

Survey of Modern Indian Poets in English

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Abstract

Modern Society of India has witnessed freedom struggle and partition of the country. Indian English Poetry was going through a phase of transition which got heightened in 1947. This present chapter intends a survey of modern Indian Poets in English. In the later part of Eighteenth Century special demand for poetry began to start. It was because new society was rising. In true sense Renaissance in India began with poets like Henry Derozio. In starting of the Nineteenth century he rose as an eminent poet of India. His influence can be felt on several younger and aspiring poets of India. He himself was inspired by Romantic poets as well as French Revolution. As a result in India old religious beliefs were ridiculed and challenged. It is the tendency of time and history to bring an evolution of a new society. This kind of evolution takes time to prosper finally it is accepted in the society. Again it becomes history and is replaced by some new order. It is the cycle which controls nature. What was felt in Germany and England during the early Seventeenth century India was facing it in Eighteenth century. This is one of the reasons that it can be said that it was like a transition period for India. Even after the death of Derozio his followers never stopped ridiculing the old order.

Keywords- Struggle, Romantic, Religious, Evolution, Renaissance

They were called as “Derozio men”¹. They were the real iconoclasts of the society. Society acts like a mirror and everybody wants his image clean in that mirror. Due to this reason a person has several identities in the society. In form of a father he wants to have a clean image and in form of a son also he does not want to defame himself. Even in this tough situation modern poetry was taking birth in India. During this period “Hinduism”² was ruling the Indian society and it was the reason that intellectual class started watching loopholes in this religion. It was a common reaction of men to find fault in religion because they were influenced by several revolutions of the world. It attracted “Christian missionaries”³ to India. Their faiths and rituals were supported by the so called intellectuals because collectively they started to challenge the principles of Hinduism. My intentions are not to talk about religion and its principles but my intention is very clear that how modernism knocked the door in Indian society. It was the case with poets like Toru Dutt. She belongs to a rich family. Her father Govin Chunder Dutt was a respected man in Calcutta. Religion plays a pivotal role in her life. Later we will find that she was fascinated with Christianity. These poets looked society differently. Modernism in India gave a vision to these poets that this universe has been created by God and it was gifted to man to enjoy and admire the creation of the almighty. Thus, human beings should not create any hurdle in enjoying the beautiful creation of the God. This is one of the reasons that modern poets of India kept on ridiculing the orthodox society of India. The finest examples of such poets are Nissim Ezekiel and Keki. N. Daruwalla. Though people say that Ezekiel is an outsider but I am hardly concerned about this. Whenever I read the poems of Ezekiel I feel that he is a real Indian because his words are special and it appeals to my senses. Keki N. Daruwalla is another poet who is known for his own philosophy. His understanding of religion is different from Ezekiel. Critics and scholars have different views regarding the poems of Daruwalla. He is popularly known as a “landscape poet”⁴ because his style of writing is subjective. It is not a spontaneous overflow however his emotions are powerful. It is not an easy task to compare the emotions of Daruwalla with Ezekiel. Both are emotional in appeal but their intentions are different. It is one of the reasons that they are successful in stirring the heart and mind of their readers. In this chapter I am not going to compare these two poets as this chapter intends to present modern

Indian poets in English. Modern Indian evolved greatly with poets like Rabindranath Tagore. Chiefly he is a Bengali writer but Indian English literature is incomplete without his name. His understanding of the world was natural and it is one of the reasons that he got Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 for his masterpiece “Gitanjali”⁵. It has already been said that for India it was a period of transition. Tagore was a kind of person who believed in world citizenship. This is one of the reasons that he is celebrated not only in India but in the world. He has a special place in the world literature. His concept of nationalism is that a person should love his country but it does not mean that he should hate other countries. Love and compassion never teaches us to hate and it cannot be supported by any religion. Tagore was surrounded by aristocratic culture but he always believed in simplicity. He was a person who wanted recognition for every individual. It seems that heredity and environment influenced him a lot. That is why he was a naturalist and academicians love to follow his foot prints. His poems like *The Crescent Moon*, *The Gardener* have been admired the most. Dr. Edward Thompson has remarked about him that he represented an age. He has taken Indian literature to a new height. Poets like W.B. Yeats and May Sinclair were greatly moved by his writings. W.B. Yeats has accepted that he was influenced by the writings of Tagore. He used to study the translations and poems written by Tagore in restaurants and omnibuses and it moved him a lot. His way of thinking and philosophies of life is so unique and Yeats was amazed that how deeply a man can think. When Plato said that a poet imitates his surroundings and for this reason poets are not good for the society then people were bound to think about the potential of a poet. It is right that what a poet writes is twice moved from the reality but it is also right that a man must have visions to understand his surroundings. Tagore was a kind of poet who had visions and he talked about his visions. He was not only a poet but he wrote different plays also. Sri Aurobindo adds new flavor in Indian English Poetry. He has written several poems dedicated to mother India and his disciples followed him blindly. His life was very tough because he followed the dictates of Hinduism. By doing so he was spiritually active but not orthodox. He had democratic thoughts and this is one of the reasons that he is admired even today. I have read few lines of his poem entitled *The Children of Wotan* published in 1940. By reading this poem I was compelled to think that mother India has given birth to gems. His writings are divine enough to encourage the people who are ignorant. Few lines from the poem are worth quoting here-

“ Where is the end of your armoured march, O children of Wotan?

Earth shudders with fear at your tread, the death –flame laughs...”⁶

These lines remind me of Pablo Neruda who was vibrant and dynamic. His writing style was unique and one of the special features of his poetry is that his objects and subjectified. He wrote a poem *Ode to Tomatoes* and in this poem his ideas are connected to nationalism. Tomatoes are seen beautifully as an object associated with nationalism. It is interesting to find that religion and nationalism has shaped the poets not only in India but in the whole world. Indian sub continent is a little bit different because of its ideals. Let me talk about India where we have seen the poets like Tagore and Sri Aurobindo. Their life style was totally different. Their understanding of poetry was also different. It seems to me that innocence and experience fuses together in their poems. William Blake once admitted that no progress can occur without criticism or contrary. He was right because he was experienced. His songs of innocence and experience have taught the world that how Christ can be as violent as a tiger and as benevolent as a baby. This is the beauty of a poet which Plato failed to recognize. A poet can create magic through words. Plato never believed on magic and he said that the works of poetry is twice removed from originality or reality. W.B. Yeats’ and William Blake’s poems are full of visions which create a boundary line between real and virtual world. Indian poets such as Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Nissim Ezekiel and Keki N. Daruwalla along with some other poets are vivid example of complexity. In their poems we can notice that there is a philosophy which stands between the real and the virtual world. Tagore said men to hold their head high in spite of problems in life but in reality it is difficult to rise in adverse situation. This is one of the reasons that Blake said that contraries are necessary to mark progress in life. Scholars and critics agree on a point that adversities break the courage of some men but these are the same adversities which make them bold enough to break records. These adversities make men strong and courageous. Ezekiel is a fine example of such boldness. In spite of several arguments that by race he is an outsider he kept on asserting that he is as Indian as some others. He never accepted what critics and scholars asserted for him. Modernism in England opened gate for women and there were equal opportunities both for men and women. Modern Indian English poets are aware of such opportunities. This is one of the reasons that there are equal opportunities both for men and women in India also. Poets like Sarojini Naidu write for equilibrium. She is courageous enough to speak about her life. It seems that she is the spokes person for all the women who aspire to tell the world that what a woman wants. It is interesting to notice that it was the question which was asked by wife of Bath. She was a famous character created by Chaucer. It is also interesting to find that Chaucer has himself

answered the question that it is all about sovereignty. A wife or a lady always wants her lover her own subject. It can be found in Elizabethan period also when poets like Sidney and Spenser wrote about the character of a lady. In *Astrophel and Stella* Sidney writes that the beloved is like a guiding star for her lover. The beloved was always seen like a master while the lover followed her like a slave. It was the tendency during Elizabethan period. In India the condition was different. During that time and even today there are special place for ladies in our society. A beloved is compared to a deity in India and people think about them that they are shy to express their love in public. It is one of the reasons that in a typical patriarchal society ladies are given less chance to express themselves. They also want complete dominance over their lover but they are never granted this complete dominance. As a result they are subjected to loneliness. They feel alienated and repressed. Poets like Sarojini Naidu understand this kind of agony and she expresses it successfully through her writings. In modern India the story was similar but the circumstances were different. During the time of partition several women were abducted raped and killed and it was also expressed by several writers. In Indian poetry we have never seen such blunt expression that what a woman want? She has always been treated as an object. She certainly wants to be treated like a human being. Forceful intercourse in form of rape and mutilation has shaken the mentality of women over a period of time. She is scared to speak in front of public and people take it for granted. They think that women are weak but in modern India such thinking were challenged and it was the demand of time. Tagore was the man behind the real philosophy of life. He understood that life should be based upon principles. Such principles were also understood by Sarojini Naidu. She reshaped the memory and desire through her words. Some consider her as lyrical and some as practical. No doubt she is lyrical but she made the readers aware that lyrical can be practical also. In the tone of melancholy she is parallel to John Keats who is the most quoted poet of romanticism. John Keats was remembered for his negative capability whereas Sarojini Naidu is immortal for her acceptance of blunt reality. Her words are not twice removed from reality but it uncovers the covered reality. There is a glimpse of modernism in her poems.

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