



INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIAN WRITERS

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ABSTRACT

Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who wrote in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian diaspora, especially people like Salman Rushdie who was born in India. It is frequently referred to as Indo – Anglican literature.

The term “Indo –Anglican” is used to denote original literary creation in the English language by Indians. Today there are a large number of educated Indians who use the English language as a medium of the creative exploration and expression of their experience of life. The present paper throws light on the impact created by Indian writers on Indian English literature through various genres like poetry, drama and fiction.

Key words:Indian diaspora, Indo-Anglican, creative exploration, creative expression

Introduction

Indian English literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. It is also associated with the works of members of the Indian diaspora, especially people like Salman Rushdie who was born in India. It is frequently referred to as Indo – Anglian literature.

Discussion

The term “Indo –Anglian” is used to denote original literary creation in the English language by Indians. Today there are a large number of educated Indians who use the English language as a medium of the creative exploration and expression of their experience of life. Their writing has now developed into substantial literature in its own right and it is this substantial body of literature which is referred to as Indo –Anglican literature.

This Indo–Anglian literature is to be distinguished from ‘Indo–Anglian literature’. The term ‘Indo–Anglian literature’ is used to denote the writing of English men in English about India and Indian life. Thus Rudyard Kipling is an Anglo–Indian writer. Their works are also significant as they serve to interpret India to the west. However, their presentation of Indian life is often romantic rather than realistic. India is presented as a land of snake–charmners, Jugglers and Rajas and Maharajas, and one great value of ‘Indo–Anglian literature’ is that it serves to correct this picture and project a more favourable and truthful image of India.

There is another term “Indo–English literature” which is used to denote translations into English from literature in Indian languages. This ‘Indo–English literature’ has been further distinguished into ‘classical’ Indo–English literature by scholars like Prof. Gokak on the basis whether the translation is of an ancient or of a modern work.



The Indo–English literature has its own significance since in this way literary classics in regional languages become available to those who do not know those languages, both in India and abroad. Indian literature should be available in English because even today the English language continues to be a living link between those who read and write literature in different regions of India and speak different languages.

There is still another category of translations in the English language, to which the term ‘transcreation’ rather than ‘translation’ is applied. These are the translations into English made by an author of his own works in his mother tongue. The original is not closely followed, but is considerably altered and improved in the process of translation, so that becomes almost a different work. It is therefore ‘transcreation’ and not ‘translation’ proper which implies measure of faithful adherence to the original.

Tagore’s Gitanjali is the only outstanding work of such ‘transcreation’ on the part of an Indian writer in English.

Paul Verghese says –

Tagore made a phenomenal impact on every regional literature in India and that no other Indian writer in the recent present or the distant past has ever attained the unique distinction of being the inspirer and moulder of a whole nation’s literature.

This influence of Tagore on the literatures all over India became possible because of the translations of his works are mostly free renderings and are, therefore, not exact translations of the originals. They are ‘transcreations’ or something in between translation and creation; for Tagore took liberties with the originals and rewrote them in English rather than attempting a literal translation.

Indo–Anglian writing was a separate genre, as distinguished from Anglo–Indian writing and ‘Indo–English writing’. This way of writing has been enriched by such internationally recognized figures as Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, Aurobindo Ghosh and Mahatma Gandhi. With the contribution of eminent Indian writers such as R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Indo–Anglian literature continues to grow and flourish and attain higher and higher peaks of excellence.

In the early days of the British rule a committee of public instruction was appointed by the Government in the education imparted to the natives, and it allotted all the funds available for education to the Sanskrit college in Calcutta. Against this step, enlightened reformers, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, protested vehemently, and petitions were filed demanding “the imparting of the best and most modern European education through English.” Sanskrit and Persian which were the chief subjects of study, were felt to be entirely inadequate.

Macaulay’s “minutes” on education is a landmark in the history of English education in India. In the minutes, Macaulay advocated the cause of English and said,

We have to educate people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother–tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre–eminent even among the languages of the west.

In this task, Macaulay was helped by the Christian missionaries, who founded schools and published dictionaries, by the English mercantile community, and by the educated Indians and



enlightened reformers. No doubt the lure of getting Government service also helped the cause of the English language. But it was certainly not an imposition but something which was gladly welcomed and accepted. K.K.Datt asserts that,

*“The enlightened Indians in the early nineteenth century
had come to realize the need of linking their countrymen
with the progressive cultural forces of the outside world.”*

Extracts from contemporary Bengali papers like Samachar Darpan, Samachar Chandrika, Bengaduta etc., published in Samadpatre Sekater Katha, are quoted extensively by K.K.Datt in support of his work Dawn of Renascent India, 1964.

The study of English and western science on the whole proved very fruitful. It developed a scientific and rational approach to life, and educated Indians could shake off much of their conservatism and narrowness of outlook contact with English language and literature was fruitful to the regional languages, as it led to the growth and development of creative literature in these tongues.

It was the dissemination of English that led to the upsurge of nationalism and the Indian renaissance of the 19th century. In the early decades of the century Indians took to the language with enthusiasm, and many of them tried their hand at literary composition in English.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian to write in English. He could speak and write English fluently and forcefully as is clearly brought out by his works on religion, the precepts of Jesus and the guide to peace and happiness. But he was a social reformer and much of his writing is utilitarian rather than creative. His prose has lucidity, clarity and flexibility, and compares favourably with the prose of many contemporary English men. Through his well –balanced, well-reasoned prose tracts he could wield considerable influence and bring about the desired change in the thinking of the intelligentsia.

Keshub Chandra Sen, Dwarka Nath Tagore and their Brahmo friends were other social reformers who used English prose effectively for communication of their ideas.

“These men were among the earliest writers of utilitarian English prose; they blazed the trail for such great Hindu religious and social reformers and thinkers as Rama Krishna, Vivekananda, Dayananda, Sri.Aurobindo, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan.”

Indians began to use English for creative expression much before Macaulay's minutes and the implementation of his policy on English education. For example, Henry Derozio's volume of poems was published in 1823, and Kashiprasad Ghose published his volume of poetry entitled the Shair and the other poems in 1830. These two eminent Indians may not be great as poets, their work is largely imitative of such English poets as Scott and Byron, but their historical importance is great, for they belong to that small group of Indians who wrote in English much before Macaulay.

The novel, the short story and the drama were practically non –existent in the Indian languages before the middle of the century. With the introduction of English, there was a spurt of translations, and a number of English classics were soon translated into the various Indian languages was inspired by these translations.



The English classics were the models for the Indians writing in English, and their works were moulded closely on these masters. Bankim Chandre Chatterjee became the first Indian writer of a novel in English. He made his mark with *Rajmohan's Wife*, published in 1864, *One thousand and One Nights* by S.K.Ghosh and Indian Detective stories by S.B.Bannerjee are other works prose fiction in English from Indian hands. Mention may also be made of Toru Dutt's novels, called *Bianaca* or the *Young Spanish Maiden* which was published after the death by her father in the columns of the *Bengal Magazine*. Ramesh Chandra Dutt wrote many novels in Bengali and two of them were translated into English by the novelist himself. These are *The Slave girl of Agra* and *Lake of Palms*.

The poverty of the Indians languages in the field of drama is equally marked. There were translations of a number of English dramatists including Shakespeare into regional languages, and these translations stimulated the growth of Indian drama. They also served as models to the early Indian dramatists. The Indian drama, like the novel and the short story, was the result of the impact of English studies. The first Indian play in English the *Persecuted* was written in 1832. But the solid contribution to Indian drama in English up to date is that of Tagore and Shri Aurobindo Ghosh. Srinivasa Iyenger attributes the paucity of good actable English plays written by Indians to the fact that the natural medium of conversation with us –except for the super –sophisticated who live in the cities and in the larger towns, in the universities or business houses –is the mother tongue rather than English. According to him

‘Unless the characters and situations are carefully chosen, it would be difficult to make a dialogue between Indians in English seem convincing’.

Conclusion

Such were the pioneers in the field of Indian writing in English, and their work is largely imitative of British models. We may call this early phase [from 1830 -1880]. The phase of Imitation, though even these early writers show considerable mastery over English language and versification. They sowed the seed which was to grow, flourish and bear fruit in the years to come. The second stage is that of Indianisation, and it may be said to begin with the works of Toru Dutt in the last quarter of the 19th century. The third phase may be said to begin with the opening of the new century, it is the phase of increasing Indianisation, when the Indians writing in English acquire a ‘national consciousness’ and write to interpret the mind and heart of India to the west. Fourthly, experimentation and individual talent mark the works of writers in post-independent India; Indian writers have acquired confidence and strike out along new lines on their own.

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