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Tradition and Modernism in Post-Independent Indian English Poetry

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Abstract

India has a long tradition of arts and poetry from ages. Indian English poetry is very rich in expression of Indianness, its culture, politics and philosophy. The post-independent poetry established its own characteristics and voice in Indian English literature. The poetry describes cultural attributes through myths, legends, symbols, circumstances and themes. The poets presented the contemporary India associated with Indian traditions and culture. Their poetry represents the quest for their self and quest for their cultural roots. The poets in post-independent era are not mere traditionalist but their poetry is a fine amalgamation of tradition and modernity. The post-independent Indian English poetry has created its place in the realm of world literature.

Keywords: Indianness, Pre-independence poetry, post-independence poetry, myth, legends,

Poetry is the ancient form of oral and written Literature. It is the expression of human life. India has a long tradition of arts and poetry from ages. British colonial rule gave the Indian people a new language, English to express the ideas and thoughts. Indian writers started to write in English language and covers all forms of writing. Indian writers mastered not only in the field of poetry but also in the field of prose. Indian English poetry is very rich in expression of Indianness, its culture, politics and philosophy. Primarily Indian English Poetry is divided into two periods: Pre-Independence Poetry and Post-Independence Poetry. After colonization, it is emerged as one of the most important developments in the world of literature. Indian English poetry has three phases of development: the imitative, the assimilative and the experimental. The Pre-independence period from 1850 to 1900 is the imitative phase while the period from 1900 to 1947 is the assimilative period when the Indian poets tried to assimilate the romanticism and nationalism. The post-independent poetry is the third, experimental phase which begins after the independence.

In the first phase, the early pioneers- Henry Derozio, M. Dutt, Toru Dutt etc. began to poetize the Indian philosophy in foreign language. Their efforts were imitative and derivative but they successfully gave a new direction to Indian poetry in English. In the second phase, the poets were compulsive nationalist seeking to project the reviving consciousness of India caught in the turmoil of historical conflict and change. In the third phase, the poetry of modern Indian English poets deals in concrete terms with concrete experience. The modern poetry adheres their own principles. They used much experimentation in an effort to achieve modernity. Modern techniques derived from modern poets, their quest for originality and newness and stress on individuality marks the third phase of poetry. Khatri and Arora remarks that, The early Indian English poetry, thought imitative of the manner and method of English Romantic and Victorian poetry, mainly dealt with the Indian or oriental themes. Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Soshee Chunder Dutt, Ram Sharma, R. C. Dutt, Kashi Prasad Ghose, Manmohan Ghose and B. M. Malabari were the pioneers and trend setters in Indian English Poetry of nineteenth century (Khatri and Arora 4).

Later, Indian English poetry entered into the new era of development. V. K. Gokak classifies the pre-independent Indian poets as neo-symbolist and neo-modernist. Poets in the post-independence phase is considered as the modern poets who wrote anthologies in self-styled. A large number of Indian poets in English appeared in post-independent phase. No doubt, Indian English poetry is remarkably great. Both Pre-independence and post-independence poets have a visible mark of difference between their ideas, themes, values and applications. The pre-independence poets pronounced Indian themes by using Romantic and Victorian modes and observe the form and metrics and other poetic patterns. The post-independence poets were explorers and experimental figures. Indian English literature express the British influence. But post-independent poetry rejected this influence. They started the general study which led to separate from the old conservative methods of self-expression. The poetry describes cultural attributes through myths, legends, symbols, circumstances and themes. They presented the contemporary India associated with Indian traditions and culture. The modern Indian English poets reflected the perspective and environment after the independence. The themes based on inner conflict, alienation, failure and frustration, love and social context became prominent during this period. Indian English poetry marked complexity, harshness and mixture of tradition and modernism.

The post-independent poetry established its own characteristics and voice in Indian English literature. Bilingualism is one of the important factors that influences Indian English poetry. Many Indian English poets are bilingual or trilingual in their speech and writings. A. K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das, Arun Kolhatkar, Dilip Chitre, Gauri Deshpande are the bilingual poets but their high quality of English poetry achieves global acclaim. These poets with their mastery and cross fertilization of the English language with Indian culture learnt to ponder and sense in English and transmute their felt experiences. It shows the meaningful, intelligent stuff of sentiments and emotions in Indian English poetry in later phase. It is invested with complex, mosaic Indian experiences, shaped by Indian sensibility and enriched by Indian traditions, customs and myths.

The post-independent poets have freed themselves from the clutches of "Englishness" and have started writing in Indian manner. They have started to express themselves freely in an Indian manner. Word-borrowing is one of the characteristics of the post-independence poetry. Many poets used pure Indian words in a beautiful manner to express the ideology. Gokar comments Bruce King's remark, English is no longer the language of colonial rulers, it is a language of modern India in which words and expressions have recognized national rather than imported significances, alluding to local realities, traditions and ways of feeling. Such Indianization has been proceeding for several generations (Gokar 19). In the post-independence period, Indian Poetry in English marks the period full of political tumult and confusion, urge to acquire national identity. The poets are confronted with the crisis of identity. Their poetry represents the quest for their self and quest for their cultural roots. These poets have their cultural roots in their community. Many poets were emigrants. The themes like alienation, exile, the crisis of identity, childhood memories, family relations, love, nostalgia for cultural traditions are found during this period. Some poets are confessional in tone, obsessed with loneliness and insecurity. Kamala das, Eunice de Souza and Shiv Kumar are such poets who sought either in the erotic fantasies or the self-probing tortured souls. The poets in the eighties were interested in depicting their personal, domestic and social circumstances. Agha Shahid Ali, Dilip Chitre, Jayant Mahapatra portray the rural Indian landscape. The poetic sensibilities are oriented along three different paths: the means of declaration in terms of myth and history, quest for the self and modes of rejection in terms of desire for suspension and death. It means modern Indian poetry has centered around self with enhanced emotions and feelings. So, the themes of these poetry are secular and contemplative. P.K.J. Kurup says,

They are mostly concerned with themselves and the surroundings allied to them. Their poetry records the artist's own life history and his struggle against himself. They center themselves within their selves is an attempt to discover their roots, both as individuals and as cultists, and during the process of which endeavor 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 (Tilak 21).

The Independence in India brought new movements in literature like innovations in language. The new poets of post-independent poetry speak in new voice. Their use of idioms, style, syntax reflect their freedom. They depict the traditions and culture of the contemporary India in order to create its own identity. With the creative use of English language, the poets in post-independent period became self-conscious about their language and form. Modern poets in their poetry freely use originality out of natural inwardness. They have been elevated from conservative to modern diverse culture to challenge the new shape of things and to attain a new way of human destiny. Post-independence Indian English poet evident extensive experimentation, separation 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 like social, political, cultural, familial, national and cosmopolitan is well marked in the works of these poets.

The next expansion in the post-independence poetry was the rise of female poetic voice. Women poets were becoming the voice of those women battered by the society. Post-independence English poetry was a sort of revolt against the old. They were inspired by Kamala Das to elaborate the feminine experience in the male-dominated patriarchal society. These poets include Laxmi Kanan, Smita Tiwari, Intiaz Dharkar, Gauri Deshpande, Smita Agarwal, Asha Vishwas, Mamata Kalia, Monika Verma, Vimala Roy, Sujata Bhatt, etc. describe age-old notions of reverence, inter-generations of middle-class families, love, marital relationship etc. Most of the female poetess develops feminine aspects leading towards predicament. The

poetry of post-independent poets is a complex blend of aestheticism and activism. They represent women's struggle to break out the patriarchal restrictions and achieve an impartial position of their own. The face of Indian English poetry began to change in the era of post-independence. It represents the changing socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-political scenario in India. The main qualities of post-independent poetry are- English influence was unrestrained, imaginative and romantic aspects of previous poetry disappeared. Productiveness, originality, experimentation and presentation of contemporary reality. Indianness infused in modern poetry. Indian sensibility, Indian philosophy and situations revealed through native or Indian English. Post-independent poetry is no longer imitative but it is creative. The modern Indian English poet was captivated with the feeling of being Indian. Tradition entered deep into the poets' consciousness and inclined his observations of living present and shape the future. It is a new beginning which represent new shift from post-romantic to modern temperaments. The post-independent poets coming out with 'new intentions' to discover a 'new self'. Nissim Ezekiel (1924), Dom Moraes (1938), Kamala Das (1934), Ramanujan (1929) including Arun Kolhatkar, R. Parthasarathi (1934) began their careers in 1950's and proved their promising talent in Indian English poetry. Purushottam Lal (1958), Shiv K. Kumar (1921), Jayanta Mahapatra (1928), A. K. Ramanujan (1929), K. N. Daruwala (1937), Arun Kolhatkar (1932), Adil Jussawalla (1940), Gieve Patel (1940), Arvind Malhotra (1947), Prithish Nandy (1947) and others appeared as a strong pillar during this period. Nissim Ezekiel's *Night of the Scorpion*, Jayant Mahapatra's *Relationship*, A. K. Ramanujan's *The Striders*, Kamala Das's *The Invitation*, R. Parthasarthy's *Rough Passage*, Imtiaz Dharkar's *Purdah*, K. N. Daruwala's *Boat-Ride along the Ganga* etc. are the notable pieces of quality in post-independent poetry.

To sum up, post-independent Indian English poetry ranges from personal emotion and lyricism, to complex linguistic experiments, pungent satire, rational tone, and nursery rhymes. It has a new note and earnestness of utterance but this poetry cannot escape totally from tradition. This poetry penetrates deeper and deeper into the poet's consciousness and encourage their observations of living present and past. Therefore, runs into the present and shapes our future. Our ethnic traditions, supplying from the Vedas, The Upanishadas, The Ramayana, The Mahabharata, the religious saint poetry, the great rivers of India, Indian myth and legend, the memory of racial and local history have formed modern poetry. The poets in post-independent era are not mere traditionalist but their poetry is a fine amalgamation of tradition and modernity. Even Nissim Ezekiel and other modern poets can not completely get rid of tradition. The modern poets of post-independence era deal with the existing experiences of the people living in the modern world. But this concreteness of experiences is influenced by the aroma of the private life of the experiencing 'self'. Post-independent Indian English poetry has created its place in the realm of world literature.

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