

## Development of Modern Indian English Poetry

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Indian English poetry is one of the many 'new literatures' emerged in the early nineteenth century. After the end of Second World War and the closing stages of colonialism, it has reached new heights. Models available for it were British Romantic Poets with their Victorian successors. Walter Scott and Byron provided the models for the longer narrative poems while the shorter poems get echoes from other British poets of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest Indian English poet, who laid the foundation of present poetry, was Henry Derozio (1809-1831), the son of an Indo-Portuguese father and an English mother. He is called the "father of Indian English poetry" as Chaucer is called the "father of English poetry". Derozio's literary works include: *The Fakeer of Jungheera* (1827), *A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1827). Derozio's verse is full of "burning patriotic zeal" (Naik 10) that confers on him the title of a "true son of the soil" (Naik 10). Poems like 'My Native Land', 'To India' and 'To the Pupils of the Hindu College', reveal the poet's ardent patriotism. He is mainly pre-occupied with Indian myths and legends. In the short span of his life, his poetic output is meager but authentic and shows the signs of true poetic talent.

With Toru Dutt Indian English Poetry began to appear real and genuine rather than imitative. She is the first poet, who has written on the Indian myths and legends. Her first poem, 'A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields' is a translational work of seventy French poets. She was not confined to Indian historical themes and legends extrinsically. These elements are integrated with her consciousness. "In her poetry we confront for the first time a language that is crafted out of the vicissitudes of an individual life and a sensibility that belongs to modern India" (Chaudhari 69). *Our Casuarina Tree*, one of the finest book by Toru Dutt, is an excellent example of "romantic melancholy and nostalgia" (Naik 12) written in that period.

Indian English poetry has been categorized into pre and post-independence poetry. Pre-Independence era has witnessed two prominent poets, Aurobindo Ghose and Rabindra Nath Tagore. Both are original and innovative in their literary craftsmanship. Literary bilingualism is

Tagore's rare contribution to literary history. Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912), a translational work includes his Bengali devotional lyrics. All his lyrics vary substantially in length: ranging from a brief lyric to a dramatic piece of literary episode. Aurobindo Ghose proved a great benefactor to Indian poetry in English. His entire poetic career was a preparation to create *Savitri*. Present paper focuses on how the modern Indian English poetry emerged from the early Indian poetry in English which was more imitative and commonplace rather than creative and original.

Post-Independence scenario was completely different from Pre-Independence. In the words of Lal & Shah "The phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojini Naidu" (qtd. in Naik 52) who was great woman writer. She has explored the simple themes of nature and village life well in her poems. The first Indian English poet of Post-Independence era was Nissim Ezekiel (1924 - 2004). Another distinguished personality, P. Lal, who categorized Indian English poetry into Aurobindonean and Non-Aurobindonean poetry. He heralded a movement against the older poetry which was more imitative. A. K. Ramanujan, and Shiv K. Kumar have introduced new innovations in Indian English Poetry. Nineteen-sixties and seventies witnessed a period of development in the field of Indian poetry in English language. The poets of this age were highly intellectual people who evinced their creative prowess through their beautiful verse. Women writers like Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Monika Verma, Lila Ray, Margaret Chatterjee, Ira de, Tapti Mukherji, Tillotama Rajan, Vimla Das, Malti Rao, Sunita Namjoshi, Gauri Pant, Rosen Alkazi, Mamta Kalia, Eunice de Souza, Meena Alexander, Lakshmi Kanan, and Sunita Jain contributed much towards Indian English Poetry by exploiting their miraculous inherent poetic knack.

The first poet, Nissim Ezekiel, is remembered as the chief pioneer of modernism in Indian English poetry. Another gleaming star of immediate post-Independence phase is Dom Moraes. His poetic works are: *Poems* (1960); *John Nobody* (1968); *Poems* (1955 to 1966) and *Collected Poems* (1969). He was alienated from genuine Indianness and

disowned his Indian heritage in England. P. Lal, a well known poet, launched his career as a poet during nineteen-sixties. His poems disclose his awareness of social realities and complexities. He used symbolism in his longer poems. Modern Indian English poets constituted large group of poets who have different literary tastes, aesthetics, styles and standards. This enhanced the rapidity with which the modern Indian English Poetry was evolving towards international standards keeping in view the different notions of creative art.

The next class of poets embodies: Gieve Patel, PritishNandy, JayantMahapatra, K. N. Daruwalla. They employed diverse themes in their poetry and institute new features in the domain of Indian Poetry in English language. Parthasarathy, Kolatkar and Ramanujan tried to evoke a sense of their past and made a bid to inherit the native traditions. Kamala Das has delineated her sexual and emotional traumas in highly sensuous manner. She highlighted her sexual experiences and inhibition rooted in her native culture which, at last, forced her to convert into Islam for the protection and security.

With each decade increasing immediacy and awareness of changing Indian life and Indian experience is discernible. Poets' personal experiences and veracity of community life find resemblance in common life. Then comes the experimental poetry of A. K. Mehrotra, ArunKolatkar, PritishNandy, DilipChitre and JayantaMahapatra in early seventies. In addition to the immediacy, experimentation, frankness and revelation of Indian poetry in English, an increasing concern for long poems evolved. A mention of Parthasarathy's *Rough Passage*, Kolatkar's *Jejuri*, and Mahapatra's *Relationship* is apt here. The period of 1950s and 1960s was a period of great upheaval in Indian English Poetry. The major transition of perspective was to the poet himself: poet's awareness with surrounding, specific situation and relation with others. Dom Moraes's diction and many of the pre-occupations have been illustrated in the lines given below:

I have grown up I think, to live alone,

To keep my old illusions, sometimes dream

Glumly that I am unloved and forlorn,

Run away from strangers, often seem('A Beginning')

Gieve Patel's poems have also made an honest use of local or specific subjects. His personal interest in peasantry is reflected ironically in the lines: "I have dealt with the peasantry / Over three quarters of a century / And I fail to follow your thinking"(Grandfather). K. N. Daruwalla

opted a strategy to present his themes and characters in tangible situations. His poems are "striking, concrete, and physical. Dreams, memories, and senses are there and no place for tragedy in his poetry. If it is, it has been echoed in our personal feelings of "angst' and physical and social evils" (King 125). It has an "immediacy and anger"(King 125). Older orders of view of tragedy in the modern world are denied.

Mobility and foreign travels was also a mark of Indian English poets during 1960s. For example, Kumar has done his doctorate at Cambridge University. Ezekiel, during the struggle of his career, stayed in England for three years. Dom Moraes, Jussawalla and Vikram Seth took their university degrees in England. De Souza, SaleemPeeradina and Silgado have studied abroad. Rayaprol studied at Stanford University. All these poets brought new trends into Indian English poetry. Kumar's wit was the outcome of his high erudition which was reflected in Kumar's poetry. For example, Kumar satirizes Indian hypocrisy and corruption in an amusing way in his poem, 'Epitaph on an Indian Politician':

All his life he shambled around

in homespun yarn,

socializing his soul,

while his sons flourished

in the private sectors of big business. (AS 25)

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (1947) began his career in writing verse and took "image" as a pre-dominant idea to explore in his poetry. Mehrotra uses figurative language brilliantly in his poems. His poetry comprises images, symbols and fantasy which create a world of weird effects: "a skull contains river", "rose has bone" "pyramids come and knock at the door". This fact has been admitted by Patke: "From the seventies onwards he develops a new style and a more convincing tone. His mature work is disarmingly slight in manner, casual in its resourcefulness; its sophisticated obliquity equally capable of the deceptive and the delightful, like the discovery of watercolour when you had given up oils as dark and heavy"(259). He writes:

Reconsider, first, the oblong of light

Already there when you open

The door to a high-ceilinged room;

Then, half way up the wall, the alcove ('October')

SaleemPeeradina highlights social awareness consisting modern Indian urban life keeping in view the fact that a poem arises out of the place where the poet dwells. He calls poem a “created artifice” (King136) made from local material. It should have an immediacy and local relevance. He takes the metaphor of Bombay suburb to characterize its history to identify the mixture of culture and sub-culture. He has also written on Indian situation. The poet introduces distinctive Indianization of western forms of culture in later Indian English Poetry. The poet has incorporated tremendous Indian realities: marriage, advertisements, negotiation for marriage, the cinema booking office, wedding processions, the mixture of religious communities and their services in his poetry. The poet writes:

Wanted personality, colour, family,

Salary, irrespective of

caste community province.

doctor, engineer, officer. Male

Wanted suitable, beautiful, highly

convent-educated family

well-to-do extremely (‘Morning Glory’)

ManoharShetty projects his introspections and emotions to the outer world. Memories of past are incorporated into the present and become a subject for reflection in his poetry. Shetty’s poems mark a recall of comforts of protected spaces, “the doors of childhood”, “the spider’s web”. *A Gaurded Space*, the title of ManoharShetty’s first book is impressive in its art. In the poem ‘Fireflies’, he brings out a contrast between external world and “trapping and caging” in childhood memories. The child’s brutality towards the firefly is mild and innocent while a man compares himself with the trapped insect and calls his routine life the “caging and trapping”:

I felt nothing then,

Only a small pang for the loss

Of a schoolboy’s ornament. But now,

Travelling my daily groove

In the hunt for food and habitat

I remembered their trapped blank light. (qtd. in King 141)

JayantaMahapatra started his literary career at the age of forty with his first book of poems *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten*. He is called as post-colonial poet by some readers because of his themes, concern for past, and his continuous attempts to represent the religion that point towards postcoloniality. While other group of readers believes that “his poetic career is a site for the colonial-postcolonial dialectic” (Punekar 44).Mahapatra’s famous collections of poems are: *A Rain of Rites* (1976), *Waiting* (1979), *The False Start* (1980), *Relationship* (1980), *Life Signs* (1983), and *Temple* (1989). JayantaMahapatra nourished Indian poetry with spontaneous fertility of his metaphors. “His poetry comprises “fugitive nuances of feeling and evanescent shades of thought: ascribing through a welter of metaphor” (Patke 266). “Grandfather”, who “starving, on the point of death..... embraced Christianity.....in 1866”, is asked: “Did you hear the young tamarind leaves rustle / in the cold mean nights of your belly?” (Patke267).Mahapatra’s*Relationship* won him the SahityaAkademi Award.It has twelve books. It is a long poem written in an epic style telling historical and mythic origins of Orissa. The force that compelled him to write this book is the poet’s interest and relation with his past that comes in the form of dream. The past comes as a dream in the given lines:

We have come as dreams disguised that pinned us down,

Artisans of stone,

messengers of the spirit,

twelve hundred artless brown flowers in passion

to the night in humble brotherhood,

aerial roots of a centuries-old banyan tree;  
(‘Relationship’)

R. Parthasarathy is the author of single, slim, periodically revised work, *Rough Passage*(1977-1980). The work shows resemblance with T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Walt Whitman’s *Passage to India* in quest for self. “The quest motif in the poem is described as psycho-spiritual” (Harishankar 82) journey to nothingness, awakening, insight and naming. The three parts of *Rough Passage* are: “Exile”, “Trial” and “Homecoming”. “Exile” describes the predominance of sense perceptions such as touch, smell and sight. “Trial” ends on a note of mental suffering. After revisiting the past, the poet turns to the present for sustenance in Homecoming. The three parts of *Rough Passage* are: innocence, experience and knowledge.

Both male and female writers equally contributed to Indian English Poetry. Women poets also explored various aspects: subject matter, language used, and craftsmanship. The most influential women poets are: Kamala Das, GauriDeshpande, Monika Verma, Lila Ray, Margaret Chatterjee, Ira de, Tapti Mookerji, TillotamaRajan, VimlaRao, MaltiRao, SunitaNamjoshi, Gauri Pant, Rosen Alkazi, MamtaKalia, Eunice de Souza, Meena Alexander, Lakshmi Kannan, Silgado, and Sunita Jain. Women poetry, indeed, is a rebellion against the conventional role of woman as a wife and mother. A striking wave of feminism evolved in Indian poetry in English during the post-modern period. The feminist movement manifests in Europe, America, Canada and Australia. It awakens the traditional woman from the long repose of ignorance since time immemorial. They question stern patriarchal system to snap the shackles of oppression and to liberate the woman from age bound subjugation. The women poets began to articulate both resistance and self-confidence. Indian English women poets embrace feminist ideas and theories from west into Indian poetry in English. These women poets testified post modernism in literary articulation.

Significantly many of Das's poems are based on the theme of love, marriage, sex and her childhood memories. Das has created linguistic standards which are purely indianized and reflect what the poet feels or is trying to say. Eunice de Souza and Silgado are the younger women poets, who followed Kamala Das in the employment of directness of speech rhythms and colloquial language. From Eunice de Souza, Melanie Silgado learnt to write about herself. She imitates De Souza thoroughly and

elaborates and introduces Goan culture furthermore in her poetry.

These poets have contributed much towards Indian poetry in English. They stretched and redefined the domains of realities in Indian English poetry. Analysis of human life in Bombay or in India, family life, personal experiences, relationships, advertising, newspapers, the radio, and motion pictures occupy a considerable attention in the poetry of many Indian English poets. Since these poets, under study, belong and represent the same era and handle the same literary genre (poetry), so, resemblance, and, evaluation of their works adds freshness and originality to Modern Indian English Poetry.

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