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SYMBOLIC WEALTH IN SELECTED INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

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Abstract:*Imagery and symbolism are the prominent features of Indian English poetry. Indian English poetry can be traced more than two hundred years back since to the day of Henry Derozio's First volume of poems in 1827. Literary work of Indian English poetry can be divided into Pre-Independence and Post-Independence era. In Pre-Independence poetry, notable names are Derozio, Toru Dutt, M. M. Dutt, Aurbbindo, Manmohan Ghose, Tagore, Naidu, and R.C. Dutt. Early Indian poetry in English was romantic and imitative. Later, it became more spiritual, lyrical and Indian. Now it is modernist which can be labeled as neither Indian nor English but realistic. The present article deals with imagery and symbolism in selected Indian English Poetry.*

Keywords:Symbolic Wealth , Indian English Poetry , Pre-Independence poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Modern Indian English poetry began in 1960s. It has acquired a distinct place of its own. A large number of Indian poets in English appeared from sixties onwards. There are over three hundred poets practicing Indian English Poetry with a good hand. A. K. Ramanujan too has said, I say good luck to them. These hundred is not a large number for such a long.

The post 1960 Indian poetry in English has discovered its own character and voice. Indianness is one of the salient features of Indian English poetry. Indianness may be found in imagery and symbolism. Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan make ample use of imagery and symbolism.

IMAGERY

The term, most common in criticism, and one of the most variable in meaning can be applied to range all the way from the mental pictures which, it is sometimes claimed as experience by the reader of a poem. Examples of such range of usage are C. Day Lewis' statements in his Poetic Image (1948), that 'an image is a picture made out of words,' and that 'a poem may itself be an image composed from a multiplicity of images.' The varied use of words to create pictures in the readers' mind is especially frequent in Indian English Poetry. In all these senses imagery is said to make poetry concrete opposed to abstract. Imagery (that is images taken collectively) is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense and perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature whether by literal description or by allusion. Imagery is used more narrowly to signify only specific descriptions of visible objects and scenes especially if the description is vivid. Commonly recent usage imagery signifies figurative language, especially the vehicles of metaphors and similes critics, after the 1930, and notably the New critics, went far beyond earlier commentators in stressing imagery, in this sense, as the essential component in poetry and as a major factor in poetic meaning structure and effect.

SYMBOLISM

Symbolism transformed the phenomenon into idea, the idea into an image, and in such a way that the idea

remains always infinitely active and unapproachable in the image and even if expressed in all languages, still would remain inexpressible language. One of the major aspects of poetry is the use of imagery. Most of the Indian poets use the Indian imagery. The images of rivers, animals, mythical elements are typical Indian. Another important aspect is the use of symbolism. Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Jayanta Mahapatra, A. K. Ramanujan, R. Parthasarathy, Kamala Das, K. Daruwalla and Gieve Patel etc are prominent exponents of symbolism in Indian English Poetry.

The fact can be cited with the help of selected poems by these poets.

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-2003)

Nissim Ezekiel is not an imagist like British poets like Yeats, Eliot and Auden but he seems to be influenced by them. Sharp images, apt similes and notable metaphors characterize the lyrics of Nissim Ezekiel. His images may not be decorative but they are functional, vivid and visual. Images are found in large amount in the lyrics of Nissim Ezekiel. His key images are women, the city, and nature around which are woven a number of other associative images. The repeated use of such images and their suggestiveness often acquire symbolic significance.

Poem: Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher

The poem has vivid imagery. The images of birdwatcher, sitting on a hill and of the women surrendering to her lover are remarkable.

*The hunt is not an exercise of will
But patient cove relaxing on a hill
To note the movement of a timid wing
Until the one who knows that she is loved
No longer waits but risks surrendering.*

These lines suggest that a birdwatcher waits patiently on a hill to observe movements of rare birds. A lover waits at riverside for his beloved patiently till she surrenders to him. In the same way, the poet waits silently for inspiration to create rare words of poetry. In this way, it is waiting and patience which brings a reward.

The image of thorny ground is presented as...

*To watch the rarer birds you have to go
Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow
In silence near the source, or by a shore
Remote and thorny like the hearts dark floor.*

These lines refer to the arduous nature of the poet's mission. Paul Varghese is of the opinion that, what striking about the use of images in this poem is that the transition from one image to the other is so unobtrusive that the Poet, lover, birdwatcher lose their separate identities for once and merge into one another to carry the poem forward to its end. Another critic named I. N. Kher is of the view that the images in this poem merge into each other like lovers in the act of love.

Poem: Case study

The poem is a study of an 'unfinished man.' It gives a portrait of a man who could not really make up his mind about his career or his mission life. In this autobiographical poem, Nissim Ezekiel presents a case study of the universal experience of success and failure in everyone's life. Naturally, there is a sense of guilt and an acceptance of reality. The unfinished man symbolizes any frustrated young man of our age.

*Not all returned as heroes who had field
In wanting bath to have and eat the cake
Not all who fail are counted with fake.*

These lines are last lines of the poem. The man is an image of irony and a laughing stock.

Poem: The Railway Clerk

It is a monologue. The speaker is an Indian railway clerk from Mumbai and expresses his feelings of unhappiness and discontent caused by difficulties in his life. The clerk symbolizes poverty and misery in India and also middle class people.

*My wife is always asking for more money.
Money, money where to get money?*

My job is such, no one giving bribe.

*While other clerks are in fortunate position
And no promotion even because I am not graduate.*

These lines represent real condition of Indian middle class people; wife asking repeatedly for money because she is not working and husband struggling to get money for survival. It also expresses typical Indian mentality expecting money as bribe.

A. K. Ramanujan (1929-1993)

Ramanujan is a master of striking imagery and fine lyricist. His poetry is image oriented his images are precise and accurate, real and highly suggestive. They are not vague and abstract. His imagery has richness and fullness. In some cases Ramanujan imagery becomes complex. In many of his poems imagery seems to determine and control the theme. A critic expresses his view about him as, in Ramanujan's poetry, the image is not only the spring Board of poetic composition, but the kernel as well, underneath the poems, and one can decipher the pattern in which the poet seems to think the pattern of images. The poems of Ramanujan are full of vivid striking images.

Poem: A River

The River is a central symbol in the poem. The centrality is suggested even in the title. It is not a traditional symbol of holy water; a sacred purifying water. It is a symbol of modern dirty city. Madurai which was once a holy city has now turned into dirty city. The poem contains rich images. The poem has Indian images. The central image is that of the river the Vaikai. The poet describes the state of the river in the summer season.

Every summer

*A river dries to a trickle
In the sand,
Baring the sand-ribs,
Straw and women's hair
Clogging the Watergates
At the rusty bars
Under the bridges with patches
Of repair all over them,
The wet stones glistening like sleepy
Crocodiles, the dry ones
Haven water buffaloes lounging in the sun*

These lines present a picture of the river dried in summer. The river looks like a stream. The sand is bare blocked the trickle (stream); the rusty bars of the bridges are seen with patches of cement. The wet stones look like crocodiles, while the dry stones look like the shaven buffaloes. The line contains images of decadence and dirt. The image of the 'bridge' is a decadent image. The river points to the decadence of modern city. It is also the decadence of Indian religion and culture. It suggests a slow collapse of modern culture.

*The river has water enough
To be poetic
About only one a year
And then
It carries a way
In the first half hour
Three villages
A couple of cows
Named Gopi and Brinda
And one pregnant woman
Expecting identical twins
With no moles on their bodies,
With different coloured diapess"
To tell them a part.*

These lines present the picture in the rainy season. It is a thrilling description of the flood. The river becomes a symbol of power and wonder. This symbol is much celebrated in the traditional Tamil poetry. It contains images of cobbled steps bathing places. The water runs over a number of steps of the 'ghat' the flood has caused destruction. It has carried away three villages, two cows named Gopi and Brinda and a pregnant woman. The image of the 'pregnant woman' who is a victim of flood is a tragic image. Here Ramanujan has presented the reality about

the flood and destruction caused by it. The image of the 'mole' is traditional sign distinguishing the twins. It is replaced by the modern color diapers. The image of the 'diaper' is quite unpoetic and funny. The floods also signify the destructive elements. Modern man is a victim of such destructive elements. The tragic death of the pregnant woman is a consequence of these destructive elements.

Poem: Obituary

The poem is steeped in imagery. The imagery here is ironic and suggestive. The central image is that of the obituary itself which controls the theme. The images here are drawn from human life. The poem begins with the image of the 'father' and ends with the image of 'mother.' It is a story of a decaying family.

*Father, when he passed on,
Left dust
On a table full of papers,
Left debts and daughters,
A bedwetting grandson
Named by the toss
Of a coin after him.*

These lines represent the death of a father described by his son. The description is ironic 'Death' signifies the destructive elements it contains images of debts, daughters, grandson, papers on the table etc. The poet says that his father died and left behind him a legacy of papers, debts and daughters. The image of the 'dust' suggests decadence and death.

*As before easily
And at both ends,
Left his eye coins
In the ashes that didn't
Look one bit different,
Some burned to coal, for sons"*

These lines represent the story of a decaying family. It contains fine images. The image of the eyes is compared to coins. The father's dead body was burnt properly. Some spinal discs which were half burnt will be thrown into the water of three holy rivers by the sons.

*Who sell it in turn
To the small groceries
Where I buy salt,
Coriander
And jaggary
In newspaper cones
That I usually read."*

These lines represent the reality of day to day life and its all dull routine. It contains image of 'grocery'.

Poem: Strider

This poem describes a water bug. It is rich in its imagery. Like his other poems, the imagery in this poem is precise and concrete. In this poem, the strider is a kind of water bug. It points out its distinctive quality.

*And search
For certain thin
Stemmed, bubble eyed water bugs
See them perch
On dry capillary legs
Weightless
On the ripple skin
Of a stream.*

These lines represent vivid picture of the water bug in insect. The insect stands alive before our eyes. The bubble eyed water bugs are weightless. They sit on the surface of a stream. Here the eyes of water bugs are like the bubbles. The legs of the water bugs are very thin hair. The weight less water bugs rest and balance them on the ripple

skin of a stream. It means the striders balance themselves on the flowing waters.

*No, not only prophets
Walk on water. This bug sits
On a landslide of lights
And drowns eyes
Deep
Into its tiny strip
Of sky.*

In these lines the striders acquire the spiritual status. The image of prophet gives a spiritual dimension to the striders. In other words the striders are compared with Biblical prophet Moses who walked on water. In the image of a prophet, the water bug is an amphibian. Thus, the poet gives philosophical thought through the image of a prophet.

CONCLUSION

Imagery and symbolism can be cited as significant aspect of Indian poetry in English. It reflects Indianness in poetry. These features make Indian English Poetry distinct from other poetries.

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