

Culture and Identity in Contemporary Indian English Poetry

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Abstract

Indian English poetry with a view to achieving modernity, tries to do different kinds of experiments. Rhyme and Stanzaic forms had replaced free verse. Verbal melody came to be evoked through the use of alliterative words. The tone was one of the intellectualized irony and sarcasm. The stance of the poets was one of the complete detachment and objectivity. The other innovation of the modern Indian poets is the use of symbolism. The poets use modern techniques used by the film industry and advertising industry besides the stream of consciousness and free association of ideas. There is much “word hunting” and “image hunting” which reflects the medium of consciousness on the part of the poet. The Indian, poets therefore borrows words from their regional languages. To be Indian, poets have to be rooted in Indian-geographically, historically, socially or psychologically. Poetry is the expression of human life from times eternal. India, in fact 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 phrases: the imitative, the assimilative and the experiment.

Keywords- Poetry, Indian, Techniques, Innovation, Expression.

The period from 1900 to 1947 is the assimilative period when the early 19th 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 written in 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 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 Niadu 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.

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. So once again there was barrowing up to some extent as in the first two phases of Indian poetry. While the pre-1947 poets burrowed from the Romantics, Victorians and “new” Romantics of the decadent period, the post-1947 poets burrowed from the modernist poets

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like Yeats, E. E. Cummings, Pound and Auden. In India English language is used as a communicative language both by the central and the state governments it is the only language which unite different linguistic state of India. Before independence English was viewed as an alien tongue but after independence, the perception got changed and number of people who began to learn and write in English increased drastically. Though English has been with us more than 300 years, the number of people who has English is only very few. Yet the industrial and economic progress of India is led by the English speaking people who have roles to play in the world market. However, it is identified that the English language used in India is different from that of other English speaking countries. Since it is distinctive variety, it is called Indian English. Indian writers had adopted the language and style of the English writers since they were the only models available. One could see the use of unadulterated language in the early Indian writings because the text was meant only for the elite class of people who know English. Moreover publications could be done only in Britain. Bankim Chandra's Rajamohan's *wife*, the first Indian novel belongs to this category though the storyline is set in India. 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. Their poetry deals in concrete terms with concrete experience. The poets of the modern time have been suddenly lifted an exclusive to an extensive range of creative experience 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 actually, freshness, sensibility, concrete, experience, trained intelligence and vitality are essential for good poetry. Nissin Ezekiel writes in this connection.

Modern poets like A.K. Ramanujan, Nissin Ezekiel, K. N. Daruwalla, O. P. Bhatnagar, Jayant Mahapatra, Kamala Das, Monika Verma, Gauri Deshpande 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 roots in India. These poets shattered the shackles of British Romanticism that influenced the works of Pre-Independence poets like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Derozio, Sarojni Naidu and others. The poets after Ezekiel, writing in English gave the language a unique Indian flavour, peppering it with local colour and idioms. Their contribution to Indian literature is immense, and they have managed to carve out a niche for themselves in the world of arts and letters. Kamala Das, for instance, despite being an Indian woman from a traditional background, has broken social barriers to elevate confessional poetry to the highest level.

Prominent poet A.K. Ramanujan's poetry also bears the note of Indianness. Indian sensibility can be called one of the themes of his poetry. The Indian sensibility of Ramanujan is sharpened by his western education and environment. Ramanujan portrays the Indian scene from across the Atlantic with complete artistic detachment and irony. In his poem "A River" he talks about a river. A river is Indian in theme and location. The place is Madhuri

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and particularly Vaikai River. The description of the Vaikai reminds us any Indian rivers. The straw and women's hair clogging the watergates, the stones like buffaloes and crocodiles etc. are Indian images. The names of the cows taken away by the flood, Gopi and Brinda are typically Indian. The Tamil poet belongs to India, and the Poets style bears Indian Sensibility.

The various socio-cultural factor played a very significant role in shaping the sensibilities of the educated in India during this period. With the introduction of English language as the medium of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities, the young in India came in contact with the whole world outside. India and interacted with the intellectuals of contact with whole world outside India and interacted with the intellectuals of different countries in the world. They grasped their country's position politically, socially and economically in the light of their needs. The influence of great social and religious thinkers and leaders like Swami Vivekanand and Raja Ram Mohan Rao brought about an awakening of national consciousness and re-discovery of India's cultural heritage. Consequently, the educated men and women in India began to employ English language quite successfully as a medium to re-examine India's cultural and spiritual values. Through their creative articulation of English language, they succeeded in rediscovering India's cultural heritage. An amazing array of patriots, poets, critics and orators like Surendranath Banerjee, Gopala Krishna Gokala, Toru Dutt, Aurobindo Ghosh Rabindranath Tagore and Srinivasa Sastri came into being during this glorious period of Indian when Renainance. They were profoundly stirred by nationalistic fervour and reformative zeal. These young educated Indians gave vent to their sentiments ceaselessly in

their works with the sale, ultimate objective of social regeneration and freedom movement. They chase English as the medium of their creative expression dictated not by considerations of patriotism or nationalistic or racial ethics, but by an inner compulsion perfectly Indian in thought, feeling, emotion and sentiment. The operative sensibility as manifested by their works is always unmistakably Indian. This brood of the highly-talented writers made a skillful use of English to express their creativity. Indian mythology and Indian folklores have got proper expression. So in their poems, India in its amazing, varied manifestations was deftly projected to the appreciation and admiration of the western world. Meanwhile, in 1913, Tagore's *Gitanjali* won him the prestigious Nobel prize. The Nobel Prize was not just for the creative genius of Rabindranath Tagore. It was a global recognition and reputation that was conferred Indian-English poetry. It was really a historical and remarkable phase in Indian-English poetry. Tagore's *Gitanjali*, a garland of devotional songs in Indian bhakti tradition with the Indian mystical concept of man-god relationship and the profound themes of patriotism, humanism and condemnation of the blind worship and idolatry and escapism from duties and responsibilities in the name of religion, lent a new dimension and an impetus to Indian English poetry. Modern Indian English poets rejected the older themes and forms. They abandoned the ornate, rehistorical style of their predecessors colloquial and simple Style, with the sole objective of reaching out to the readers of the modern age and capturing the complexity of the Contemporary Society.

Indianness is an inherent and integral to the poet's true care as the peels of onion. It finds an authentic expression on the levels of both experienced and idiom. Beliefs attitudes

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throughout processes, perception of the past and the present color, the poet's experience while images, allusions myths, ritualistic patterns and similar other devices forms the texture of the idioms. On both these levels reader is aware of a typical, identifiable indianness, which affords certain joy of recognition to the native readers and opens the cave of Ali Baba to the foreign readers. It is not important for us to judge the work of an Indian English poet as "Indian, But to find out if the poem is good or not. Indianness is just one of the characteristics of Indian English poems.

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