

## **Inspirational poets in The English language**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper is a comprehensive survey of Indian English poetry. The paper tries to see firstly how Indian English poetry emerged as a result of contact with different foreign cultures and secondly how it went developed as an independent variety of English literature with the passage of time. The paper shows the emergence and development of Indian English poetry through its survey of different phases and so the author has provided samples from the writings of different important phases with due regard to the themes that they have touched on.

**Key words:** Indian English Poetry, origin, development, imitation, adaptation,

### **Introduction**

In order to develop a historical overview of the genre called Indian English Poetry, it would be in place to, first of all, try to build a rudimentary understanding of the nature and scope of Indian English literature of which Indian English poetry happens to be an essential part. Historically speaking, Indian English Literature began its journey as a “by-product of an eventful encounter in the late eighteenth century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India” (Naik, 1982, p.1). As a result of this eventful encounter between Britain and India, Indian English was born as a hybrid which enabled communication between the English masters and their Indian subjects so much so that with the passage of time, it gave birth to a variety of English literature now recognized as Indian English Literature. One is reminded of what F.W.Bain had forecasted about English and its proliferation the world over “India, a withered trunk ....suddenly shot out with foreign foliage” (Naik, 1982, p.1); in fact, one form of this foreign foliage is Indian English Literature in all of its different vibrant forms like poetry, prose, drama, short story and novel. While documenting the history of genesis and evolution of Indian English Literature, historians have designated it variously for example, “Indo-Anglian Literature”, “Indian writing in English”, and “Indo-English Literature” which at times would even create certain confusions also with regard to nature and scope of the same. According to M.K.Naik:

“Thus, in his A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature (1908), E.F.Oaten considers the poetry of Henry Derozio as part of „Anglo-Indian Literature'. The same critic in his essay on Anglo-Indian Literature in The Cambridge History of English Literature (Vol.14, Ch.10) includes Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and Aravindo Ghosh among “Anglo-Indian” writers along with F.W Bain and F.A Steel. Similarly, Bhupal Singh's

Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction (1934) deals with both British and Indian writers on Indian subjects. V.K Gokak, in his book, English in India: Its Present and Future(1964) interprets the term “Indo-Anglian Literature” as comprising “the work of Indian writers in English” and “Indo-Anglian Literature” as consisting of “translations by Indians from Indian Literature into English”. In his massive survey, Indian Writing in English (1962), K.R. SrinivasaIyengar includes English translations of Tagore's novels and plays done by others in his history of Indian creative writing in English, while H.M.Williams excludes these from his Indo-Anglian Literature 1800-1970:A Survey(1976).John B. Alphonso Karkala (Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century 1970) uses the term “Indo-English Literature” to mean “Literature produced by Indian Nevertheless, the fact is that Indian English Literature may be defined as a variety of English Literature written originally by the authors of Indian origin; in other words, who are by birth, ancestry or nationality Indians. Such a definition makes it quite clear that Anglo-Indian Literature does not form part of this literature as in case of the same the writers and authors happen to be of the English origin by birth, ancestry and nationality as, for example, Kipling, Forster, F.W.Bain, Sir Edwin Arnold, F.A Steel, John Masters, PaulScott, M.M.Kaye and many others who have written about India but their works actually belong to British Literature. Similarly, translations from Indian Literature into English may again not be treated as a part of Indian English Literature except if somebody has made a creative translations of the same in English.(Naik, 1982, p.3)

### **Defining Indian 'English Literature'**

The authors write in a foreign language like English but their style of expression, way of thinking and sensibility are all the way Indian in nature so their writings would be categorized as Indian English Literature, as for example, if one examines the writings of Henry Derozio, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K Narayan, RajaRao, Kamala Das and many others who originally hail from India but write in English, their Indianness would be quite explicit from their use of English language and the sensibility they embed to their expressions. With this small introduction of what actually Indian English Literature is and who qualifies to be enlisted and studied under this particular category of literature, it would be now quite relevant and smooth also for us to proceed to document an overview of the genesis and evolution of Indian English Poetry as a very important part of Indian English Literature.

While talking about the historical growth and development of Indian English Literature in general, one cannot do the same without referring to how English language and literature got introduced in India; and related to the arrival of English literature and language in India would be the questions on how Britishers landed in India? ; How they with the passage of time established their control on Indian business and Indian education?, and how finally they managed and controlled as one its largest colonies the world over? M.K.Naik has thus summarized the answers to these questions with reference to how English people landed in India:

Initially, the East India Company aimed at promoting its business and commercial relationship with the Indian market; but, the slow disintegration of the Mughal Empire encouraged it to go for the conquest of India thereby converting it into a colony of the British Empire. Many postcolonial thinkers and analysts are of the opinion that the British colonialists came to India under the guise of East India Company and Christian Missionaries in order to get their target of conquest served with a meticulous and well planned strategy. One of famous Anglo-India novelists and poets, Rudyard Kipling has a very important point to make in this regard. In fact, those people who had come to sell and purchase goods in the Indian market stayed back to rule and master India for the coming two hundred years.

The Mughal empire slowly lost its power and glow from the Indian landscape, and the last nail in its coffin was fixed by the English in 1857. During this interaction between the English colonizer and the Indian people through various institutions created and developed by the English colonizer, English language developed in India as a natural development as English people introduced it as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges, and also taught Indian people English culture and civilization through the primary texts of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Milton, Shelley and Keats.

There was a significant development as in the coming days the same new development was going to give birth a new variety of English in India called and acknowledged now as Indian English Literature of which Indian English poetry happens to be very important part. When we talk about Indian English and the contribution of Indian writers to the development of Indian English language and literature, naturally we come to talk about three very important concepts: adoption, adaptation and adaption. It is through these very important concepts that one can actually gauge and discern the genesis and evolution of Indian English literature. With the help of these three concepts and techniques of writing in English used by the Indian English poetry, one could, broadly speaking, divide Indian English poetry into two periods: Pre-Independence and Post-Independence; and while discussing the different phases in the evolution and growth of the same, one may refer to the phase of imitation, experimentation and, of course, finally the write back by the empire. The present research project aims at underlining and evaluating the manifestation of different cultural and philosophical transitions and shifts in the poetry written in English by Indian poets so that one may assess how much this poetry is rooted in Indian ethos and sensibility.

**Indian English Literature Scenario : Rise and Development :** That early texts of Indian English poetry were imitative is beyond doubt; but to say that these early Indian poets were mentally slave to the extent that they did not raise voice against the different forms of injustice and oppression of colonial institutions in India is also not true. There might be some poets who might have appreciated and praised the British rule in India; but there are many also who not only questioned it but directly spoke against the same also. An example of an Indian English poet's disdain of the colonial culture and way of thinking could be explicitly marked in these lines taken from Cowasji Nowrosji

Vesuwala's collection of poetry *Courting the Muse* (1879) which presents a chaos in the whole operative administrative system:

*There Devil's great and God is all unknown  
There Virtue hissed and Truth has little sway  
There Modesty is but feigned, and Vice  
alone Shines out all foremost in glittering array  
There men and women adulteries atone  
And sins confess, so awkward to essay*

Similarly, one would hear the voice of protest and tones of resistance against the foreign occupation in the verses of Chattopadhyaya who does not hesitate to declare “That no existing government/based upon war is permanent” and goes on to offer his own opinion saying that “Whatever men might say in song/to conquer others land is wrong” (Early 149). There are poets like G Annaji Rao who reveal and expose the reality behind “White men's burden” and lay bare the real intent behind introducing English language and literature in Indian schools and colleges, construction of a new breed of clerks that would serve the purpose of English people. Here one's attention would straight away go to the following lines from *Congress Ditties and Other Rhymes* (1928):

*They open schools and teach us English  
And lots of worthless things besides:  
For why? They want us all for clerks  
And over us they want to ride.*

There are poets like S.H Jhabwala who tirelessly urge all Indians to stand united for the common good and sacrifice heart, soul and blood for the sake of country, thereby setting the country free from the clutches of colonial slavery. One could hear such exhortations from his poem *Malini, the Daughter of Punjab or A Tale of Sacrifice* (1924) in these words:

*Ye Hindus! Muslims! Parsees! Christians! Jews!  
This land is yours; or you have made or marred  
This land; it is for you to make or mar!  
Ye builders or ye spoilers of its fate!  
Unite in common good; you live,  
you die But what do you live on for aye and does  
From father unto son descend. Ye sons  
Of India! Ye have eaten of her slat  
Drunk deep her milk and ploughed her soil and lived  
Unite to set her barque along the sea  
Of freedom “little poetry” (Ibid)*

One could never forget a poet like Fredoon Kabraji who shows his modern tendencies through his expressions and words that are full of anxiety, tension and pressure but very much rooted in the soil of India. These verses quoted below are from his poem *A Minor Georgian's Swan Song* (1944):

*Now at this lunch hour  
Unlunching,  
Sitting on gracious wooden benches  
I am rested, I am enthralled,  
I have company of silent,  
Unwashed, idle-labouring men  
Who flutter their "Midday Stars" And "Standards"-  
Nod and numble and jerk a twitching nerve,  
Bite upon air or a sandwich morsel*

**Merits of the Lords:** In early Indian poetry, one could also see that the poets were not only well aware of natural calamities, but they were also conscious of the strong grip of outdated beliefs and superstitions among Indian people. Some verses quoted below from Rationalistic and Other Poems (1917) explicitly demonstrate the poet's, Peshoton Sorabji Goolbai Dubash, frank articulation regarding the lack of education and communal harmony among the Indian people:

*But why the women?  
Even all men are not  
As yet educated, and believe  
In superstitious and beliefs of all  
The harmful kinds and by distinctions doomed  
Into a chaos of differences of faiths.*

**Anthological Prerejection n Indian English :** Some anthologists like Parthasarthy, A.K.Mehrotra and Daruwalla are of the opinion that the true modern poetry begins with Nissim Ezekiel while as the fact is otherwise. There is one poet Joseph Furtado whose poetry is fully of experimentation in content and form, and could be referred to as the predecessor of Nissim Ezekiel in making it new in Indian English poetry. Furtado's first collection in English appeared in 1895 by the title Primerics Versos. One of his poems "Lakshmi" is in the form of dialogue having Indian theme and of course Indian expression also. The reader of this poem could find himself/herself in an Indian atmosphere because of the tone, content and words of the poem. The following lines from his collection of poems Selected Poems (1942) could be taken as example for the argument made above:

GoanFiddler: Omerirani , amkudeotorapani

Lakshmi: I speaking English, saib

Goan Fiddler: Very well, my English speaking daughter, give me then a little water.

Lakshmi: Why little? Drink plenty much. All peoples liking water of this well.

GoanFiddler. Many thanks.

Never expected to find in this out-of-the-way village a Hindu girl speaking English.

And nice English too you speak, my daughter.

In another poem "The Neglected Wife", Furtado, again, seems modern enough to treat his subject matter in a profound psychological manner, and so he voices the plight of the

wife neglected by her husband who has not met his wife since the day he has been to Bomaby. The husband neither meets her nor even writes to her, thereby leaving her in a perfect state of despair, unending longing and heart-burning on account of her husband's absence. To this young lady who is past eighteen, beauty in the absence of love and liberty is just useless as could be illustrated from these lines of the poem:

While all declare I'm young and fair;  
But what is beauty,  
youth to me Deprived of love and liberty?

**Experience of Pain and Anguish :** The anguish and deeply felt pain over the present status of India and how it used to be a great country and civilization in the past. He, in fact, grieves and mourns over this change. In other words, one could see that he pained to see the golden eagle in the chain and this pain is felt to the extent that he wishes it to be free. This is how he recalls the Indian past:

*My country! in thy day of glory past  
A beautiful halo circles round thy brow,  
And worshipped as a deity thou wast-  
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?*

Turning to Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-1873), he was a bilingual poet writing in his mother tongue, Bengali, and English. His maiden contribution to Indian English poetry is his collection *The Shair and other Poems* (1830). A cursory reading of this collection of poetry would reveal to any reader that he was deeply influenced by Sir Walter Scott though many poems in this collection are about Indian festivals. There are reflections of despair, despondence and melancholy also in his poetry. In one of his poems, "To a Young Hindu Widow", he would thus see and lament the status of widows in India:

*Ah, fair one! lone as desert flower,  
Whose bloom and beauty are in vain;  
How dark was that fatal hour  
Which brought thee lasting grief and pain!*

One can understand the early rise and evolution of Indian poetry from the great compositions of these poets, though they were at the early stages of Indian English poetry deeply indebted to European Romanticism. In English, poets like Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) have left impressions through his works like *The Captive Ladie* (1849), *Vision of the Past in Blank Verse* (1849), *Ratnavali* (1858), translation of *Sarmista* (1859), *Is this Called Civilization?* (a farce published in 1871) in which he has proved his Indian stance and thus compose a blend of Western form and Indian content. His poem "Captive Ladie", having a marked influence of Romantics like Scott and Byron opens like this:

*The star of Eve is in the sky,  
But pale it shines and tremblingly,  
As if the solitude around, So vast, so wild, without a bound,*

*Hath in its softly throbbing breast*

*Awak'd some maiden fear unrest*

**The Greatness of Tagore** : Of course, this is a poem which shows a lot about India. Similarly, in a poem like "Oft like a Sad Imprisoned Bird", he anticipates the vision of Rabindranath Tagore in these lines:

*For I have dreamed of climes more bright and free*

*Where virtue dwells and heaven-born liberty*

*Makes even the lowest happy: where the eye Doth sicken not to see man bend the knee*

*To sordid interest: climes where science thrives.*

*And genius doth receive her guerdon meet;*

*Where man in all his truest glory lives,*

*And nature's face is exquisitely sweet:*

*For those fair climes I heave the impatient sigh,*

*There let me live and let me die.*

*which he used in „DakshaYagna'.*

Another very important poet from the early period is Nobo Kissen Ghose (1837-1918) who wrote under the pen name "Ram Sharma". He might be found neither too extremist not too moderate vis-à-vis his attitude towards the British rule though at a later stage in his life he did not mind advocating and pleading the rights of Indian people whom he advised not to use the British goods. He wrote prose as well as poetry. Some of his famous and noteworthy collections of poetry are Willow Drops (183-74), The Last Day (1886) and Shivratri, Bhagwat Gita and Miscellaneous Poems (1903). He tried his hand at blank verse in imitation of John Milton and ballad form which he used in "DakshaYagna".

In the lines quoted below, Nobo draws the pen-portrait of Vivekananda in these beautiful words :

*In flower of life, when full of fragrance sweet*

*Vivekanand, Bengala's gifted son,*

*Vivekanand, all India's pride, is gone*

*....His soul was one Of rarest grace,*

*and like a star it shone*

*Whose splendor East and West did warmly greet*

*Though brief his life on earth,*

*it was yet replete' With noble work*

His poetry has marks and impressions of resistance and protest against oppression and hegemony of all sorts. Here is how he criticizes the dual policy of the British colonizers in these lines:

*"It was by Onley's bard and sage-*

*"We have no slaves at home-then why broad?"*

*Is England's scepter, then a tyrant's rod?*

*No! we repel the charge with hoest rage!*

*Still, England! there are rivets in our chains.  
Which, thou wilt own, had better not remain;  
Remove them; and make it thy duteous care  
To mete thy weaker Sister measure fair.*

**Zenith of Indian English Literature:** This journey of Indian English poetry reaches to a magnificent height with the arrival of the nightingale of India, Sarojini Naidu, who, in Paranjape's words is "a minor figure in major mode" (Arora, 2016, Vol. I, p.115). Sarojini was like many other pre-independence Indian English poets influenced by Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Rossette and Swinburne; however, she used Indian themes in place of foreign ones thereby introducing Indian culture, ethos and sensibility to the West. Her poetic contributions include *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912), *The Broken Wing* (1917) and *The Feather of Dawn*. She has been appreciated in the West by many people like Edmund Gosse, Arthur Symonds and Mary C. Strutgeon for her melody, beauty and Indian content. In her poetry, one may hear the songs hailing the beauty of life, love and nature springing quite spontaneously. One may also sense Keats's features like humanism and sensuousness in her poetic works. Her folk songs show her devotion to the God as, for example, Krishna could be seen becoming an iconic figure for gopis or maidens. Some lines from a song may very well explain the nature of Naidu's poetry:

*O! if the storm breaks, what will betide me? Safe from the lightening where shall I hide  
me? Unless Thou succor my footsteps and guide me,  
Ram e Ram ! I shall die*

While all these names mentioned so far are great milestones in the history of Indian English literature by themselves, however, Indian English literature got the highest honor and recognition through one of its towering figures, Rabindranath Tagore who became a cause for International recognition of Indian English poetry. Iyengar would introduce Tagore in these words to establish his status in the world of literature: Tagore belongs unquestionably to Bengali literature, but he belongs to Indo-Anglian literature too—indeed, he belongs to all India and the whole world...he was a darling of versatility, and still he was the same man; he was an integral whole, the Rishi, the Gurudev. (Iyengar, 2014, p.99).

**Contributions of the VP Scenery Master: Works of Tagore:** Tagore was the bard of India who sang the songs of beauty, love, harmony, humanism and unity under the influence of Kabir, the Bhagvad Gita, the Upanishads and many other eastern and Western sources of thought. All the collections of poetry that Gurudev published are the storehouses of love and spirituality. He has to his credit collections like: *Gitanjali*, *The Crescent Moon*, *Fruit Gathering*, *Lover's Gift*, *Crossing*, *Stray Birds* and *The Fugitive and other Poems*. In all these collections of poetry, one may find glittering pearls of wisdom, lyricism, mysticism, humanism and beauty of thought and feeling at its best. If one would say that Tagore's poetry is an act of emancipation and a revolution in itself, one would not be wrong; rather, after reading Tagore, one develops this feelings also that he is one



such man in India who emancipated the Hindu mind from many false constructions that prevailed among them and thus liberated them from their own prisons of mind. He would find the God among common men who do their duties of life without asking for fruits as appears to be the case in these lines:

*He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where*

*The path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and*

*In shower, and his garment is covered with dust.*

*Put off thy Holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!*

In his poetry, Tagore follows the Bhakti Marg. He reaches the God through music as feels the mystic bliss upon getting inspired from Him. He loses himself in singing the hymns for the God and appears all the way a servant of the God. He calls the God His friend and sings the songs of mystic love for Him as appears the case in these lines:

*I know thou takes pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.*

*I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy Feet which I could never aspire to reach.*

*Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee Friend who art my lord.*

Under the influence of Hindu philosophy of life, Tagore believes in the theory of incarnation which suggests that man comes in this world and leaves it as soon as his role is over appearing again and again in a new form. The influence of the theory of incarnation could be marked in the lines quoted below:

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail

Vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillets it ever with fresh life Tagore, thus, not only offers a vision of life but also gives a clear definition of human freedom and progress. With this vision of life and freedom, the journey of Indian English poetry moves to new depths and heights in the form of ethos and sensibility that Swami Vivekananda shares through the same medium where Indian philosophy offers great depths of life and human thought. In his poetry, one finds the fusion of four ingredients, namely, renunciation, dedication, service to humanity and worship of motherland, something that is typical of Indian ethos and sensibility. He was deeply interested in Hindu classics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and was equally drawn to the readings of the poetry of Wordsworth and Shelley for their romanticism, mysticism and freedom. He is one of those Indian intellectual poets who popularized Indian thought and sensibility among the Western people as he could very nicely blend his Indian spiritualism with the Western learning.

Vivekananda is one such Indian poets whose poetry encompass varied experiences-philosophical, devotional and social-in life. It is full of religious and mystical outpourings about goddess Kali, Lord Shiva, renunciation, transcendence, creation and its mystery, Brahma, deep meditation, search for God, pantheism and the practical Vedanta. One would find reflections of the fundamental values of Indian ethos and sensibility in his poetry as they are in the Vedas, the Upanishadas and the Bhagvad Gita. Such reflections

could be noticed in the lines quoted below from his collections of verses In Search of God:

*Truth never comes where lust and fame and greed Of gain reside.*

*No men who thinks of women As his wife can never be perfect be;*

*Nor he owns the least of things, nor he Whom anger chains, can ever pass through Maya's gates.*

*So give up, Sanyasinbold! Say- „Om Tat Sat.Om*

### **Conclusion**

The British connection with India was effectively established in the beginning of the seventeenth century, though the first English man ever to visit India did so as early as A.D.883, when one Sigelm, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle notes, was sent there by King Alferd on a pilgrimage, in fulfillment of a vow. The discovery of the sea route to India by Vasco da Gama in 1498 brought the Portuguese and the Dutch to India long before the British. In early and mid-sixteenth century, British interest in India mostly remained in the formative stage. A petition addressed to King Henry VIII in 1511 reads: "The Indies are discovered and vast treasures brought from thence every day. Let us therefore bend our endeavors thither ward. Finally, the East India Company which was to link India's destiny firmly with Britain for almost two centuries was granted its first charter by Queen Elizabeth I on the last day of the last year of the sixteenth century, as if to usher in a new era in the East-West relationship with the dawn of the new century. (Naik, 1982,p.7)

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