

Introduction.

India is the third largest English book-producing country after the United States and the United Kingdom. The largest numbers of books published in India is in English. (Srinivasa Iyengar 2002:702) Creative writing in English forms an integral part of the literary traditions of South Asia. To quote Srinivasa Iyengar:

English, then, is one of our national languages, and Indo-Anglican literature too is one of our national literatures. We have reached the point where we are able to see Indian writing in English as a distinctive literature---a tree that has sprung up on hospitable soil from a seed that a random breeze had brought from afar. A critical study of this literature, however, needs much more than acknowledgement *of* its existence for yielding satisfactory results.

(Iyengar 2002:15-16)

Literature in English marked by strong local colour had poured out from India since the colonial days. In the beginning the writers were mainly British or Anglo Indians who sought to appeal to the public of England. The English community of India also formed a portion of its readers. This literature is now better known as the

Anglo-Indian Literature as distinguished from the Indian writing in English that encompasses writers of Indian origin.

The Cambridge History of English and American Literature records a number of Anglo Indian writers who produced the first Anglo-Indian Literature from India, some whilst their stay in India, others after retiring to their country after years of service in India.

The first book of Indian English verse, as M.K. Naik records, is that of Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami's translation of Arasanipala Venkatadhvarin 's 17th century Sanskrit poem *Viswagunadarsana* (1825). It was published in Kolkata with the help of donors whose list includes the names of Rammohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore. It was, however, an English rendering and therefore has not received the status of an original work. The first Indian English poet to be hailed is certainly Henry Vivian Louis Derozio, who signaled the birth of Indian English poetry with the publication of *Poems* in 1827. Although Derozio's satirical verse and long narrative poems illustrate an obvious semblance to Byron; his imagery an influence of British Romanticism, and his diction, traces of neo-classicism; many of his poems like *To India-My Native Land*, *The Harp of India*, and *To the Pupils of Hindu College* have a clearly identifiable genuine nationalistic articulation that establishes Derozio (1809-31) as an Indian English poet.

O! Many a hand more worthy far than mine

Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,

And many a wreath for them did Fame entwine
Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave:
Those hands are cold -- but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

(DerozioThe Harp of India)

Derozio was also one of the foremost of the Indian English poets to freely allude to Indian myths and legends, though he also alludes to western classical myths with an equal proficiency. Three years after Derozio's publication of the first Indian English verse Kashiprashad Ghosh (1809-1873) appears on the Indian poetic scenario, the poet who can claim to be the first purely Indian English poet, Derozio being the son of Indo-Portuguese father and English mother. Kashiprashad's *The Shair of Ministrels and Other Poems* emulates by turn British Romanticism, love lyrics of the Cavalier Poets and didactic strain of the Neo-Classical poets. But he does show flashes of originality in employing powerful rich imagery:

How like the breath of love the rustling breeze
Is breathing through the fragrant sandal trees!
How sad but sweet the bulbul sings above...
Like liquid silver yon soft-gliding stream

Wanders and glistens in the lunar beam,

(Kashiprashad: The Moon in September)

His portrayals of Hindu festival or poems like *The Boatman's Song to Ganga* are candid efforts to strike the parochial note. Kashiprashad Ghosh's verses were followed by the inconspicuous Rajnarain Dutt's *Osmym : An ArabianTale*, Soshi Chunder Dutt's *Miscellaneous Poems* (1848) and Hur Chunder Dutt's *Fugitive Pieces* (1851).It is noteworthy that Michael Madhusudan Dutt(1824-1873) the epoch- making Bengali poet had begun his career as an Indian English poet. The *Dutt Family Album* is a family anthology of a hundred and eighty seven poems by the Dutt brothers Govind Chunder, Hur Chunder and Greece Chunder and their cousin Omesh Chunder Dutt. Like the poets of the earlier generation they also expose painstaking imitations of the British Romantic poets.

Ram Sharma, pseudonym of Nobo Kishen Ghosh (1837-1918), however, displays the first sparks of mystical flame that was to burn brighter later in Shri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and Tagore (1861-1941).

The first period of Indian English literature is said to have ended in 1850s a few years before the Revolt of 1857 that had ushered in antagonistic ideas about the British rule in India and marked a turning point in the rapport between India and Britain. By the next two generations the Indian English literature slowly grew out of the shackles of British imitation and found the bona fide Indian voice.

D.C. Mallick in his works (1919) records his responses in a usual imitation alluding to the western legends.

"It was with Toru Dutt (1856-77) that Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authenticity." (M.K.Naik 2004: 37)

An example of prodigy, well versed in English, French and Sanskrit Toru Dutt displays an originality of imagination not easily seen in the earlier poets. Although she quotes freely from English poets like Pope and Wordsworth she never relapses into psittacosis. Her originality stands out prominent when we compare her with another poet of the time Behramji Merwanji Malabari (1853-1912) whose *Indian Muse in English Garb* unequivocally flatters Queen Victoria and Prince of Wales. Some lyricists like C.N. Vesuvala (nom de plume Chili Chutnee), M.M.Kunte, and Nagesh Viswanath Pai published from Bombay but it was Kolkata that dominated the Indian poetic scenario for long.

Romesh Chunder Dutt's translations of Sanskrit and Prakrit classics including the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Rigveda*, *Upanishads*, *Kalidasa*, *Bharavi* and Buddhist texts like *Dhammapada* are worth mention.

Our next significant poet, Manmohun Ghosh (1869-1924), studied in Oxford and specialized in classical literature. He came in contact with the poets of the Decadent school and had his poems published in the collection of *Primavera* where Binyon was one of the editors. Manmohun shared with Stephen Philips, Laurence

Binyon and Arthur Cripps the mood of yearning and world-weariness and the colorful aestheticism of eighteen -ninetees. Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) his younger brother, who proceeded from patriot to poet to seer enjoyed a poetic career that is sixty long years. His diverse and impressive works include lyrical, narrative and philosophical pieces, short poems and also an epic. His short poems deal with the typically romantic subjects like love, sorrow, death and liberty in a characteristic romantic style. His longer poems reveal his fascination for quantitative hexameter. His epic *Savitri* with the subtitle '*the legend and a symbol*' is an explanation in itself, for Aurobindo here makes the ancient Hindu legend of Satyavan and Savitri his symbol of divine realisation. A grand work of its kind it echoes Milton and the Romantic poets. Aurobindo's influence continued in the poets like Dilip Kumar Roy, Nahar, Prithvindra Mukherjee, Madhusudan Reddy, in Godkak's *Song of Life and Other Poems* (1947) and in Srinivasa Iyengar's *Tryst With Divine* (1974).

On the eve of departure to England for medical treatment, Tagore(1861-1941) had rendered some of his Bengali poems into English, which was later published retaining its original Bengali name; *Gitanjali* (1912). Tagore, who enthralled W.B.Yeats and William Rothenstein, took London by storm. *Gitanjali* was followed by *Gardner* (1913) and *The Crescent Moon* (1913) and came his Noble Prize for Poetry.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), who was again strongly influenced by the Romantic Poets, also won recognition in England. By now there were scores of voices singing in English and many of them had overpowering mystic vision. Joseph Furtado here needs mention for he was probably the first Indian English poet to write in pidgin English though for comic purposes.

Sly rogue, the old Irani!

has made a lakh, they say ---

A lakh in land and money ---

By mixing milk with pani.

(Furtado: The Old Irani)

The end of the world wars marked the beginning of new thoughts and expressions:

... the scene was set; it repeated what

Was in the script.

Then the theatre was changed

To something else. Its past was a souvenir.

It has to be living, to learn the speech of the place.

It has to face the men of the time and to meet

The women of the time. It has to think about war

And it has to find what will suffice. It has

To construct a new stage.

(Wallace Stevens: Of Modern Poetry)

Modernism began for Virginia Woolf in December 1910 and for George Levine in 1922. Whenever was its commencement, there was new poetry in England and in France. India, which emerged, as a free nation in 1947, was no exception.

The country scenes of England so loved by Robert Bridges came to be elegiacally celebrated by Osbert Sitwell. When the war came the poets had greeted it as patriots but soon enough felt its futilities. The next few decades were muddle of contraries in England. It swayed between hope and despair, peace and violence, energy and exhaustion, revived faith and growing scepticism.

Eliot's *Wasteland* appeared in 1922 and a vision of the twenties was fashioned in the light of the poem. Huxley expressed post-war a-morality, disenchantment, and disparagement. Along with these the decades also belonged to Edith Sitwell, De la Mare, Brooke, Dylan Thomas, Macneice, Spender, Day Lewis.

Twentieth Century France was characterized by an expansion in literary output and a rapid experimentation with new means of expression. Under Andre Breton Surrealism aimed at absolute revolution of visual arts and verse. Albert Camus and Simon de Beauvoir echoed Philosophical Existentialism that dominated post-war France with Jean Paul Sarte as its leader. From 1950s the dominant trend was however the New Novel or the Antinovel, represented by Nathalie Sarraute, Michel Butor and Alain Robbe Grillet. Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida provided fresh insights into analysis and criticism.

Modern Indian English -language poetry is one of the many 'new literatures' which began to emerge at the end of the Second World War after the end of Colonialism (Bruce King 2004:1).

By 1950s New Poetry had come into being in India. When C.R. Mandy became the editor of the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (1947) which was one of the most widely read magazines and decidedly published poems by Indian English poets this 'New Poetry' obtained a new prevalence and our poets gained popularity.

Nissim Ezekiel played a significant role, who after publishing in a few journals and editing a few others, among which was *Thought* which had P Lai as a columnist, became an assistant to Mandy, advising all those who aspired to write English poetry. Ezekiel next joined *PEN* and founded *Quest* modelled on English journal *Encounter*. According to King, *Quest* helped to make modern Indian poetry part of contemporary Indian culture. (King: 15)

Among the significant poets published in this journal were Dom Moraes, P.Lai, Adil Jussawalla, Kamala Das, Katrak, R. Parthasarathy, A.K.Ramanujan, Dilip Chitre, and Arun Kolatkar.

The Writer's Workshop that was established in Kolkata in 1958, by P.Lai and his associates readily became a very helpful forum for modernist poetry.

The workshop 'Manifesto' published by P.Lai, depicted the school as consisting of a group of writers who consented that English has

proved its ability, as a language, to play a creative role in Indian literature. Though they had individual differences they all converged on some important points:

1 .We affirm our faith in a vital language as sufficient to write in. A vital language may be in modern idiom or ancient but it must not be a total travesty of the current pattern of speech.

2.We think that poetry must deal in concrete terms with concrete experience. That experience may be intellectual or emotional ...but it must be precise and lucid and tangibly expressed.

3.Poetry must be free from propaganda.

4.We claim the phase of Indo-Anglian romanticism ended with Sarojni Naidu.

5.We condemn all forms *of* imitation.

(Lai 1958:31)

In the second of the Writer's Workshop, when P.Lai published *A Miscellany of Creative Writing*, there was an interesting convention on queries such as: Is the English language capable of expressing Indian imagery and tradition? Can real Indian poetry be written in English? Although they might sound today like The Mystic Masseur's *101 Questions and Answers on Hindu Religion* they were the questions of the hour.

By early 1960s Writer's Workshop had become a publishing center for important poets. The Indian reader steadily grew familiar with the names of Nissim Ezekiel, P.Lai, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra and of the other Indian poets in English. English poetry still exerted its influence on Indian English poetry but there was a radical shift of focus from the Romantic poets to the more modern Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Auden, Dylan Thomas, also to Allen Tate and Wallace Stevens. Jayanta Mahapatra's *The Exile* shows the influence of Wallace Stevens:

amidst the smell of smoke and gunpowder and blood,
 am unable to hold aloft the flag of language
 in a shameful battlefield of defeat
 as I watch the play change ,
 new characters come on stage ,
 and while so surely they go about their well-rehearsed acts,
 I wait

(Mahapatra: A Father's Hours :12)

By 1965 modern Indian English poetry books were in publication. The poets now attended scenes that were typically Indian and dealt with the characters who were not mythical heroes but the modern men or the downtrodden.

With the subsistence of new poetry the entire array of Indian English poetry came to be broadly divided into pre-independence poetry and post-independence poetry.

There are two schools of critics, the traditionalists, like V.K. Gokak, who extol the pre-independence poetry demeaning all that is post-independence, and the modernists who find all pre-independence poetry pathetically hackneyed.

After Harold Bloom the concept of influence itself has undergone a change. Influence is now regarded as inescapable and after T.S.Eliot's *Tradition and Individual Talent* (1932), a less derogatory term. Tagore, one of the greatest voices Indian Literature has known, confesses:

Kotha hote kon gondho je churi kori
 Sandhan taar bolite pari na kahare
 Je ami swapan muroti goponchari
 Je ami amare bujhite bojhate nari
 Apon ganer kachete apni hari
 Sei ami kobi ke pare amare dhorite.

(Tagore Utsargo: 24]

[I cannot point out definitely
 From where do I pillage which aroma
 I who am visionary unrevealed
 I who am incomprehensible to myself and others
 am beaten by my own songs
 That 'I' is the poet, none can grasp me.]

We must admit that the Indian English writers and poets, however influenced they were, have played a great role in adapting the language and establishing a niche that has ensured both its survival and significance here.