

CHAPTER-I

- I -

INDO-ENGLISH POETRY

Indian writing in English, or Indo-Anglian literature, is hardly 150 years old. The history of Indo-Anglian poetry dates from Derozia.

Derozia (1809-1831), a teacher of English in Hindu College, Calcutta from 1818 onwards, inspired a number of young Indians with a love of the English language and English literature.

It seems that Indo-Anglian poetry was born under a Romantic star. It learned to lisp in the manner of Byron and Scott in the verse of Derozio, M.M. Dutt and others.

Genuine lyric poetry and lyrical narrative poetry, both of the Romantic and Victorian type, came fully into their own in the last quarter of the 19th century, with the generation of Toru Dutt. Toru Dutt's Ancient Ballads came out in 1832. R.C. Dutt's Lays of Ancient India and his renderings (on) the Ramayana and Mahabharata were published in 1894 and 1898-99. Manmohan Ghose's Love Songs and Elegies was published in 1898 and Sri Aurbindo's Songs to Myrtilla

in 1895. Sarojini Naidu's The Golden Threshold was published in 1905. Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekanand were also active during this period. Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu, who spent their impressionable years in England when the 'Decadent' poets dominated the scene, reveal the influence of this trend in their early poems. The last quarter of the nineteenth century is the golden period of Indo-Anglian poetry.

The first quarter of the 20th Century produced a number of poets who continued to write in the Romantic and Victorian manner of the Indo-Anglian poets. But there were other Indian poets who responded to the new trend that was perceptible in the Georgian poetry.

The second quarter of the 20th century may be said to have yielded a richer harvest. M.Krishnamurti continued the humanistic trend. J.Krishnamurti forwarded the tradition of mystical poetry. The 'progressive' manner of the thirties is seen in some of the poems of Humayun Kabir.

The third quarter of the 20th century has seen the further strengthening of modernist as well as neo-symbolist trends. The Calcutta Writers Workshop has published the work of poets like P. Lal, Kamala Das, V.D. Trivedi, Mary

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Erulkar, A.K. Ramanujan and others which reveal significant developments on modernist lines in Indo-Anglian poetry. Nissim Ezekiel and Mokashi-Punekar also belong here. The trend towards neo-symbolism is seen in the work of poets like Nahar, Themis and Prithvindra. (V k. a, k, 9)

- II -

EARLIER POETRY : ROMANTICS  
UPTO INDEPENDENCE

In Toru Dutt's Ancient Legends and Ballads of Hindustan and Ramesh Chunder Dutt's shortened version of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, we have the first successful adaptations or translations from our ancient literature. In poems like Sri Aurobindo's Urvasie and Love and Death we find Indian poets essaying romantic narrative poetry on their own, the themes no doubt redolent of native myths and legends but the articulation is unquestionably English in blank verse of Milton, Byron and Tennyson.

These early Indian poets, then, were imitative, derivative - they imitated the forms and rhythms of English poetry and they derived their themes from Indian history, myths and legends, but they also tried to forge something distinctive and new. This is seen in lyrical more than in narrative poetry.

Sarojini Naidu's The Golden Threshold (1905) and Tagore's Gitanjali (1912) are both land-marks in the history of Indo-Anglian poetry. Gitanjali was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature for the year 1913. Although based on his own original Bengali, Gitanjali merits being described as a classic of English poetry.

Sri Aurobindo and Tagore, Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu helped to build the image of Indo-Anglian poet. The Gitanjali songs are mainly poems of bhakti in the great Indian tradition. The imagery, the conceits, the basic experience, the longing, the trial, the promise, the realization - all have the quaintly unique Indian flavour and taste.

Thus Rabindranath Tagore, who was a poet, dramatist, actor, producer, musician, painter, educationist, reformer, philosopher, prophet can be described as a foremost writer in the Indian Renaissance.

" Sri Aurobindo on the other hand, was the propounder of Integral Yoga, the prophet of the Life Divine, the patriot and the interpreter of the Vedas. The politician, the poet, the philosopher and the Yogi were all of a piece - the man was Rishi Aurobindo. His poetry was meant to bridge the present and the future, self-divided present life and the Life Divine that is to be." {

His lyrical poetry is full of philosophy and mystical glow. His Savitri : A Legend and a Symbol is in three parts, divided into 12 Books or 49 Cantos. Savitri is symbolic of the true wife's devotion and power unflinching devotion and power even to overcome the greatest of the evils, Death. And Satyavan is Truth.

Like Tagore and Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu was more than a poet. Sarojini Naidu's poetry is her 'inner life'. She was above all, sensitive to beauty, the beauty of the Buddha's compassion, the beauty of Brindavan's Lord.

After the publication of The Golden Threshold (1905), she was hailed as the Nightingale of Indian song. There are "songs of life and death" - life is often brightly pointed, but death's shadows creep or linger. Sarojini Naidu's brother, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya too wrote poetry.

There were major political changes on the Indian scene. The Indian National Congress had already been founded in 1885. The partition of Bengal and Swadeshi movement by Sri Aurobindo created political awareness among the Indian people. It was at this moment that Mahatma Gandhi appeared on the scene and further developed the movement begun by Tilak, Sri Aurobindo and other leaders.

- III -

THE 'NEW' POETS

"Since the end of World War II, there has been a visible stir everywhere - partly the rustle of a new hope and partly the stutter of a new despair."<sup>1</sup> There is a 'new' poetry in England, in France, in the United States - and not least, in India and in 'Indo-Anglia'.

Several of the poets in the various regional languages - Balamani Amma, K.M. Panikkar, Umashankar Joshi, V.K. Gokak, P.S. Rege, B.S. Mardhekar, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Ramadhari Singh 'Dinkar', Amrita Pritam - are efficiently bilingual. The political and economic uncertainties of the thirties, led to some re-thinking on the part of the writers.

The poems of the forties were generally the products of melancholy, frustration and bitterness and 'modernist' in their sentiment and articulation.

A Professor of English, and a leading poet and novelist in Kannada, V.K. Gokak has also written poetry and criticism in English. The Song of Life (1947) contains his poems in English as well as his English renderings of

some of his own Kannada poems. His poems are characterised by an elevation of style and seriousness of intention.

- IV -

THE MODERN POETRY : POST-INDEPENDENCE POETRY

When C.R. Mandy became the editor of the "Illustrated Weekly of India" in 1947, Indo-Anglian poetry suddenly acquired a new currency and even respectability. Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, Bartholomew, Leo Fredricks, Mary Erulkar, A.K. Ramanujan, V.D. Trivedi, Leela Dharmaraj and a few others came into light. The Western influences are still there but Indian poetry in English has passed the phase of imitation. The Indian poet writing in is concerned English today to see that his poetry is modern.

The Writers Workshop in Calcutta has in the last few years brought out a host of publications each one of which a thin volume of verse, is an example of the type of modernity.

Among these Indians writing in English, the following are notable poets - Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Arun Kolatkar,

Jayanta Mahapatra 9

Keki Daruwallah, Gieve Patel, Adil Jussawallah and Monika Verma. Their language is clear and coherent and their poems describe experiences, make statements of belief, express feelings towards friends, women, work, nature and cosmos, define attitudes and make commitments to values. Their poetry is extremely readable.

Dom Moraes's poems are patterns of co-ordinated images that have sprung from a free association of ideas private to himself. These ideas constitute the mythological machinery which he employs in most of his poems. This mythology is neither altogether personal nor consistently borrowed from one source. Much of Moraes's mythology comes from the fairy world and some from medieval romances.

He has published five volumes of poems : A Beginning - 1957, Poems - 1960, John Nobody - 1965, A Brass Serpent and Poems - 1955-56. His mythological creatures have usually some symbolic significance.

P. Lal is a poet and the rallying centre for many of the 'New' poets. The Parrot's Death (1960), Love's the First (1963), Change ! They said (1966), Draupadi and Jayadratha (1967) and verse translations of the Gita, the Dhammapada are his remarkable collections. He has an eye for beauty and even familiar things yield rich significance to him. He is a confessional poet too.



“He sings of bees, birds and roses and seeks to find 'a moral tenderness' in them.” Lal has a gift for suggestive and memorable words and phrases.

Shankar Mokashi-Punekar is an interesting figure among Indo-Anglian poets. As a poet, Mokashi-Punekar is poised between the 'traditionalists' and the 'new' poets.

Pritish Nandy's Early Poems, Of Gods and Olives (1967), On Either Side of Arrogance (1968) give evidence of talent. He tries in his own way to catch the reflection of old Indian myths.

Daruwallah's works include Under Orion (1970), Apparition in April (1971), for which he was given the Uttar Pradesh State Award in 1972, and Crossing the Rivers (1976). He has been praised for his bitter, satiric tone.

Arun Kolatkar's works include Jejuri (1976) which was awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1977, and Arun Kolatkarchya Kavita (1976), a volume of his poems in Marathi which was given the H.S. Gokhale Award in 1977. Jejuri is a long poem in thirty-one sections. Apparently it is about the poet's irreverent odyssey to the temple of Khandoba at Jejuri, a small town in Western Maharashtra.

Shiv K. Kumar's works include Articulate Silences (1970), Cobwebs in the Sun (1974) and The Last Wedding

Anniversary (1975). In 1978, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature during his stay in England as Commonwealth Visiting Professor of English at the University of Kent at Canterbury. Often he takes a simple fact or incident and develops it to a point where it acquires a new meaning.

Jayanta Mahapatra explores the intricacies of human relationships, especially those of lovers. His works include Close the Sky, Ten by Ten (1971), Svayamvara and Other Poems (1971), Countermeasures (1973), poems translated from the Oriya of Soubhagya Misra and A. Rain of Rites (1976). He was awarded the Jacob Glatstein Memorial Prize of poetry (Chicago) in 1975.

A.K. Mehrotra uses images in subtle manner. His works include Bharatmata : A Prayer (1966), Woodcuts on Paper (1967), Poems/Poems/Poems (1971), Three (1973) and Nine Enclosures (1976).

Gieve Patel's works include Poems (1966), and How Do you Withstand, Body (1976). The leading woman poet today, Kamala Das deals with the theme of love. In her poetry we have an expression of a female sensibility at its best. With a frankness and openness unusual in the Indian context, Kamala Das expresses her need for love. A bilingual

writer, her works in English and Malyalam include Summer in Calcutta (1965), The Descentdants (1967), The Old Playhouse and Other Poems (1973), and My Story (1975), an autobiography.

Among the other poets are B. Rajan, F.R. Stanley, Keshav Malik, Leela Dharmaraj, R.de L.Furtado, Mary Erulkar, Leslie de Noronha, P.K. Saha, Roshen Alkazi, M.R.Bhagvan and N.K. Sethi. From this galaxy of poets, I have selected Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan and R. Parthasarathy as representative of the various aspects of the theme of 'alienation', and who, incidently (being to the) same generation, as Parthasarathy has pointed out, "If we regard a generation as a group of people born about the same period, usually within a thirty year span, with some experience, belief, attitude etc. in common, my generation would include both Nissim Ezekiel and A.K. Ramanujan." ②

*The reference is wrong. P. 187 - Osmania Journal, Sp. No.*

Nissim Ezekiel occupies a position of considerable importance in Post-independence Indo-English literature. He treats poetry as a way of life, as a continuous flow and as something which is inextricably related to existence. Ezekiel's poetry is both the instrument and the outcome of his attempt as a man to come to terms with himself. One finds in his poems, the imprint of a keen, analytical mind trying to explore and communicate on a personal level

feelings of loss and deprivation. His works include A Time to Change (1952), Sixty Poems (1953), The Third (1959), The Unfinished Man (1960), The Exact Name (1965), translations from the Marathi of Indira Sant and Hymns in Darkness (1976) and The Later Day Psalms (1982).

Persons and places, memories and situations, literary echoes and moments of vision all inspired Ezekiel to poetic utterance. He is painfully and poignantly aware of the flesh, its insistent urges and its stark ecstasies. In his later poetry, there is revealed a careful craftsmanship, a more marked restraint and a colder, a more conscious intellectuality. His Night of the Scorpion evokes superstitious practices we haven't still outgrown. In Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher, the search for love and the word is presented in the person of a birdwatcher.

A.K. Ramanujan's poems acquire concreteness and sharpness from a clarity of expression and an intensity of tone as well as a vigour of vocabulary and syntax and originality of imagery. Most of Ramanujan's poems express an Indian sensibility sharpened and conditioned by a western education. None of Ramanujan's poems can be said to express the poet's personality fully, though most of them are poems of memory.

Since 1962, he has been at the University of Chicago where he is now Professor of Dravidian Studies and Linguistics. His works include Fifteen Tamil Poems (1965), The Striders (1966), The Interior Landscape (1967), Relations (1971) and Selected Poems (1976). He was awarded the Gold Medal of the Tamil Writers Association for The Interior Landscape.

“ In The Striders, Ramanujan summons from his memory buried moments of suspense, surprise or agony, and turns them into disturbingly vivid poems. The mutilated beggar, the drowned woman - they are caught in their contrortions and misery and they are there, like the denizens of Dante's hell. The images are unforgettable. His Relations is an even maturer achievement, and is something of a bridge spanning childhood and age, and India and America.” He has established his position as one of the most talented of the 'new' poets. ’

Of the poets who cultivate austerity in style, R. Parthasarathy is probably the most successful. Parthasarathy's best poems reveal an uncommon talent and a sensibility that deliberately puts shackles on itself. His works include Poetry from Leeds (1968), Ten Twentieth

Century Indian Poets (ed.) (1976) and Rough Passage (1977), which was a runner-up for the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1977. He was awarded the Ulka Poetry Prize of 'Poetry India' in 1966.

“His Rough Passage is a sort of overture<sup>2</sup> made with the aim of starting a dialogue between the poet and his Tamil past. The strength of the poem comes from his sense of responsibility towards crucial personal events in his life.” 9

REFERENCES

- 1) K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, The New Poets, Indian Writing in English, Asia Publishing House, Bombay (1973), p. 641.
- 2) R. Parthasarathy, How it Strikes a Contemporary : The Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan, The Literary Criterion, Vol. XII, Nos. 2-3, 1976, p. 188.