

Inner Consciousness: A voice of the Modern Indian English Poetry

¹Dr. Pramod Kumar. ²Dr. Gurpyari Bhatnagar

¹Prof, School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Sharda University.

²Assistant Professor, School of Humanities & social Sciences, Sharda University.

Abstract

Indian poetry written in English after the Independence of the country is usually called modern or contemporary. After the World War II. Aurobindian tradition was followed by some of the poets who were fond of imitating new symbolic cult. But after his death in 1950, a change appeared; tough mysticism and romanticism remained an obsession with many of the later poets like Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das. The poets felt an urge to change the tradition set by Tagore, Sarojini and Aurobindo, and they tried to bring about a new trend and innovation. They preached for change in the poet's attitude, theme, imagery and his use of the English language. New poets used the English language as their vehicle of expansion, best suited for their feelings and sentiments. Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes and P. Lal are the most eminent early poets of the post-independence era who provided a new kind of poetry which was written in the nineteen sixties and early seventies with a new creative urge and awareness, a new faith and credo, a pledge of sharp departure from the themes and technique of pre-Independence poets.

Keywords: Mysticism and romanticism, attitude, theme, imagery, pre-Independence and post-independence.

INTRODUCTION

To encourage such a trend and directions, P. Lal established the Writers Workshop in 1958. These poets are called neo-modernist who made a plausible departure from the old tradition. P. Lal emphasised the principles of language, method and intention of the new poets. V.K. Gokak calls these principles as neo-modernist trend in Indian poetry. New poets wanted to discard the blurred and rubbery sentiments of Sri Aurobindo. They wanted to deal with concrete experiences in concrete terms in their poetry. The experience may be intellectual or emotional or historical or tragically or comical, but it must be precise and must be lucidly and tangibly expressed. They cherished the ideal of realistic poetry and abhorred mere propaganda in poetry. Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, P. Lal, Monika

Verma, Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan Gieve Patel, Keki N. Daruwalla, Jayant Mahapatra, Shiv K. Kumar, and Arun Kolatkar are the outstanding poets representing this new trend.

Contemporary Indian English poets reject romantic or mythic generalizations that deflected attention from everyday realities. Emotional frankness with intellectual vigour got importance with life-experiences that were localised, ordinary and normal, and these new poets used a new idiom and expression most appropriate to their needs. In contemporary Indian English literary scene, a noticeable thing is the appearance of a host of women poets like Kamala Das, Monica Verma, Gauri Deshpande, Mamata Kalia, Meena Alexander, Margaret Chatterjee, Roshen Alkazi and many others.

P. Lal is the harbinger of new poetry in English, and the Writers Workshop poets have attempted ceaseless experimentation in new forms, technique and awareness. But a very significant fact that has influence of post-War American poets is the post-War American poets took different directions in quest of soul-searching and to adhere to a poetical convention or tradition. Indian English poets in the nineteen fifties also showed a sharp reaction against convention and gave a new direction to Indian poetry. They have shown a keen interest in modern themes, diction imagery and rhythms which has further intensified in the hands of younger generation of poets who rejected the old romantic tradition of Indian English poetry called themselves modern. The influences of many British and American poets are clearly visible on them. They strongly reacted against romanticism and mysticism. They discarded the influence of Keats, Shelley, Byron, Swinburne and early Yeats under whom Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya nourished their poems. The modern Indian English poets were influenced by contemporary writers like T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas, and this new trend can be seen first in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes,

P. Lal and Kamala Das.

The influence of T.S. Eliot and others can easily be seen in the predominately urban background of imagery and tone of the new Indian poetry in English. Shiv K. Kumar, Jayanth Mahapatra, R. Parthasarthy, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, A. K. Ramanujan and several others rely almost exclusively on the imagist poets. If Classicism replaced Aurobindonian trend in the nineteen fifties, the influence of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, the later Yeats, W.H. Auden, Wallace Stevens and Dylan Thomas dominated the writings of new poets. As such, the impact of Eliot and others on the poetry of imagist Shiv K. Kumar willfully obscure A.K. Mehrotra and realistic Pritish Nandy is unmistakable.

However, these poets have their own identity and have imparted poetry a new dimension as compared to the work of the pre-Independence

poets. The writings of these poets are free from poeticism. Their diction is free from clichés. They share a fondness for occasional Indian words from Sanskrit or any of the regional language. Most of them make an attempt to draw their autobiographical anecdotes and venture to write poem on childhood reminiscences and analyze their own perception of lives.

The pre-Independence poets had lived their lives under the British rule. Their derivatives and imitative poems were always concerned about the language of their ruler, and the poets were linguistically self-conscious. But, on the contrary, the contemporary poets have shown genuineness and authenticity of experience. They do not imitate romantic poets and their stock themes. English for them is no more an alien language; it is the medium through which they express their feelings, sentiments and outbursts in a poetic form. This has resulted in an unprecedented growth of a large number of Indian English poets, even though, except a few promising poets, many of them have produced only little good poetry. However, poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, N. Daruwalla and Mahapatra have brought out consistently good works.

Contemporary Indian poets accept the environment as it is. Many of them are urban poets. Nissim Ezekiel is a natural outsider, but he is committed to India and has made himself a part of India. Indian landscape attracts him, and he states his unambiguous commitment to it. India is simply his environment, and he cannot afford to ignore it by withdrawing from it. Pritish Nandy is the voice of urban melancholy, whereas Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande and Suresh Nath try to find themselves in their own life. K.N. Daruwalla finds his root deep in rural landscape. These poets are close to their experiences whether it is personal, urban, social or familial. They certainly contribute authenticity and genuineness to Indian poetry in English.

A remarkable change is visible in the trends of post-Independence poetic craftsmanship. The pre-Independence poets were more interested in subject matter than craftsmanship. The older

Indian poets cared more for what they said than how they said it. They produced many marvelous sonnets, haunting lyrics and mighty lines, but failed to give special attention to diction and idiomatic English. In fact, Nissim Ezekiel is the first Indian poet to show Indian readers ceaselessly that craftsmanship is an important feature to a poem which is more accurate and well-disciplined in the works Nissim Ezekiel. Dom Moraes, A.K. Ramanujan, K.N. Daruwalla, R. Parthasarathy. Adil Jussawalla, Shiv K. Kumar, Mahapatra, and Suresh Nath are only the few names who reveal genuine concern for craft and control. But the charge of William Walsh regarding the dry element of Indian English poetry is somewhat correct. The contemporary poets rejects the emotional bargain on the one hand, but on the other they narrow down their poetic range to mere conversational varieties of 'verse libre' in matters of technique and style. Here it can be affirmed that these shortcomings in regard to range and technique are noticeable due to their incompetence and their intentional efforts to bid good bye to Sri Aurobindo's "blurred and rubbery sentiments," and also due to the spirit of urge to revolt against the old, imitative tradition resulting in deliberate attempts to experiment new methods and models.

Another significant change in contemporary Indian English poetry can be seen in the form of the emergence of a host of women poets. They have given vent to a powerful feminine sensibility in their poetry which could not be expressed so accurately by their male counterparts. 'Woman' in their poetry is as important as the poetry itself, if not more. No doubt, women poets were quite conspicuous and prominent in the pre- Independence era also — Toru Dutt was the first woman poet who compelled foreign critics to take note of Indian poetry in English and Sarojini Naidu was another distinguished poet who was also outstanding in the freedom movement —; but out of 132 poets in P. Lal's *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, forty are women. These women are well aware of tone, craft, structure, imagery and technique. The most important feature of these women poets is the expression of feminine sensibility. Many of them have

only slender volume of poems, while a few are quite prolific. Many of them are not predominantly feminine in outlook, use of phrases, images and poetic gestures, but they surely reveal the woman in them. Apropos of them, K.P. Saradhi remarks:

Among the contemporary Indo-Anglain women poets there are various figures whose achievements compel notice, but quite often they are good just because there is in them a pleasant feminine touch or a marked command over the medium. Some of them, however, stand apart as important writers possessing a board vision of life. Among these can be counted Gauri Deshpande, Roshen Alkazi and Kamala Das who not only bring to their poetry a measure of an awareness of the problems of life but also richness of expression.²

Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu are the major women poets of pre-Independence era; they are the pathfinder for the next generation of women poets. However, in spite of having charm and eloquence, their poetry lacks genuine feminine sensibility. Hence, it would not be wrong to call them poetesses' rather than women poets because their works lack the spirit of womanhood. Kamala Das is perhaps the first exponent of this sensibility.

All the contemporary Indian English women poets have some common features. Thwarted desires, frustration in a male- dominated society; love and sex are the common themes of their writings. Repetition of such themes and images are the serious limitations of their poetry. But love, sex and thwarted desires continue to be the subject-matter of their male counterparts also. However, women poets treat the themes with a peculiar feminine sensibility. Contemporary situations find frequent mention in the poetry of male poets like Nissim Ezekiel, K.D. Katrak, K.N. Daruwalla. A.K. Mehrotra, Mahapatra and Suresh Nathi; apparently, they also suffer from paucity of themes, repetition of technique and images.

Contemporary women poets deal with love and sex from their own point of view with considerable depth and vigour. Contrary to male poets, their attitude to love and sex are realistic,

frank, autobiographical, vivid and candid. In this connection, Gauri Deshpande remark: "She, (Kamala Das) and in general all the women poets must be given credit, however, for coming to terms with man-woman relationship in blunt, bitter and concrete terms, where men still pussyfoot around metaphor, metaphysics and roundaboutness."³ True, new tradition in the post-Independence era has been started by women poets like Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Nasima Aziz and Vimala Rao for communicating naked feminine sensibility with realistic imagery and candid expression.

The post-Independence era is, indeed, marked by creative bloom and poetic resurgence, but the setback visible in this era is the grave failure of muse by using free verse in the name of modernity in many poems. The peculiar problems of many Indian English poets, who choose English as a creative medium of expression, are the use of bruised idioms and broken metaphors. But the contemporary poets make use of fresh imagery with conscious experimentation. The major poets of the day live in a different ambience than of the old and conventional, and hence they have produced numerous powerful, bold, new and fresh images.

The post-Independence poets have revolted against romanticism and are determined to uproot the "sloopy, sentimental nature poetry" to change the poetic sensibility and modes of expression. But they have failed to bid farewell to romanticism completely. A realistic romanticism has taken birth, based on their primary experiences. P. Lal, Nissim Ezekiel, Dom Moraes and Kamal Das can easily be called romantic to a certain extent. Harish Raizada aptly observes: "The subjective element is the most significant characteristic of the Indian poetry in English written in the sixties and after. This new poetry is free from political and social consciousness and concentrates on the personal and realistic experiences of the poets themselves. The poets now do not fiddle with eternity or his agitating concern for human predicament, or his futile search for his answers, and there some of these new poets are self-revealing even to the point

of being confessional. They are uninhibited and treat of the man-woman relationship in blunt, bitter and concrete terms on the basis of their own personal experiences."

Personal theme is the recurrent subject matter of many contemporary realities as well. They are obviously not the harbingers of social awareness, but are not the harbingers of social awareness. Exploitation, poverty, social injustice, rampant political corruption, dirt and squalor of society are often sketched in the poems of contemporary poets. P. Lal's "Famine", Marry Erulkar's "A Child in time of Famine", Shiv K. Kumar's "Rickshaw-Wallah", Tejaswini Niranjana's "Dancing Peacock", Nissim Ezekiel's "Truth about the Flood" and A.N. Dwivedi's "Rickshaw-Wallah" are notable in this context. True, social awareness gets a special attention in the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, K.N. Daruwalla, J.Mahpara. Gieve Patel, Prithvi Nanday, Saleem Peeradina, A.K. Mehrotra.

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