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Indian poetry in english: issues & trends

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Abstract

English language was introduced in India in order to fill up the communication gap existing than between Briteshers and the natives through a resolution passed in 1792. The language was further resolved to be adopted for the promotion of European literature and science in India. Indian writers, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy felt the needs of introduction of English language and accordingly English language was adopted for the first time in the syllabus of Calcutta University and later the model was adopted by other Universities. Indian Poetry in English was the last to be born among the Indian literature in English. The early poets contributing India Poetry were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chatteerjee, Henry Louis Vivian Derozis, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Kashiprasad Ghosh etc. The poets and poetesses of middle period are the Sarojini Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Sir Jyotindra, Mohan Tagore and Nobokissen Ghosh. The modern poets contributing to the poetry Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, Dom Mores, A.K. Ramanujan, Deb Kumar Das, Pritish Nandy, Prof. Shiv K. Kumar, R. Parthasarathy, Keki N. Daruwalla, R. Parthasarthy, Keshaw Mallick, Syed Amanuddin, Kamla Das, R.K. Singh and several others. Contemporary poetesses are also contributing Indian poetry on various themes.

Keywords: India, Poetry, English, Trends

1. Introduction

English language was introduced in India by the Britishers because soon after establishing their base in Calcutta in India, East India Company began to feel a communication between the Britishers and the natives. Charles Grant, the Director of East India Company, pleaded for the adoption of English Language for the first time in 1792 in order to solve the existing communication problem. English language, therefore, was adopted by a brief resolution of the Governor-General in council for “the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India”^[1]. The resolution was thereafter followed an announcement of Lord William Benetick to impart Indians “the knowledge of English literature and science through the medium of English and this resolution ushered a new era in the history of India.” Raja Ram Mohan Roy, though he was profound scholar of Sanskrit, Perisan and Arabic languages, felt that since all the renaissance knowledges are being complied in the European languages and hence adoption of English would contribute to the promotion of Indian literature and Arts. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, with the help of William Benetick, started encouraging European literature and culture in India. Lord Macaulay first of all introduced English language in the Calcutta University, which was soon followed as a model by other Universities in India. As a measure of reciprocation, Sir William Jones translated ‘*Shakuntala*’ into English. Sir John Woodroof, another British Officer, translated cultural text i.e. *Tantra*, into English.

2. Early Poets

Indo-English Poetry, followed by fiction, is supposed to be born in the last among rest of the Indian literature. The prominent poets and creative writers who used English as a medium of expression of creative urge in English are: Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Kashi Prasad Ghosh and others.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) attempted for the first time to trace the historical and cultural glory of India through his creative writing in English through poetry and wrote a famous poem “*The Harp of India*”. As a poet and teacher of poetry, he expressed his patriotic feelings through his poetry. His sonnets are bold and explicit expression of his denouncement

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of British rule. The poetic style of Derozio are on the romantic pattern and emotions are based on Indian culture and mythology. His poem, *The Eclipse*, highlights the superstition of Hindus who go to the river bank to take a holy dip on the occasion of lunar eclipse and prays to save the moon being swallowed by a monster.

Kashi Prasad Ghosh (1873) thereafter was first Indian poet to publish a collection of poetry in English. The poetry like *To a Dead Cow* shows his poetic genius. The symbolic expression through crow, being a *momento mori* (reminder of death) shows his unique style of presenting a feeling. The *'Shair or Minstrel'* (1830) contains several poems on Indian Festivals. During the period, the Dutt family consisting of Toru Dutt, Aru Dutt, Hur Chander Dutt and Ramesh Chunder Dutt also contributed to the poetry. Next generation of noted scholars in the 'Dutt family' were: G.C. Dutt, Raj Narain Dutt, Michael Mudhusudan Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1827-1873) expressed his creative urge by earlier volume of verse *'Visions of Past'* (1848) which contains the native sensibility and imagery. It is all about Prithvi Raj Chauhan, the king of Delhi, who won a bride, Sanyogita, forcibly from his father and he was latter attacked by Mohammed Gazni. Hur Chand Dutt has two volumes of poetry collection to his credit: *'Fugitive Pieces'*, and *'Lotus Leaves'*. Govind Chunder Dutt has also composed two volumes of poetry collections: *'The Loyal Hours'* (1876) and *'Cherry Stones'* (1881).

Aru Dutt has just eight poems to her credit which has been published in Toru Dutt's *'A Sheaf Gleaned in French Field'* (1876). Ramesh Chandra Dutt's important creations are: *'Willow Drop'* (1873), *'The Last Day'* (1886), *'Shiva Ratri, Bhagabati Gita'* and *Miscellaneous poems'* (1903).

Rabindra Nath Tagore also occupied an important place in the field of Indian English Poetry. He translated several poems and plays into English. His creation, *'The child'*, is the description of pilgrimage of men and women, His *'Gitanjali'* (1913) earned world wide reputation and Nobel prize for literature for him. Manmohan Ghosh is another poet of the period, Sri Aurovindo is known for his works: *'Primarers'* (1890), *'Love Songs & Elegies'* (1898), *'Songs of Love and Death'* (1926) and *'Immortal Eve and Orphic Mysteries'*. The noted Critic Georg Sampson rightly called him "the most remarkable of Indian Poets who writes in English and his poems" would readily take them as the work of an English poet trained in the classical tradition [2].

Other prominent poets of middle period are: Swami Vivekananda Malabari, J.M. Tagoe, A.M. Kunte, Brajendranath Seal, D.L. Roy, N.W. Pai, Nizamut Jung, P.P. Muherjee, A.M. Modi and Ezekiel Cohem. These literary figures also contributed to the Indian poetry in English by writing poems.

3. Middle Poets

Sarojini Naidu, known a 'Nightingale of Bengal', has composed excellent poems in English and Bangali. Her first collection of poems *'The Golden Threshold'* (1905) was famous among the readers of English literature. Other

succeeding collections such as *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *'The Broken Wing'* (1917) also earned for her the international recognition. Besides being a true lyricist, she was also a great social worker and freedom fighter active in National Freedom Movement with Mahatma Gandhi.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (1893-1990), brother of Sarojini Naidu, has also earned national recognition as an excellent poet. Most of his poems are thematically based on religious and devotional themes. His important published works are: *The Feast of Youth* (1918), *The Coloured Garden* (1919), *Perfume of Earth* (1922), *Collected Poems & Plays'* (1927), *Five Plays* (1937); *The Dark Well* (1939), *Lyrics* (1944), *Blood of Stones* (1944), *The Son of Adam* (1946) and others. His poetry is marked with creative genius and are full of clarity, force and message of humanism.

Jyotindra Mohan Tagore composed poetry collection: *Rajput Soldier's Farewell*. Nobokissen Ghosh has also composed two long poems, *'The Last Day'* and *'The Bhagwat Gita'* and both works are based thematically on 'Love of life'. Nagesh Viswanath Pal has a long narrative poem to his credit: *'The Angel of Misfortune'*, which is a nice description of nature composed in the style of blank verse.

4. Modern Poets

Nissim Ezekiel (1924), a University Professor in English, is one of the most prominent poets of modern Indo-Anglian Poetry. The important poetry collection to his credit 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 *'Latter Day Psalms'* (1982). His poems are teeming with philosophy of life.

P. Lal (1929) is a master of modern English, American poetry and Sanskrit classic. His poetry is basically romantic in nature. His important works are: *'The Parrots Deaths'* (1960); *'Love's the first and other poems'* (1963), *'Change, they said'* (1966), *'Drupadi and Jayadratha'* (1967) and *'Calcutta: A long poem'*. His translation of *Mahabharata* is also a laudable work.

Dom Mores (1933) is another modern poet of Indian English Poetry who has extraordinary power of expression and perception of ideas. The poetry collections to his credit are: *The Beginning* (1957), *Poems* (1960), *John Nobody* (1963) and *'Selected Poems: 1955-65'*. He was awarded the 'Hawthorndon Prize' for poetry.

A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1993) has earned immense recognition in the field of Indian English Poetry. His works are: *The Striders* (1966), *Relation* (1971), *'Second Thought'* (1986) and *'The Black Hen'* (1995). Deb Kumar Das is another Indian Poet who writes under the influence of T.S. Eliot. His published volumes are: *The Night Before* (1960), *'Through a Glass Darkly'* (1965), *The Winterbird Wakes*, *'The Eyes of Autumn'* *'The Labyrinths'* and *'The Fire Courts'*. He has also credit of translating 'Isa upnishad' in the verse.

Prof. Shiv K. Kumar is also one of the greatest poets of twentieth century. He has composed poems on various themes such as love, sex, taboo, tradition, religion, morality etc. His poetry collection, '*Broken Column*', is an autobiographical piece of work. The volumes published to his credit are: '*Articulate Silence*' (1970), '*Cobwebs in the sun*' (1974), '*Subterfuges*' (1976), '*Woodpeckers*' (1980) etc. Pritish Nandy is an 'innovative and profuse' poet. Besides being an eminent poet, he is also a play wright, a translator and an anthologist. His important published works are: '*Of Gods and Devils*' (1967), '*On Either Side of Arrogance*' (1968), '*I Hand you in Turn My Webbuk Wreath*' (1968); '*From the outer Bank of the Brahmaputra*' (1970); '*Madness in the Second Stroke*' (1971), '*The Poetry of Pritish Nandy*' (1973); '*Dhritarastra Downtown: Zero*' (1974); '*Riding the Midnight River*' (1975); '*Lonesome Street*' (1975); '*In Secret Anarchy*' (1976); '*A Stranger Called I*' (1976); '*Tonight This Savage Rite*' (1977) etc. He has also co-authored an anthology with Kamaa Das entitled '*An Anthology of Modern Indian Lover Poetry*' (1979). Although he has composed poetry on various themes, yet love and romance are presumed to be his favorite themes.

R. Parthasythy is another distinguished poet of Indian poetry in English. His poetry is compact and full of images and observance of society.³ The important published works to his credit are: '*His Rough Passage*' (1977); '*The First Step Poems*' 1956-66' (1967) and also an anthology '*Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets*' (1977). His poems are prescribed in different Universities of India. Keki N. Daruwalla, a retired I.P.S is a versatile genius. He is a poet, short-story writer novelist, newspaper's column writer, translator etc. The scenes of countryside and natural surrounding are his favourite themes. His important poetic collections are: '*Under Orion*' (1970); '*Apparition in April*' (1971); '*Crossing of River*' (1976); '*Winter Poems*' (1980) and '*The Keeper of Dead*' (1980) and others.

Keshav Mallick, a journalist by profession, has four volumes of poetry published to his credit: '*The Lake Surface*' (1959); '*Rippled Shadow*' (1960); '*More Poems*' and '*Strom Warning*' (1979). Syed Amanuddin has also proved his creative talents in the field of creative writings by composing both poetry and drama. His published poetry collections are: '*The Forbidden Fruit*' (1967); '*Tiffin State Hospital*' (1970); '*Shoes of Tradition*' (1970); '*The Children of Hiroshima*' (1970); '*The Poems of Protests*' (1972); '*Lighting and Love*' (1973); '*The Age of Female Eunuchs*' (1974); '*Adventures of Atman*' (1977); '*Gems and Germs*' (1978) and '*Challenger Poems*' (1988).

Kamla Das has also contributed significantly to the Indian Poetry in English and earned immense popularity. Iqbal Kaur rightly says that her poetry is "replete with a powerful form of catharsis and protest"⁴. Her poetic collections are: '*Summer in Calcutta*' (1965); '*The Descendants*' (1967) and also "*The old playhouse and other stories*" (1973). She may be regarded as a 'renowned feminist' presenting the Kaleidoscopic images of woman, as a wife, mother, beloved, street-walker, prostitute, goddess etc. and also as love-lorn,

ecstatic, despondent, hoping, despairing, longing, yearning, whoring and enduring⁵.

R.K. Singh, a Professor in English, has also contributed greatly to the Indian Poetry in English. His major contributions are: '*A Spiritual Epic*' (1984); '*My Silence*' (1985); '*My silence and other selected poems*' (1986), '*Memories Unmemoried*' (1988) and '*Above the Earths Green*' (1997) He opts imagery of sex as a medium of creative urge.

Baldev Mirza has published three volumes: '*Words on Fire*' (1981), '*Shall I speak out*' and '*Buddha My Love*' (1985). I.K. Sharma, an academic poet, has contributed collections such as: '*The Shifting Sand Dunes*' (1976) and '*The Native Embers*' (1986). Subhas Chandra Saha has written: '*The Unseen Bird*' (1971), '*The Ruins of Morning*' (1975) and '*After Midnight*' (1981). J.P. Das published his poems in '*Timescapes*' and '*Love is a season*'. Pranab Bandopadhyaya's collections include: '*The Mud Castle*' (1976), '*Call for Freedom*' (1976), '*Illa Ray*' (1977), '*Whistle in the Wind*' (1977) and '*The Midnight River*' (1977).

Several other poets are also contributing at their level for establishing Indian Poetry in English at international level. Some of them are: Vikram Seth, Vilas Sarang, Santan Rodrigues, K.R.S. Iyengar, K.V.S. Murti, V.K. Gokak, R.R. Menon, Dilip Chitra, S. Santhi, Narsingh Srivastwa, Gieve Patel, Dwarka Nath Kabaddi, Adi Jusewda, K.D. Katrak, Subhas Saha, Prahlab Bangopadhaya, O.P. Bhatnager, Syed Amaruddin, Sankutala Choudhary, Prakash Joshi, P.S. Shastri, Subhas Kak, Har Deo Sharma, M.A. Wane, H.O. Nazarath and other.

Indian women poets are also contributing substantially to the promotion of Indian poetry in English. Sarojini Naidu's songs are full of patriotism and emotionalism. Kamla Das also proved her talent to raise women related issues. Other women poetesses contributing greatly to the Indian poetry in English are: Monika Verma, Gauri Deshpande, Lila Ray, Mergret Chatterjee, Gauri Pant, Suniti Namjoshi, Lalita Venkateshwaram, Anna Sujatha, Lakshmi Khanna, Vimla Rao, Malathi Rao, Meena Alexander and Eurice De Souza. Although these women writers are writing on variety of themes yet a conspicuous feminine sensibility is obvious in their works.

5. Notes

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3. Singh, Pramod Kumar: 'Major Indo-English Poets & Poetry', (Book Enclave, Jaipur, 2004) P. 17.
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