

Weaving The Threads: A Blue Print Of Indian English Poetry Since Independence

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Abstract

The trains of poetic thoughts were, seeking and struggling to gain momentum, in the land of India. With the onset of British rules and regulation, the freedom of Indian mind is questioned with perturbed restlessness. Although literature was scattered in India and it was more in regional and Hindi language. The British rule use of English, gave Indians to try their creativity in Second Language. Although the emotion, culture were Indian in essence but it was difficult to exactly pen down as there was lack of sufficient words. But gradually poetic wings soar high and high from assimilative, imitative to experimentalist, and modernist tone and search of ideas. The present paper makes a sincere attempt to just carve in a single line the poetic journey of Indian English Poetry from Shiv. K. Kumar to R. Parthasarthy, to give it in glimpse their poetic style, distinctive expressions and themes in these poets.

Keywords: Indian, English, Poetry, British, Culture, Language

The poetic corpus gathered momentum with sweeping winds from the west. The fetters opened their interlocked twigs and new era of poetry began in India. No doubt, a perennial history of Indians is known to all of us, the traditional, conservative bent of outlook, to revolutionary whirling swing of our Indian ethos and norms, but apart from it, every spirit of Indianess is succinctly in poetic prints of precincts ages.

Indian English Poetry has its long journey which can be easily classified under two categories: Pre-Independence Poetry and Post-Independence Poetry. To understand it clearly its conceptual framework several terms have been used like Indo-Anglian Literature, Indian Writing in English, Indo-English Literature all these distinctive terms denote writings in English by

Indians. However the term 'Indo-Anglian Literature', is more apt with its historical origin as a product of, fruitful encounter between Britain and India. In all, Indo-Anglian literature is defined as a literature written by Indians with their ability to express their ideas in English.

The developments of Indian English Poetry follow an interesting course in as much as from the modest beginning it goes on to touch dizzy heights. From poetry of imitative and derivate modes, it develops into poetry of innovative modes and effective techniques. Besides being simply the minor tributary of a poetic expression of a limited section of society, it goes on to be an important instrument of the expression of not only the aesthetic consciousness of India but also to some extent of the world as well. Moreover, it develops a rare capacity for the absorption and assimilation of the national and the global movements, literary as well as social and transforming the essence into Indian honey. Subsequently, it serves as a conduit transmitting the influence of foreign poets to the Indian poets writing in their regional languages which works as a catalyst to transform Indian poetry.

In the Nineteenth century, the Continental literature is suffused by the emergence of the Romanticism and the various movements of the Victorian era. Likewise, in the Twentieth Century there are Modernism and Post Modernism and within them movements like Surrealism, Dadaism, Confessionalism, Feminism and the like. All these movements go on to penetrate the Indian continent. Subsequently, we have our own 'Romantics, Victorians, Georgians and Modernist and Post-Modernist' (Iyengar 5). Along with the influence of these movements, comes the influence of the foreign poets who play a crucial role in the emergence of Indian modernity.

Indian English Poetry is obviously concerned with the search for thematic and formal identity. Thematically, it is in the quest of self-identity in all its aspects: cosmic, social and individual. Formally, it makes a persistent effort to develop the linguistic forms, which can express Indian consciousness. This search for identity can be understood in the four fold phases outlined by Paranjape. Further ahead the pre-independence poetry can be subdivide into, 'Colonialism, and Nationalism followed Post-Independence poetry Modernism and Post Modernism.

The first phase Colonialism spans from the year 1825 to 1900. The literature of this period is marked by the current of expanding Colonialism and the under-currents of Indianism produced by the emergence of Indian Renaissance. While Colonialism makes its presence felt in the form of the consolidation of western institutions which promoted economic and political disparities. It establishes reducing Indians into second-rate citizens. The Indian English Poetry begins in Bengal, the province in which the British established their first colony. It flourishes in

Bengal and then moves to Madras and Bombay. In the initial stages, the new poetry is limited only to English men or at the most Anglo-Indians. Derozio, an Anglo-Indian poet is the first (1809-1831) one, who uses English as his medium of expression. Derozio and Kashiprasad are later followed by Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) The Dutt family includes: Govind Chandra Dutt, his two daughters Aru and Toru and their cousin Romesh Chandra Dutt. However, it is Toru who gives a new direction to Indian English Poetry. First of all, she begins to seek new realms of poetry.

The Impetus search is provided by the growing spirit of Nationalism, the ground prepared by hundred years of Renaissance and various social movements is made more fertile by the social and political movements, especially the movements for freedom launched during the first half of the twentieth century. The whole atmosphere is conducive for the seed of Nationalism to sprout and to spread in all directions casting its shadow on all walks of life including literature and for that matter poetry. Subsequently, there is tremendous upsurge of the poetic activity in the entire aesthetic realm of the subcontinent. Indian Poetry now becomes a vehicle of patriotic fervor. These poets are led by some outstanding figures like Tagore (Bengali) and Aurobindo Ghose (English), whose work is still read widely as well as poets like Shridhar Pathak, Maithlisharan Gupta and Mankalal Chaturvedi (Hindi). All these poets are surcharged with the spirit of patriotism. They do not simply poetize their private experiences, but engage themselves in giving vent to popular experiences social as well as historical.

If Sri Aurobindo is the greatest of all Indian English Poets and Tagore the best poet of the century, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) is the most probably, the most popular poetess, read and appreciated throughout not only in India but also abroad. In the third phase, 'Modernism', the quest of identity gathers a tremendous momentum. The poets of the period explore the social and individual self stranded in an alien world. Formally, they develop forms relevant to express Indian consciousness.

The third phase 'Modernism' runs from 1950-1980. This period marks the emergence of a new poetic mentality that commensurate with the spirit of the post-independence generation. With the advent of independence, the spirit of nationalism is on the wave. The tremendous enthusiasm is generated by the promises of disillusionment in the wake of the blood bath of the partition and the rampant corruption. The old poetry is suffused with the spirit of nationalism, idealism and optimism which becomes irrelevant to the generation overtaken by pessimistic mood. The poets of this period begin to look for other poetic avenues capable of voicing their disillusionment. Naturally, the poets of the post-independence era begin to be attentive to the new schools of poetry which are dominating the entire poetic realm. The most prominent among

the new schools is Modernism, held in check by the vogue of Nationalism. It ultimately gets a favourable climate to flourish in the sub-continental realm of literature.

Inspired by Modernism the Indian poets of this period turn against the poetry of pre-independence era. They go on to reject their own past, their own traditions and alienate themselves from the new India. They as Paranjape writes, 'declared themselves opposed to the idealism and the romanticism of their predecessors...turning away from religion, they sought meaning and order in personal relationships. They explored human sexuality and wrote about it with confessional candour. Nature for them was no longer the ennobling and grand proof of God's faith in the world; instead they wrote about the city and its dirty, poverty-stricken and dehumanizing environs. Finally, the poets increasingly resorted to irony as the best means of representing their love-hate relationship with their surroundings. They believed, 'they were alienated from their society and irony was the only way of expressing their ambivalence towards themselves and their world' (20).

The wind of Modernism brings with it the impulses from foreign poetic traditions-French, Spanish, British, American etc. These impulses go a long way to influence the course of Indian Poetry. They also become instrumental in strengthening the spirit of modernity in Indian mind. Supporting this view Vinay Dharwadker writes, 'foreign influences have played a crucial role in the emergence of Indian modernity' (Dharwadker193).

Bruce King thinks that, after Independence Modern Indian Literature incorporates 'the techniques and themes of such major twentieth-century modernists as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, by discovering the great body of French experimental poetry from the nineteenth-century Rimbaud, an Lautreamont to the twentieth century Dadaists and Surrealists, while learning from the political poetry of Neruda and others. Several of the English-language poets such as Kolatkar, Ramanujan and Chitre, are also involved with changes in the regional literatures' (King Bruce 2001:5). India being an English colony, the English influence comes with the English language itself.

Significantly, Indian Modernism is a little different from the one that flourishes in the western hemisphere. Coming to India, it suffers some sort of transformation; if not in form at least in its content. It seems to have lost something of its fervor, momentum and intensity. It also loses its purity as it is mixed with other movements prevalent in the social and literary realm. At the same time, it goes through a process of indigenization often falling prey to the tendencies which it earlier rejected, summarily tendencies like Indianism, Spiritualism, and Romanticism which define the poetry of the second phase that is Nationalism. At times, it also tends to be imitative and derivative in mode which they condemn earlier.

Furthermore, its sharpness is also blunted because of its loss of purity. The Modernism which becomes popular in India is of a mixed brand. It often blends with movements like Existentialism, Surrealism, Confessionalism and Feminism. The Indian English Poets and novelists feel alike the weight of Existentialism leading with the problems of life, especially frustration and mental derangement. Most of the modern poets suffer from alienation and feel themselves trapped and isolated in a dark and gloomy world. They are Jussawalla's, 'Missing Person', belonging to the alienated middle class. Poets like Dilip Chitre, Jayanta Mahapatra Arun Kolatkar and Arvind Kumar Mehrotra are pre-occupied with Surrealism. Other poets, especially Kamala Das, Ezekiel and Moraes demonstrate the confessional streak. This streak is also found in their counterparts like Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Moraes. Confessionalism dominates the recent poetry as well as especially in the poetry of Souza, Shetty and Silgado. Likewise, most of the feminine poets take a feminine stance reacting strongly against male-chauvinism.

Amalendu Bose writes: Modern poets in their poetry are free to use English which is not mechanically but organically out of a natural inwardness which gives a poem its immediacy of experience. The poets of the modern time have been suddenly lifted from an exclusive to an extensive range of creative experience. They have been raised from a conservative to a cosmopolitan culture to confront the new shape of things and to acquire a new view of human destiny. The age has changed and requires a new change. This has largely been met by the poet. They have no influence of the British poets and they have their aim at working in their own way. They prefer originality and experiment in word-craft intensity and strength of feeling, clarity in thought structure and sense of actuality, freshness, sensibility, concrete, experience, trained intelligence and vitality are essential for good poetry. Nissim Ezekiel writes in this connection: "Good poetry is not always lucid and clear. Nevertheless, the amateur poet ought to aim at clarity and lucidity concrete and relevant images are usually superior to vogue immensities, simple disciplined forms within which much freedom can be exercised, help the poet to discover what he feels more than sprawling accumulation of lines. Rhyme and other devices may be discarded only if structural compensations and very special effects are provided instead. Development within a poem is a sign of maturity in the poet".

The new poets which arose in this era are charged with new note. They talk of the soul of modernity and universality which makes a poem contemporary and universal. All modern Indian poetry is sustained by the living waters of our racial tradition (the Vedas, the Upanishads. As a reaction there was in India, flush of romantic exuberance, witnessing realistic clinical explorations, the poet turned proletarian, psychologist, psycho-analyst, cybernetist, naxalite or primitive. There is a return to romance, there are sensualists, and the symbolists, the poetry of the spirit is as ancient as the Veda and as modern as the latest guided missile.

The first of the new poet was Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2004). mother tongue , Ezekiel's quest for integration made for a restless career which quick changes and experiments in the domain of philosophy , poverty, and poetry. The alienation theme is central to Ezekiel's work. His early fascination for Rilke, and learning his poetic craft from Eliot and Auden shaped his poetry. His minor Verse "Night of the Scorpion", is one of the finest poems in which he brought his alienation syndrome. The poem revolves around the sting of a scorpion told by an observer, who is neither ironical nor detached. The observer tries to project the Hindu-Buddhist view of evil and suffering without making any attempt to share it.

Another persistent motif is an obsessive sense of failure, leading to agonized bouts of self –doubt and self-laceration, revealing the poet 'in exile from himself.' It has also coloured Ezekiel's poetry of love and marriage. Ezekiel's own search for roots is at the center of the two long poems *Hymns in Darkness* and *Latter –Day Psalms*. It is significant that both end on negative note. His poetry reveals technical skill of a high order. He has always written verse which is extremely tightly constructed. His mastery of colloquial idiom is matched by rhythm and rhyme. His poem "Enterprise" shows mark of extended metaphor.

Another important poet during this era was Shiv K. Kumar(1921-) is a senior academician who published his first book of verse " Articulate Silences(1970) when he was fifty. This was followed by *Cobwebs in the Sun* (1974), *Subterfuges*(1976) and *Woodpeckers*(1979). His work reveals a mastery of both the confessional mode and ironic note. Gradually the confessional element virtually disappear, ironic mode persists and lead to develop new techniques. The confessional poems mostly succeed in giving intense emotion. The poet explores a dark view of love, sex, and marriage. Kumar's irony mostly talk of human adequacies. His victims range from the foreign tourist on Kovalam Beach to the Hindu priest in the temple, the academic to the High court. In his poem " Mother Teresa" where he juxtaposed Mother Teresa with the blood-thirsty goddess Kali. In his last collection so far, *Woolgathering*, Kumar seems to be moving away from both emotional turmoil and ironic perception to a more reflective kind of verse.

The state of Orissa is generally considered to be one of the backwaters of the modern Indian English Literature scene. The most prolific Indian English poet of our time is Jayanta Mahapatra(1928-) . He began his career with *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (1971) and has published *Svayamvara and Other Poems* (1971) , *A Rain of Rites*(1976), *Waiting* (1979), *Relationship* (1980), *The False Start* (1980), *Life Signs* (1983), *Dispossessed Nests* (1987), *Burden of Waves and Fruits* (1988), *Temple* (1989), *A Whiteness of Bone* (1992), and *Shadow Space* (1997). Two volumes of selections are *Selected Poems* (1987) and *The Best of Jayantra Mahapatra*, edited by P.P.Ravindran (1996).

The Orissa scene and the Orissan tradition play a major part in Mahapatra's early verse. The most striking in the Orissa scene is the famous Jagannatha temple, and one of the most traumatic memories in Orissan history is Emperor Ashoka's invasion of the land, and ensuing blood-path, which left the Emperor himself aghast at what he had done. Mahapatra's muse is haunted by these two time and again. His poem Relationship links personal memories with race memories, and the Jagannatha temple figures in both. In the Temple the scene shifts to Bengal and Tamilnadu. The subjects of the poet's reflections are the loneliness and hurt of life, suffering of Indian Womanhood.

The Temple is not only poem in which Mahapatra moves away from his native Orissa. In his later poetic collections, we find him in Delhi at the time of the Mob-fury after the assassination of Indira Gandhi; in terrorist infested Punjab, and in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh at the infamous- Gas -leak tragedy.

The most substantial poet of the sixties is A.K. Ramanujan(1929- 93). He went to U.S.A. and earned his reputation by being a teacher of Dravidian linguistics at the University of Chicago. A.K. Ramanujan's *The Striders* (1966) was published by Oxford University Press and it won a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. *The Striders*, summons memory buried moments of suspense, surprise, agony and are disturbingly vivid poems. It talked about mutilated beggar, the drowned woman, misery, and the images are unforgettable. His most recent *Relations: Poems* (1972) is an even mature achievement, and is something of a bridge spanning childhood and age, India and America. Another notable works include *The Black Hen*, *Second Sight* (1986), he also translated Tamil and Kannada Poetry into English in *The Interior Landscape* (1967), and *Speaking of Siva*(1972) to high acclaim from connoisseurs.

Ramanujan's love poems, few in number, have been generally neglected, but they are remarkable in giving fresh insight. His poem *The Black Hen* extend horizons and became more symbolic and reflective. The complex nexus between art and life was one of the Chief preoccupation. In the title, "*The Black Hen*" illustrates the figure of Hen in the embroidery with round red eyes and it makes one afraid. Regarding his poetic technique he has unflinching sense of rhythm. His verse is tightly constructed. His reaction to Hindu tradition and his articulation of the Hindu ethos have produced a different poetry. Nevertheless, it remains to his credit that he has effectively demonstrate complete compliance to his roots and shown great vitality of his work as a poet.

P.Lal is undoubtedly a sensitive and accomplished lyrical poet. He has trained his ear by absorption in the best modern English and American poetry. Gradually he exposed himself to humanizing influence of Sanskrit classics. He is romantic and an eye for beauty, but soon he

turned to translation and publishing. His verse collections include: *The Parrot's Death and Other Poems* (1960), *Change, They Said* (1966), *Draupadi and Jayadratha and Other Poems*(1976), *Yakshi from Didatganj and Other Poems* (1969), and two long poems: *The Man of Dharma and the Rasa of Silence*(1974) and *Calcutta: A Long Poem* (1977). His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1977.

His shorter poems show his development towards vague aestheticism, and an increasing awareness of social realities. The longer poems are less successful as he often uses symbolism. In the poem “ Man of Dharma”, his first long poem in which he depicted the character of Yudhishtira of the Mahabharata is far too long and adequately focused. He was the indomitable spirit behind the Writers Workshop, which was founded by him in 1958, an enterprising editor of *Miscellany*. Of Lal's numerous translations, the most ambitious is his rendering of the *Mahabharata*. Lal has also been a indefatigable publisher of books in English by Indian Writers.

Like Ezekiel and Kamala Das , Lal is a confessional poet, sometimes he seems to be attractive, protective, or put a defiant cover to hide the nakedness of the self. Lal's Draupadi and Jayadratha is an attempt to charge an old myth with contemporary significance. After Arjun makes Jayadratha prisoner, there is a meeting between him and Draupadi , and Lal has tried to underline passion and the poetry of the confrontation. In Lal's translation or transcreation he aims to be provide readability to readers rather than complete compliance to the originals. The Veda, the Isa, the Gita, the Dhammapada but they are more than poetry.

Arun Kolatkar (1932-) is one of the rare poet among Indian English poets-a bilingual writer, writing both in Marathi and English. His shorter poems in English are still uncollected, but his long poem, *Jejuri* appeared in 1976 and won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Many of Kolatkar's shorter poems, like Mehrotra's present a dark, surrealistic vision in which his persona's is evident. In *Jejuri*, the technique yields better results. The thirty-one sections of the poem describe a visit to *Jejuri*, a famous temple near Pune. The poet's impression of the temple are juxtaposed with those at the railway station. The surrealistic similarities display there is a same blind faith in tradition and the establishment. There is vision of joy of life that is missing at temple and at railway station. Temple is a symbol of religious tradition and railway station is a symbol of machine civilization. The poet is skeptic and ironic when moments of sympathy and irony creeps in while seeing a old beggar woman and teenage wife. The poem opens with a journey to *Jejuri* and closes with the return journey.

Jejuri to a few admirers seem to be Indian Waste Land, but in reality it lacks both the impressive and social religious dimensions. It neither have the complexity of the modern classics. *Jejuri* is a serious attempt to review ancient heritage. It is uniformly been regarded as a

quest poem. A closer analysis of the poem reveals the scrutiny of ancient religious tradition and it present in sharp contrast three major value-system : modern industrial life, ancient religious trad But after some time, Kolatkar gives up his early hyper-modernism. Now, his surrealism takes a different colour, it no longer prevents what Bruce King describes as ‘entrance to the meaning of the ‘poem’ (164). He now goes on to cultivate a new surrealism, ‘which now becomes a way of investing ordinary reality with possibilities for the artists mind’ (164). With unusual perspective Kolatkar now ‘turns the common place into an aesthetic ition, and a value system , the life , its principle, its ways.

experience’ (165). Now, it is the ordinary which becomes the basis of his poetry.

In his later works Kolatkar turns towards Post Modernism. Now he assumes an ‘anti-art’ stance. In his later poetry neither artists nor memories or personality is important. It is purposeful transparency or apparent superficiality which becomes the central point. Kolatker’s progress from Modernism to Post Modernism is only by his tremendous work ‘*Jejuri*’ 1976.

Arvind Kumar Mehrotra (1947-) also seeks self identity in the surrealistic states of psyche. Like Kolatkar’s, Mehrotra’s poetics also moves from the world of Modernism to that of Post Modernism. According to Bruce King, ‘his poetry largely falls into three groups. The first group of poems embody his immediate reaction to his discovery of modernists and post modernist literary traditions and avant grade tradition. It shows the influence of not only the French surrealism of Andre Breton but also of the contemporary Beat poetry and the Collage Cubist methods of Apollinaire, Era Pound, Whitman and Ginsberg and Dylan Thomas. The poems of first phase include: *Bharat Mata* (1960) *Woodcuts on Paper* (1967). The second group of poems are a blending of surrealistic techniques and constructivist poetic. These poems are conscious assemblages. The poems of this kind have no visible subject. This poetry is post modernist in which the imitation of reality is replaced by the art object. The structure which it follows is an open structure and without coherence, narrative and mythic substructure or musical organisation with recurring motifs’ (King Bruce 2001:184).

In technique Mehrotra is not so much a Modernist as a Post Modernist form, he is fragmentary as he depends on collage and Montage. It has ‘no mythic, formal as symbolic structure to create coherence’ (King Bruce 2001:194).The poem has no apparent author or narrator or guide. It shows the post modernist acceptance of technology; however it suffers from a feeling of exhaustion, hopelessness which is central to post modernism. Thematically, it promotes a sort of agnosticism. Mehrotra’s poetic journey is unfolded in such works as *Bharatmata: A Prayer* (1960), *Wood Cuts on Paper* (1967), *Poems/ Poems/ Poems* (1971), *Three* (1973), poems translated from the Macedonian of Bogomil Gjuzel and *Nine Enclosures* (1976).

Besides, the tradition of Modernism and Neo- Romanticism there is yet another tradition, Confessionalism. It is one of the most popular modes of the twentieth century of the second half. It has influenced the poets of conventional and esoteric modernism alike. Confessionalism streak can be located in poets like Ezekiel, Ramanujan, Shiv Kumar as also in Kamala Das, Silgado, De' Souza as well as in some other female novelists and poets. However, the best representative of the tradition is Kamala Das (1934- 2009), who writes a truly confessional poetry like the one written by Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton et al.

Modernism pave way to the Post Modernism introduces new themes which reveal the nature of poetic creations, the details of the Indian contexts and the exploitation of ethnicity. It poetises the states of rootlessness with no facts in concrete reality. Its focal point is the state between the conscious and the sub-conscious and a feeling of exhaustion, hopelessness and loss. The poetics of Post Modernism introduces a variety of new poetic techniques including: parody, pastiche, collage, montage, inter-textuality etc., in spirit. It produces a type of what Paranjape called 'literary cannibalism' of varying degree (26).

The advent of Post Modernism brings a new spirit in creative activity. It marks the conversion of some modernist into post modernists and the emergence of new talents like Agha Sahid Ali, Saleem Peeradina, Manohar Shetty, Vikram Seth, and other poets as well waiting in the wings. However, among these poets, the most representative ones are Saleem Peeradina, Manohar Shetty and Vikram Seth. On the whole Indian English Poetic consciousness revolves around to poles quest for the identity, thematic as well as formal. Beginning simply as a minor tributary of Indian poetic, relinquishing its narrow colonial outlook it moves to focus its attention to Indian themes and scenes .

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