Ministrel 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 Aurbindo'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 Aurbindo, 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.

**Post independence poetry**

The ethos of the post-independence phase of Indian English literature is radically different from the first two phases. Its relation to the first two phases is that of the modern age in English literature to Victorianism. When the question of political independence was resolved in 1947 with the partition of India, the tensions of the Indian psyche suddenly relaxed. The post - independence era of hope and aspiration was replaced by an era of questioning and ironic exposure. The national identity achieved after independence gave Indian writers a new confidence to be the critic of the present, the past and of themselves. In this new spirit and confidence the Indian poets found themselves in line with Modern English and American poets. So once again there was borrowing up to some extent as in the first two phases

of Indian poetry. While the pre - 1947 poets borrowed from the romantics, Victorians and "new" Romantics of the decadent period, the post - 1947 poets borrowed from the modernist poets like Yeats, Eliot, Pound and Auden. It is ironical that the word "romantic" should become a veritable red tag to the post- independence poets. If the word "romantic" is a red tag, the word "mystical" drives them to a fury. Adil Jussawalla, for example, finds Sri Aurbindo's Savitri "unwinding like an interminable sari". Parthasarthy declares that "Savitri fails as a poem because Ghose's talent and resourcefulness in the use of English was limited." About Toru Dutt, Parthasarthy says, "Toru Dutt's poems mean little to

us because our idea of poetry has changed since her day."

**Pre independence poetry**

The Indian Poetry in English started with verse romances, melody, and lyrics. The Indian Poetry matured in the mid 19th century. The famous poets were mainly from Bengal and most of them were highly educated. The poets were mainly influenced by Victorian and romantic strain. They started imitating the western poets like Keats, Eliot, Pound etc. Poets were influenced by culture, environment, tradition, struggle for Independence etc. Women poets like Toru Dutt and sarojini Naidu constituted a kind of watershed between the two phases, In that they have shared their Predecessor's nostalgia and successor's sense of crisis and quest of identity. To conclude, Indian English poetry is a mixture of Africa, America, British and Australian English. The poets being influenced by various conditions have contributed immensely to the field of English literature.

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.

**Conclusion**

This review paper enables us to know that when one surveys the history of the evolution of Indian English poetry we realize that Indians have mastered the alien language, English with perfection. It was in an infant stage during the pre- independence stage but now it has grown up. Its increasing number of poets proves that it has been a successful medium of expression. At the same time, we find a variety of themes prevalent both in the pre and past independence period. There have been much experimentation in the past and they are ongoing still. The future may bring for admirers of Indian English poetry a new refreshening change.

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