

# A Study of Indian English Poetry

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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. The new women poet depicts the changing position of women in the modern Indian society. Their poetry is a complex blend of aestheticism and activism, representing women’s struggle to break out of the patriarchal taboos and attain an unbiased position of their own.

**Index Terms-** Culture, Indian Theme, Post Independence, Tradition, Women’s Impact

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English poetry is the oldest form of Indian English literature, which has attained, both fecundity and excellence of cross monestry. It represents various phases’ development of our multitudinous cultural and national life right from the beginning of the nineteenth to the mid nineties of the twentieth century. It has three phases of development. In the first phase there is a number of co-development which is responsible for generating Indian English poetry. The early pioneers-**Henry** Derozio, Michael Madusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, B.M.Malahari, S.C.Dutt and R.C.Dutt-were the trend setters who began to poetize the Indian echoes in a foreign language. Although their efforts were imitative and derivative of English poetry, they successfully gave a new direction to Indian poetry in English by writing on Indian history, myths and legends. This phase is called imitative phase. The poets of 1850 to 1900 were trying how to establish this part of poetry. They have followed the British Romantics and Victorian poets.

The second phase of poets is the assimilative. This period starts from 1947. They were compulsive nationalist seeking to project the renescent consciousness of India caught in the maelstrom of historical conflict and turmoil and change, and culminating in the attainment of political freedom in 1947, self-expression was all important to the poets of imitation self-definition , accompanied by heart-searching probing into the cultural inheritance became the genuine concern of the poets of assimilation. The early poets were projecting landscapes, moods, fancies and dreams, while their followers sought a more radical assurance of their sense of origins and their sense of destiny. Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu constitute a kind of watershed between these two phases, in that they share their predecessor’s individual nostalgia as well as their successor’s sense of crisis and quest of identity. Toru Dutt is the inheritor of unfulfilled renown and the saint poets.

Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ramtirtha, Swami Yogananda, Sri Aurbindo and Rabindranath Tagore left a body of poetry which is glorious summation of Indian’s hoary cultural spiritual and methodological heritage which dates back to the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Gita. In their poetry they endeavoured to nativize English language in order to make it a befitting instrument for the expression of Indian sensibility.

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.”

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 new poetry by Indian poets adhere 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. [1]

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. Nissim Ezekiel writes in this connection:'

"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 especial 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 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". [2]*

Modern poetry is full of ironic remarks. The new poets have used irony as a great weapon in their poetry. New poets like Shiva K. Kumar, Ramanujan, Daruwalla, Grieve Patel, Arun Kolatkar, Kamala Das, and I. H. Rizvi etc. excel in the use of the ironic mode. They have not the blind followers of British English. They have evolved a distinct idiom to express their voice. They have succeeded to nativize or indianize English in order to reveal typical Indian situations. Shiva K. Kumar uses the apt idiom to describe the abominable practice of floor crossing in an Indian politician:

"Vasectomized of all genital urges for love and beauty he often crossed floors as his wife leaped across beds"

### KRISHNA SRINIWAS

"Krishna Srinivas" has been a leader of world poetry; He is endearingly called "Krishna" by poets and poetry lovers. The sweet fragrances of the flowers of poems

were in fact indicating towards a full ripe fruit which is given to us by him in the form of 'Dance of the Dust'. He is rooted with the Indian sensibility and therefore one cannot appreciate his creative genius without a sense of sympathy, spiritual feeling and sensibility for he is intensely committed, dynamic, profound, symbolic, philosophical, prophetic and above all, spiritual. He operates at a high level without attempting at deliberate mystifying. Science, metaphysics and history in his poetry coalesce to form a refreshing imagistic pattern; he makes philosophy takes into its fold several sciences. His poetry like Emerson, R. N. Tagore and Sri Aurbindo has mysticism, classical and prophetic element. His poetry couched in a natural intonation. It has the act of catalyst for spiritual awakening the structure of his pivot ideas provide a sharp ethical and psychological insight into the fabric of the present-day moral culture. His poetic output consists of 'Dance of Dust,' 'Maya' 'Everest,' 'Beyond,' 'Void,' 'Sonnets,' 'Five Elements,' 'Sankara', 'Ramanuja', 'Madhva', 'Christ', 'Mohammad,' 'Vallalar', 'Mahavir', 'Tamil Vedas' etc. His entire poetry is mystical, metaphysical, spiritual and cosmic. Like Sri Aurbindo he is the exponent of realizing supra-consciousness through poetry. His poetry exhibits his vast knowledge of Vedanta, Upanishads, Bhagvad Gita, mysticism, pantheism, Muslim philosophy, Christianity, history, geography, geology, astronomy, modern science and different languages. His poetry has religious mission mysticism and pantheism is the two important characteristics of his poetry. He condemns the Western materialistic values and holds out the hope of redemption to dust – ridden, lust torn men and women in following the spiritual values of the East:

*Despair not;  
You and dust anon must  
Fix the lease of rigmarole*

*And hush the wrath of wormy wars  
And crack its typhus in an iron tomb  
Its keys buried millions of fathoms deep.*

*(Dance of Dust)*

#### NISSIM EZEKIEL

Nissim Ezekiel is an outstanding poet of post – Independence India. A brief survey of this large body of poetry is essential for a proper understanding of the poet's art, of his major themes, and of the evolution of his genius. His poetical works are- A Time to Change (1952), Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man,(1960), The Exact Name,(1965), Hymns In Darkness (1976), and Collected Poems 1952-88 (1989), etc. He is a versatile genius and the most outstanding Indian English poet. He is a great love poet and his poetry reveals a gradual evolution of his art and genius. A number of major themes run through his poetry gaining in depth and intensity with each successive volume that he has published. No theme recurs so frequently as the theme of love and sex. There are highly sensuous descriptions of the human body and of love-making in the bed. His treatment of the act of love, and of the charms of the female body, is characterized by extreme frankness. This has exposed him to the charge of being a poet of the body, of the female anatomy, of wallowing in sex, but such criticism is superficial and unjust. He is certainly neither a Platonist nor romantic dreamer, nor does he object the claims of the body. His all poems have a great impact on the readers. For example:

*Don't curse the darkness  
Since you're old not to,  
But don't be in a hurry  
To light a candle either.  
The darkness has its secrets  
Which light does not know?  
It's a kind of perfection.  
While every light  
Distorts the truth.*

*(Hymns in Darkness)*

Prof. A. N. Dewedi rightly remarks:

Ezekiel's experimental poem, "A very Indian poem in Indian English", clearly visualizes the reality of situation in Indian society. It enacts aReal situation for the use of 'Babu Angrezi or what we roughly call today "Indian English".

#### KAMALA DAS

Kamala Das is one of three most significant Indian poets writing in English today, the other two being Nissim Ezekiel and Ramanujam. She is one of the members of poetic trinity of Indian English poets. The other two are Nissim Ezekiel and A. K. Ramanujam Her important poetic works are 'Summer in Calcutta,' 'The Descendants', [3] 'The old Playhouse' and other poems most of her poems deal with the theme of unfulfilled love and yearning for love. 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' is a good example of a poem dealing with the theme:

*It was hot so hot before the eunuchs came  
To dance, wide skirts going round and round, cymbals  
Richy, Dashing, and anklets jingling, jingling*

*Jingling beneath the fiery gulmohur, with  
Long braids flying, dark eyes flashing, they danced and  
They dance; oh they danced till they bled .....*

In the poem she finds an objective correlative in 'The Dance of the Eunuchs' to represent the theme of suppressed desire within. The dance of the eunuchs with their wide skirts going round, "cymbals /richly clashing and anklets jingling, jingling....." is contrasted with their vacant ecstasy suggesting a gully between the external, simulated passion and the sexual drought and rottenness inside. The contrast

is sustained all through the poem. The dance of the eunuchs is a dance of the sterile, and therefore, the unfulfilled and unquenchable love of the woman in the poet. In The Freaks too the theme is the same. "In the hands of Kamala Das and Sunita Jain, the poetry of protest is largely personal; in the case of Mamta Kalia and Eunice De Souza, it becomes ironical as well."

Some critics think that Kamala Das is an obscence poet but it is not so she has presented in her poems the reality of life. She says that: "Love is beautiful whatever four lettered name the puritans call it by. It is the foretaste of paradise. It is the only pastime that involves

the soul.” Her personal no doubt are given to carnal hungers and suffer like tragic protagonists the catastrophe inflicted upon them by their own doings.

Kamala’s own disgust and failures led her to a frantic search for the mythic Krishna, the ideal lover, in whom she could establish eternal bond. This search made her aware of the need to study all men: “all at once the plot thickened with a researcher’s hunger for knowledge, I studied all men.” Since the quest has, by and large failed in her case, sex is no more than a “mindless surrender” or a heartless participation not a “humming fiesta”. [4]

#### JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Jayanta Mahapatra needs no introduction; perhaps any discussion is incomplete without reference to his poetical works. Physicist, Bi-lingual poet and Essayist. Jayanta Mahapatra hold the distinction of being the first Indian English poet to have received the ‘Sahitya Academy Award’ (1981) for ‘Relationship’. In his poetry, Mahapatra sings of the hearts and minds of many things of nature, on the basis of his sincere love for all creation, poverty, deprivation, social injustice, the plight of the Indian woman prostitution recur in his verses. He says, ‘All things happen around me’. He cannot ignore them and write about the ‘better things’ of life. ----- about the lives of upper classes. His belief in poetry as a social reality sets him off from other contemporary poets writing in English. Jayanta Mahapatra like many other Indian poets writing in English is bi-lingual. R. Parthasarthy rightly points out, ‘The true poets among Indo – Anglian seem to be those who write in English as well as in their own language. They are poets in their own Right who have something significant to say, and know how to say it, both in English and their native tongue. They are not out to ‘sell’ their poetry through a skilful manipulation of words and the employment of Sophisticated techniques. Mahapatra belongs to this small group of genuine poets. He, too, is a bi- lingual writer, the secret of whose success lies in his not disowning his Indian inheritance, and not falling a pray to what has been called a feeling of alienation. He has, by and large, steered clear of the pitfalls listed above and the result is an unmistakable authenticity of tone and treatment.’

Mahapatra’s sensibility is essentially Indian, but he does not create the impression of indianness by bringing in such traditional items as tigers, snakes, snake-charmers, jugglers, crocodiles etc. He is really Indian because he does not consciously try to be Indian and thus is able to avoid many a hackneyed cliché and posture. His indianness is seen at its best in his poems about Orissa, where the local and the regional are raised to the level of the Universal. ‘Oriya Landscapes’, ‘Evening in an Orissa Village’, The ‘Orissa Poems’, ‘Dawn at Puri’ etc. are Oriya first and therefore, Indian too. Of how many other Indo-English poets could we say something like this with equal validity? In Mahapatra’s best work, the language is English, but the sensibility and not only subject-matter is Oriya, writes K.A. Panikar.

‘An examination of the recurring images in Mahapatra’s poems reveals that he is Oriya to the core. The sun of the eastern coast of Indian shines through his poems. The eastern sea sends its morning wind through them. Mahapatra ,a child of the sun and sea, delights in invoking the god of fire and the god of water in poems like ‘Sunburst’, ‘The Exile’, ‘Indian Summer Poems’, ‘This Stranger’, ‘My Daughter’ and ‘The Beggar’, and Takes It As Solace.’ Puri is a living character in several of these poems. ‘The Temple’, ‘The Priest’, ‘The Beggar’, ‘The Fisherman’, ‘The Crow’ there rise before us in all their objective reality and concreteness and then slowly transform themselves, almost imperceptibly, into monument like images and symbols.’

R. Parthasarathy and Arun Kolatkar are the two great poets to compose their poems on the themes of Indian social problems. There is a group of Parsi poets also who contributed contemporary Indian English poetry. The notable contributions to contemporary Indian English poetry; the group comprises K.N. Daruwalla, Gieve Patel and Adidl Jassawalla. There is also a group of new poets called ‘academicians,’ and Shiv K. Kumar, Jayanta Mahapatra, A. K. Mehrotra, O. P. Bhatnagar, A. N. Dwivedi, Niranjan Mohanty, Saleem Peeradina, Syed Amanuddin, Syed Ameeruddin, R. C. Shukla, S. C. Dwivedi and many others belong to this group. A.K. Mehrotra is primarily an experimentalist in ‘surrealism’ (a French movement of the 1920s) who makes his poetry out of “incongruity, choice and free association. Both Mahapatra and Mehrotra are addicted to the drug of imagery. O. P. Bhatnagar’s ironic vision comes at vividly in his poetry, and A. N. Dwivedi is a social realist having a keen eye on the social and political developments around him. In their innovative application of language and rhythm. Dwivedi and Syed Amanuddin come close to each other. This is how Syed writes in of his poems: -

*Love me for what I am  
I love you what you are  
Let’s create a culture of younme*

There are some talented contemporary poets also who are composing their work keeping with the recent social problems of Indian. These poets are prithvi Nandy, Rabindranath Menon Dilip Chitre, Sharat Chandra, K. D. Katrak Gauri Despande, Nandy is “innovative and profuse” in his poetry. After Rabindranath Tagore, he is one great poet who has produced prose poems packed with passion.

Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande and Monika Varma are of good stature; Lila Ray and Margret Chatterjee are also of the same rank and status. "The Female of the Species." Where her female feelings come out vividly. [5]

*Sometimes you want to talk  
About love and Despair  
And the ungratefulness of children  
A man is no use whatever them*

Similar is the case with some male poets too. Of such poets, we may mention Pranab Bandyopadhyay, S. C. Saha, C. S. Singh, Ravi Nandan Sinha, R. C. Shukla I. H. Rizwi, D. C. Chambial, I. K. Sharma, R. K. Singh, B. K. Dubey, Suresh Kohli, Mahanand Sharma and a few others. Many male and female poets mentioned cursorily here demonstrate their poetic talent and aptitude, not necessarily the fulfillment that befalls with maturity of mind and commitment to art.[6-7]

## II. CONCLUSION

In sum up, we can say that in the ancient period the body of Indian English poetry has certainly been greater during this period than in any preceding era. Professor P. Lal has brought out a book over 130 poets with the title Indian Poetry in English 'An Anthology' in which he has composed selected poems of new poets. The poetry of this period ranges from personal emotion and lyricism to complex linguistic experiments, dry intellectual tone, pungent satire and nursery rhyme. It has a new note and a new urgency of utterance but even than it is not possible to escape this poetry completely from tradition. This penetrates deeper and deeper into the poet consciousness and influences their observations of the living present and past, thus runs into the present and shapes our future. Our racial traditions, issuing from the Vedas, The Upanishads, The Ramayana The Mahabharata, the devotional saint poetry, the great rivers of India, the treasure house of Indian myth and legend, the memory of our racial or local history, have shaped modern poetry Sri Paramhansa Yogananda, Mahanand Sharma and Krishna Srinivas represent the mystical and spiritual tradition of India in their poetry. But they are not mere traditionalist. Their poetry is a fine coalescence of tradition and modernity. Even poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, R.Parthasarathy, Arun Kolatkar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Gieve Patel, K.N.Daruwalla, Kamala Das, Shiva K. Kumar and many others can not completely get rid of tradition.[8] The modern poets deal with the concrete experiences of men living in the modern world but the concreteness of experiences is influenced by 'the aroma of the private life of the experiencing self.' P.K.J Kurup remarks:

"They are mostly concerned with themselves and the surroundings allied to them. Their poetry records the artists own life history and his struggle against himself. They centre themselves within their selves is an attempt to discover their roots, both as individuals and as cultists, and during the process of which Endeavour their poetic personality appears undisguised. Viewed in this perspective the poetry of most of the new Indian poets in English reveals a tension resulting from their acute self awareness and the restraint imposed upon them by the hostile environment and becomes a private quest for values and an effort to peer into the dark abysmal contents of the poet's own mind." [9]

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