

An Introduction to Anglo-Indian Literature



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The British impact on India has given rise, among other things, to an impressive mass of writing in English that could be conveniently described as "Indo English Literature". But this is really a Janus-faced literature. There is in the first place, the Literature created by Englishmen in India-or, less frequently, by Englishmen fascinated by India, though from a safe romantic distance who have made India the theme of Chaucer have no doubt scattered stray or vague reference to India in their works. But "Anglo-Indian Literature" as this Literature inspired by Indian motifs and by Indian spirit, but created by Englishmen, is called properly beings only with sir William Jones towards the close of the 18th century. A crass-fertilization of two fruitful cultures seemed imminent, but actually, the Anglo-Indians failed to rise to occasion. Anglo-Indians were generally obsessed by a sense of their racial superiority, and this effectively ruled out any real fusion of the two cultures. A classic like Forster's "A Passage To India" and (at the other end of the scale) on atrocity like Nichol's Verdict On India ate but accidents in English Literature rather than meritorious or debased Exhibits of Anglo-Indian literature has inevitably lost it's distinctive status, although books ate still written by Englishmen (and by Americans) which have a more or less recognizable Indian background.

There is, in the second place, the Literature created by Indians in English, and it is not in appropriate to describe it as "Anglo-Indian Literature" it is desirable to differentiate between Englishmen who write on Indian themes and Indians who use English as their medium of artistic expression. Today the term "Anglo-Indian" has acquired considerable currency. It has no racial or religious significance. It is reasonably descriptive, and it can be conveniently used both to label the writer and to describe, the Literature. In his introduction to the present writer's P.E.N monograph on Anglo-Indian Literature, the late

Dr. C. R. Reddy declared:

"Anglo-Indian Literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian Literature. It is a part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, commencing from the Vedas, has continued to spread it's mellow light, now with grater and no with lesser brilliance under the inexorable Vicissitudes of time and history, ever in-

creasingly up to present time of Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo, Ghose and bids fail to expand with our humanity's expanding future".

The British impact, however gave us in the fullness of time three needed impulses. "It revived", in the words of Sir Aurobindo", the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it put the receiving Indian spirit face with novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilating and conquering them". If new ideas and a new literature were to take root and flourish, a new climate of thought and purpose had to be created. It might still be the familiar Indian soil, but modern tools and rich manure would be very welcome.

The shock of the western impact had turned the sod, while English Literature had fertilized the field; and in due course modern Indian Literature was born. Like modern Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, or Gujrati Literature, Anglo-Indian Literature is also an India Literature, with a bright tradition of its own and still exhibiting signs of abundant life and energy. The stories of Anglo-Indian Literature rought fall in to five rather unequal sections as under:

1820-1870: The Beginning-the Age of the great Pioneers.

1870-1990: The renaissance in the spirit-the Age of Religious and Literary Awakening.

1900-1920: The Era of Political Awakening-the Age of "Bandemataram" and "Home-Rule".

1920-1947: The Era of the Gandhian Revolution-the modern "heroic Age".

1947 : The Era of Independence.

This is convenient, rather than an absolute, way of dividing the period to be covered, and overlapping cannot be avoided.

As might be expected, the earliest writing of the Indian in English was in prose, and Ram Mohan Roy, was the first great Anglo-Indian writer of prose. The bulk of poetry written by Indians, Indians writer's from 1850-1900 were trying out the new found possibilities of feelings and form of expression, leaning heartily in the Romantics and the Victorians.

If Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian to write English prose with self-confidence and masterly ease,

Henry Derozio was the first of the Anglo-Indian poets. Half Indian, half Portuguese, Derozio was wholly Indian in spirit and aspired to be India's National bard. His famous work was the narrative poem, "The fair or Tungheera," "Another Pioneer," Kashiprosad Ghose, was the author of "The shair and other poems", (1830) but his work has little intrinsic poetic quality. Among these latter, Michael Madhusudan Dutt takes a high rank. An Indian Christian belonging primarily to Bengali literature, but he also wrote in English a narrative poem entitled "The captive lady" (1849), retelling vividly the story of Prithvi Raj and Rani Samyukta. In the last decades of the 19th century Swami Vivekanand turned the English language for the purposes of vedantic exposition and missionary exhortation. Serial of the evangelists of the Brahma Samaj movements too, like wise, wielded the English language with consummate mastery and ease.

With Aru Dutt and Toru Dutt we reach the first truly significant chapter of fulfillment in the history of Anglo-Indian poetry. Tour's Ancient Ballads, and legends of Hindustan appeared posthumously in 1882, and more than ever proved her facility and power of poetic utterance in foreign medium. Aru and Toru Dutt were succeeded by Romesh Chander Dutt. Among other Indian writer's of English of the period were Ramkrishna Pillari (Tales of India, 1895), Behramji Malbari (The Indian Muse, In English Gorb, 1876) and Nagesh Wishvanath Pari.

The writers of 1900-47 were compulsive nationalists seeking to project the nascent consciousness of India caught in the grip of historical conflict and turmoil and change, and culminating in the attainment of political freedom in 1947.

After Independence there have been obvious out break of poetic activity demanding the urgency of national self definition and reflecting, a painful heart searching. The painful and shocking experience of political partition, the death of Mahatma Gandhi and uncertain nature of contemporary existence, have forced our writers to go back to first principles, root causes and primal experiences. The rapid urbanization and in-

dustrialization of the country has focus attention on the problem of cultural identity, and on traditional values in relation to changing realities, both in our society and in our society and in our collective personality, Apart from the sociological awareness, these have been new influence from the west: Existentialism, Positivism, phenomenology, surrealism, and the new Aesthetic. The break with romantic past is indicated by the modern poets, preference for Guardian Spirits of the new in Indian poetry. By contemporary Indian poets writing in English there is much experimentation in an effort to achieve modernity. Modern techniques derived from such craftsmen as Eliot, Auden and Dylan Thomas, as well as from the film industry and the advertising industries are being used. This experimental approach, this quest for originality and newness, this stress on individuality and regicide of all that is traditional often leads to fantastic results. There is much "image-hunting" and "word-hunting" in contemporary Anglo-Indian poetry, and one doubts if anything really meaningful is being, like Don Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, A.K. Ramanujan, Kamala Das and others, Giving an estimate of contemporary Anglo-Indian poetry Amalendu Bose writes,

2 "As a historical phenomenon, it is engrossingly interesting that since 1947 a great deal of poetry has been written by Indians in English; that both in quality and quantity, this poetry compares very well with the English poetry that Indians wrote from the days of Derozio and Kashiprasad Ghose till 1947; that in both quality and quantity, this poetry perhaps compares well also with the poetry of quite a few of the current Indian languages and that this poetry is the expression of certain attitudes and values believed in by certain sections of today's Indian society, wholly urban and metropolitan, middle-class, familiar with the Euro-American world either by direct personal experience as in a derivative manner that claims the validity of direct experience. This poetry, in respect of its pervasive sense of direction as much as of its balance-sheet of achievement, deserves the attention of the serious student of Indian poetry."

REFERENCE

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