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SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECT IN INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT: -

Indian English poetry has distinctive position in world literature. Initially, being Indian poets in English was a difference. The variance was on the basis of content and skills levels, background, experiences, themes etc. In colonial period, some poets were either praising rich heritage of India or reproving her decline, but few poets cum social reformers protested against the social evils and ills. The political developments also had considerable impact on poets. They dealt with topical political subjects and events. The present paper makes an attempt to present an overview on social and political aspect in Indian English Poetry which has been established as a stage for bringing awareness among world literature.

KEYWORDS: Indian society, Indian Politics, life and culture, human sentiments.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English Poetry is not just a branch of Indian literature in English. It is now an essential part of Indian- English literature. In fact, it primarily defines Indo-Anglican literature in the sense that in its birth, Indian-writing in English came to the fore with a global recognition. Like American poetry, Indian English poetry is highly distinctive in various aspects. It is not a product that sprang into being in a span of a few years or a few decades. It is a well furnished product, thoroughly polished from its raw state into its present having undergone an evolution for more than a century since its inception in the early nineteenth century. Indian English poetry has distinctive position in world literature. Initially, being Indian poets in English was a difference. The variance was on the basis of content and skills levels, background, experiences, themes etc.

The birth, growth and evolution of Indian English Poetry make an interesting history that goes back to pre-independence India and links it up to the Post-independence India. The Indian renaissance that took place in the nineteenth century in the wake of the western impact under the British- rule brought about a revolution in the socio-cultural scenario of India. The various socio-cultural factors played a very significant role in shaping the sensibilities of the educated in India during this period. With the introduction of English language as the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and universities, the young in India came in contact with the whole world outside India and interacted with the intellectuals of different countries in the world. They grasped their country's position



politically, socially and economically in the light of their needs. The influence of great social and religious thinkers and leaders like Swami Vivekananda and Raja Rammohan Roy brought about an awakening of national consciousness and a re-discovery of India's cultural heritage. Consequently, the educated men and women in India began to employ English language quite successfully as a medium to re-examine India's cultural and spiritual values. Through their creative articulation of English Language, they succeeded in rediscovering India's cultural heritage.

The journey of Indian literature started with the social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy who protested against the exploitation of woman and advocated the rights of press in his writings as well as actions and movements. According to M. K. Naik, "Roy wrote A Defense of Hindu Theism which was "the first and original publication in the history" (81). Later on Henry Derozio (1808-31) who wrote first original poetry in English was more patriotic. Henry Derozio and Kashiprasad Ghosh set the tone for the love of India which was followed by Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo, Kashiprasad Ghosh. Similarly the first quarter of twentieth century followed Romanticism, Victorianism. Poets like 'Meherji, A.F. Khabardar, N.B. Thadhani, Nizam Jung, Harendra Nath Chattopadhyaya, and Ananda Acharya exploited Indian and oriental thought in the typical Indian manner'. The second quarter of twentieth century led a rich harvest of poets like 'V.N. Bhushan, S.R. Dongerkery, T.P. Kailasam, N. Krishna Murti and A. Menezes' continued the humanistic trend while Nolini Kant Gupta, Dilip Kumar Roy, E.L. Vaswani, Nirodvaran K.D. Sethna, and Nishi Kanto carried forward the tradition of mystical poetry. The third quarter of 20th century has seen the further strengthening of modernist as well as new symbolist's trend. Here the poets published from 'Writers Workshop' like, P. Lal, Kamala Das, V.D. Trivedi, Marry Erulkar, A.K. Ramanujan and several others seem to reveal significant development modernist lines in Indo-Anglian poetry'. The age from 1922 to 1947 can easily be called the age of Indianness as all the writings of this period were either glorifying the rich heritage of India or admonishing her decline, but few poets cum social reformers protested against the social evils and ills.

The political developments had considerable impact on poets. English language poetry in India always included topical political events. It was expected that with the attainment of Indian independence and the withdrawal of the British from India, the creative writing in English would die out and there would be no Indian literature in English. Far from dying out, there has been an upsurge of Indian writing in English and the literary yield in poetry and fiction began to grow enormously since Independence, proving the prediction utterly false. In fact, quite paradoxically, since the withdrawal of the British from India and the attainment of Indian independence, Indian-English poetry acquired the quality of genuine Indianness, having emerged out of the shackles of English poetry.

The eminent Indian – English poet, R.Partha Saradhi observes this fact: An important characteristic of Indian verse in English in the mid – twentieth century has been its emergence from the main stream of English literature and its appearance as part of Indian literature. It has been said that it is Indian in sensibility and content, and English in language. It is rooted in and stems from the Indian environment, and reflects its mores, often ironically.(3)

After the attainment of Indian independence, remarkable changes came over the socio-political scenario of the country. The Indian – English poet who was also a part of this scenario and environment in his own country responded promptly to these radical changes and absorbed and manifested them so faithfully in what he was penning. Consequently, the reformist idealism, the spirit of nostalgia and patriotic spirit, the dominant characteristic features of pre-independent Indian – English poetry completely vanished from the works of these modern Indian – English poets, giving way to a new temperament and outlook in the psyche of the Indian – English poet. Politics as a service – oriented commitment deteriorated and instead, flourished as an unethical, lucrative self aggrandizing profession and as a shameless, crude power – game. The moral fibre of the nation was torn off and with the abandonment of idealistic pursuit; there was moral disintegration and economic inequality and social imbalance in the Indian society. So in accordance with the changing socio-political scenario, the post-Independent Indian – English poet began to assume a unique role of an uncompromising, bitter critic of the contemporary society and became a spokesman of his times and dreams and visions of the society he was living in. These modern Indian – English poets rejected the older themes and

forms. They abandoned the ornate, rhetorical style of their predecessors and chose plain, colloquial and simple style, with the sole objective of reaching out to the readers of the modern age and capturing the complexity of the contemporary society. Disillusioned with romantic idealism and reacting against the philosophical mysticism of the earlier poets, hailed as progressives and proletarians, these poets turned more satirical, cynical and ironic, carving out their poetry of protest in a new idiom and a new style. The modern poets began to focus on logical development of feeling, argumentative thought, communication with the reader, formal structure, precision of expression, and clean images. Consequently, modern poetry became more self-conscious, deconstructive, aware of popular culture, arbitrary and more narrative and less lyrical. With the poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, A.K.Ramanujan Jayantmahapatra, Kamala Das writing prolifically during the 1950s, a new movement in Indian – English poetry began.

The new Indian-English poets responded to the needs of contemporary sensibility and they chose the themes that were truly Indian, socially relevant and aesthetically satisfying. They experimented with form and style. The writers' workshop, Calcutta, a non-profit and non-political literary body played a creative role and made a significant contribution to the promotion of Indian writing in English by publishing young modern poets like Ezekiel and Kamala Das. The world poetry society in Chennai under the literary stewardship of Krishna Srinivas, an internationally acclaimed poet, dedicated to the promotion of good poetry, published young men and women of sterling poetic talent in its monthly – journal, Poet and world-anthologies of poetry and helped many a young poet to win global recognition and repute. A spate of literary journals that came into existence encouraged the creative writing, publishing poetry written in English by young men and women. Prominent among the literary journals are Indian literature (Sahitya Akademi), The Indian P.E.N., New Quest, Poetry, Art and Poetry today, Journal of Indian writing in English, Commonwealth Quarterly. Many other journals also published good poetry and the Indian English poets demonstrated the rich potentiality of Indian English and wide variety and diversity in thematic concerns and techniques of Indian-English poetry. The fissures and fragments of post-modern life are questioned and reflected in the highly experimental diction. The problems of sociological vis-à-vis literary politics, of gender inequities of marginalization and sub-humanization of women, of their social and artistic exclusion and of the dominant need for inclusion and democratization, all contribute towards the distinctive character of this poetry. For the first time, mapping out new terrains the poetry of such Indian women poets bring forth the suppressed desires, lust, sexuality and gestational experiences. This new poetry is a form of new thematic concerns of contemporary issues has changed the course of human civilization as the country entered the new millennium. As such, it does not remain isolated from the global trends and can be corroborated by the fact that it has incorporated itself the manifestations of the feminist movements that swept through Europe, America, Canada, and Australia since 1960s. At the same time in India appeared the poetry of Kamla Das, Eunice de Souza, Mamta Kalia, Tara Patel, Imtiaz Kalia, Gauri Deshpande, Suniti Namjoshi, Gauri Pant, Lakshmi Kannan, Vimla Rao, Meena Alexander, Margaret Chatterjee, Charmayne D'Souza, Mamta Kalia, Sujata Bhatt etc. These poets always remain Indian in their sensibility though they, inspired by the modern American and British poets, chose to adopt the modern poetic techniques in their poetry. After all, the question of Indianness is not something that relates merely to the choice of the poetic material, for the Indian – English poet primarily writes for an Indian audience though his poetry inevitably reaches out to the western audience. So consciously or unconsciously, the poet cannot help using and presenting his Indianness in his poetry and what his poetry reflects is nothing, but the heart of an Indian and the Indian sensibility.

Thus, Indian English Poetry that in beginning had a different doubt and discussion among scholars and thinkers but with the constant efforts of Indian English poets now it has gripped tightly the foundation of India and has become potent medium of expression as well as flourished and advanced with Indian society and culture and lastly succeeded in vocalizing the pains, pleasures and protest of Indian mind and heart in verse-form. Now Indian English Poetry come to the stage where they can take it as a medium for bringing awareness among world society and feel proud of what they have in the form of Indian English poets.

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