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INDIAN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Indian English Poetry (Kamala Dass)
Indian English Drama (Vijay Tendulkar)
Indian English Fiction (R.K. Narayan)

RUSHIKA GILL

Assistant Professor in English, BBK DAV College For Women, Amritsar



RUSHIKA GILL

ABSTRACT

Indian English Literature constitutes the works of the Indian authors, poets and literary artists who compose their works in English language. Indian English literature has drawn the attention from every quarter of the country, making the genre magnificent in its own right. The writers of this genre have skillfully made use of their own intelligence and intellect in weaving the web of their literary works. While studying their literary works, the Indian audience finds a kind of close association with the characters portrayed in them. Indian readers can identify themselves with their problems, tensions as well as with the social, political, economic and cultural background presented in the Indian English texts. Reference to Indian superstitions, myths, Indian swamis, sanyasis etc. is made in these texts and the significance of this can be understood by such an audience who are a part of the society to which this genre belongs. In my research paper, I have focused upon the three pillars of our Indian literature in English--- Kamala Das as a poet, Vijay Tendulkar as a dramatist and R.K.Narayan as a novelist. I have focused not only upon their major literary works but also upon their style of writing, their themes, delineation of their characters as well as their mental make ups reflected through their works. Their analysis brings to the fore the common idea that although they are different in their outlook yet they are similar in one thing i.e. their *Indianness* which comes to light in their texts.

KEYWORDS--- Indian English Literature, genre, Indianness, background, three pillars

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Indian English Literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of one many languages of India. The exceptional feature of Indian literature in English is its local language construction and system. The subjects, themes and the problems portrayed in their works are very Indian by nature. The Indian audience tends to identify itself more with these works because they can easily understand the Indian problems and hurdles undergone by characters portrayed in the Indian English texts. English is a foreign language but since the British came to

India, the language has had an impact on several fields in education and served as a medium of communication. The English language came to India with the advent of the British rule. At first, Indians treated this language as foreign and rejected it but later on they welcomed it with open arms. The initial requirement of the Indian writing in English was the English knowing people. English as a subject was introduced in the curriculum of schools, colleges and universities. In my research paper, I will focus upon 3 genres of Indian English literature--- Poetry (Kamala Das), Drama (Vijay Tendulkar) and Fiction (R.K.Narayan).

Out of all the prominent genres, Indian English poetry is the oldest form of Indian English literature. Indian poets writing in English succeeded to indianize English in order to reveal the typical Indian situations. Henry Louis Vivian Derozia is considered to be the first poet in the lineage of Indian English poetry followed by Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, M.M. Dutt, Toru Dutt and others. Sri Aurobindo is considered to be the first male poet while Toru Dutt was the first female poet. In their poetry, they presented the charm and splendor of traditional Indian life and Indian scene. Their poetry touched the hearts of the readers. Their poetry was an expression of the Indian spirit of that time. Much of their vocabulary is borrowed from their native Indian languages. The later phase of Indian English poetry is that of the modern and post modern phase. The models of the modern English poetry were neither exclusively Indian nor British but cosmopolitan. The poetry of this age was an expression of certain attitudes and values believed in by urban middle class. The poets were realistic and intellectual and their aim was to bring to the fore the personal and psychological expressions of their protagonists. In other words, we can say that the poetry of the modern age was thought provoking.

Now I will move on to examine the poetry of Kamala Das. Kamala Das, also known as Kamala Suraiya, the sophisticated Indian poetess was born on 31st March 1934. She is a distinguished Indian poet who has composed her poems in English as well as in her native language, Malyalam. She is perhaps the first Indian Hindu poet who has talked so openly and frankly about the sexual desires of Indian women and owing to this, she has become an icon of her generation. She was greatly inspired by the writings of her uncle as well as her mother. But being a wife and a mother, she could not devote 24 hours to her passion of writing poems. Therefore, she had to wait until nightfall and after the members of her family had gone to sleep, she would write till morning. It was her dedication for her passion of writing poems that turned her from an ordinary human being into one of the leading Indian poets.

The poetry of Kamala Dass is replete with vivid images of love. Love is her forte in poetry. Ankit Tyagi has quoted William Walsh who opines, "Her poetry is self centred and unabashedly sexual although the sexuality seems more fascinating to the poet because it is hers than because it is sexual" (3). She speaks about her sexual experiences in a way which is self indulgent as she says in her work, *The Old Play House and Other Poems*,

Ask me, everybody, ask me,
What he sees in me ask me why he is
Called a lion. (Dass 51)

According to M.K Naik, her poetry is confessional poetry and it is dominated by sexual ideas. The use of lines in her poems like "the musk of sweat between her breasts," "the warm shock of menstrual blood", show that in her poetry, she strikes hard at the husband-lover and also voices her desire of escaping from his clutches into a world of freedom where she can live with discretion. Owing to the failure of her husband's love, her:

Love became a swivel door
When one went out, another came in
Then I lost count, for always in my arms
Was a substitute for a substitute. (Dass 58)

To her, the kisses of her husband appear to be as maggots rolling over her body which she referred to as a corpse i.e. dead body. The love that she has experienced with her husband is physical in nature and she has never experienced any emotional and spiritual contact with her husband. Her openness and frankness has given Kamala Dass a tag of a poetess with a difference from any other Indo English woman poet. In her poetry, the readers get the picture of a woman of flesh and blood whose inner feelings and emotions are beautifully

portrayed. Iyenagar has remarked that her poetry is aggressively individualistic. He has even moved on to call her poetry, poetry of pelvic region. Diwedi remarks, "She is a celebrant of the human body and her poetry is glutted with images and symbols of love and lust" (60). As a confessional poet, Kamala Dass has talked about her own world of experiences. Her poetry sounds appealing to the readers because like Wordsworth, she has never talked about the far off things and places. Rather, her poetry offers a glimpse of her own personal failures and mental illnesses. The following lines from her poem, "In My Grandmother's House", speak of her craving for true love:

I who have lost
My way and beg now at stranger's doors to
Receive love, at least in small change. (84)

Ramakrishna has aptly remarked that Kamala Dass deals with private humiliations and sufferings which are the themes of her confessional poetry. Thus, it can be said that Kamala Dass has contributed immensely to the development of modern Indian English poetry. She has successfully been able to assert herself through her poems. She, through her literary gift of poetry, has been able to pour her heart out; as a result of which, we, through her poems, are able to look into her subjective, anguished, tortured and painful psyche which in turn has rated her as one of the greatest confessional poets.

Focusing on another genre of Indian English literature, I move on to bring to the fore the development of drama. India has the longest as well as the richest tradition in drama. It existed during the age of Vedic Aryans, under the British rule and after independence, this genre gained great prominence in the field of literature. It is this genre which was largely influenced by the movements of 20th century i.e. Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Symbolism and Surrealism. "According to a legend, when the world passed from golden age to silver age, people started getting addicted to sexual pleasure and jealousy, anger and desire. Then gods, demons, yakshas, rakshas, nagas inhabited the whole world. At that moment, lord Indra requested God Brahma:

Please give us something which would
Not only teach us but be pleasing both to
eyes and ears .

God Brahma gave the pious idea of Natya Veda after meditation. He combined the essence of Natya Veda out of the four Vedas, dance from the Rig Veda, song from the Sama Veda, mimicry from Yajur Veda and passion from Athar Veda" (Adya Ranga Charya 1).

The rise of modern drama dates back to the 18th century. In 1852-1853, the famous Parsi theatre was established in Bombay which greatly influenced the whole country. The notable dramatists of this period were M.H Sudan Dutt, Harindranath Chattoradhaya, T.P Kailasaram, J. M. Lobo Prabhu, Bharati Sarabai and many others. In the post independence era, Indian English drama deviated from Classical and European models. This drama is experimental and innovative in terms of thematic and technical qualities. Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnard were the prominent dramatists of this period.

Vijay Tendulkar has been one of the most renowned playwrights of India. He was a movie & television writer, literary essayist, political journalist and a social commentator. At a young age, Vijay Tendulkar was exposed to his love for books as well as to the violence inherent in man. He began to inspect people from closer angles and found the wilder aspects of their personalities dominant in them. All these observations found their way in his plays. Tendulkar is best known for his plays, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, *Ghashiran Kotwal & Sakharan Binder*. Besides being a playwright, he is also a social commentator who has talked about the predicaments of various sections of society, especially women. He has found male exploitation to be the root cause of female suppression and oppression. He observes that in the Indian society, women suffer largely as they have fallen victims to the institutionalized powers of society. Women suffer physically, emotionally and mentally in the social structure as they are not looked upon as equal and free beings, at par with males. According to N.S. Dharan, "Tendulkar's creative genius sharpened by his keen observation and seasoned by journalistic experience, found expression in his plays" (9). Vijay Tendulkar composed his first direct play in

English entitled, *His Fifth Woman*, and it deals with the problems of women. It focuses upon the idea that the real justice results out of love and not from hypocrisy. This play highlights the idea that all women including prostitutes are persons having desires and feelings. His famous play, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, depicts the maltreatment of the female protagonist, Leela Benare, whose sole fault is that she is in love with a professor named Damle and out of love, she has yielded her body and soul to him. She gets pregnant with his baby but the whole society blames only her and not Damle for the baby. It is her ill-treatment at their hands that forces her to make a distinction between the adult world and the world of children as she says, "The children don't have the blind pride of thinking they know everything. There is no nonsense stuffed in their heads. They don't scratch you till you bleed" (Tendulkar 4). Her situation suggests that women are to be used, stained forever and then thrown away. The man responsible for the crime does not have the courage to accept his act. It is as if Benare has got pregnant without the participation of any male counterpart. Tendulkar is highly realistic in the presentation of his characters as well as in presenting the human relationships. He, in his plays, has rejected the orthodox and conservative notions of society. According to N.S. Dharan, "Tendulkar highlights the hypocrisy latent in the microscopic cross-section of the milieu of the metropolitan Bombay middle class" (50). Tendulkar has achieved a milestone in exploring the relationship between men and women at different levels. In his plays, Tendulkar has brought forward the psychology of men and women characters. Vasant Davatar says—

In Vijay Tendulkar's dramas we find humanity with the blending of the embarrassing emotions spread out from the dialogues. Tendulkar does not praise or condemn any way of living but putting it in an ironic position. He portrays the nervous tension fantastically in the ways of living. (67)

In Tendulkar's plays, the readers come across the conflict not only between the characters but also between individuals and reality. Ultimately, this results in the confrontation between individual and his identity. Moving on to the third great genre, we find that the Indian English fiction has a rich past. The claimants for the first Indian novel in English are Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife*, Lal Behari Dey's *Govind Samant*, Raj Lakshmi Devi's *The Hindu Wife*, Toru Dutt's *Bianca* and H. Dutt's *Bijoy Chand*. According to Iyenagar, "These novels, written in English, have for us today no more than an antiquarian or historical interest" (315). In the 30's, the big theatre of Indian writing in English arrived on the scene. The founders of the true Indo-English novel are Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. R.K. Narayan, full name Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, was an Indian writer who was born in Madras (now Chennai). He was very close to his grandmother who had given him education in various fields like Arithmetic, Mythology, Sanskrit and Classical Indian music. His first published work was a book review of *Development of Maritime Laws of 17th Century England*. His first novel was *Swami and Friends* and then he moved on with the process of producing one novel after the other.

Narayan is best known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town, Malgudi. This fictional town was first introduced in *Swami and His Friends*. Malgudi, the locale for all the novels of Narayan is a metaphor for India. This metaphor highlights unique features of a typical South-Indian town inclusive of the lives of people over there, their customs, habits, manners, tradition and language etc. There is no such town by this name that has ever existed on the Indian globe rather Malgudi is a fantasy town in South India which is created by the skill and creative power of the author. Ved Mehta quotes, "Narayan said that the name of the town had been vouchsafed by the divine Argentine patroness of knowledge" (124). The people of this fictional town, their customs, habits, traditions and their mannerisms are no doubt a part of his mind but they are inspired by the original people whom Narayan has come across since his birth. R.A. Singh quotes, "He presents realistic details of day to day life with an air of authenticity" (109). Narayan's choice of themes and subject matter is very limited like that of Jane Austen. But the best part of him is his art of describing his characters in full aspect. Narayan does not talk of the higher class problems and evils but talks about ordinary people and their common day sufferings, trials and problems. Narayan presents ordinary people in his texts. He describes in his works the day to day activities of his characters. As in his novel, *The English Teacher*, Narayan dwells

upon the life of an ordinary person who is a college teacher. Narayan presents him as a good husband, a good father, a good friend as well as a good teacher and a human being.

Another important aspect of his writing is that he presents his characters objectively and not subjectively. He simply presents his characters and doesn't interfere by commenting upon their actions. He leaves it upon the readers to infer the meaning of the actions of his characters. R.A. Singh states, "Narayan is the only pure Indian artist who writes for art's sake" (118). Narayan is Indian in his thinking as well as in the presentation of his stories. Singh further states, "The most fascinating feature of Narayan's personality is that he is pure Indian both in thought and spirit, despite his preference for English over his mother language for the expression of his creative urge" (81). Reference to Indian superstitions, sadhus, sanyasis, swamis, Indian fables and legends is made in Narayan's works as in *The Guide, Gods, Demons and Other Stories* and in *The Man-Eater of Malgudi*.

R.K. Narayan has great regard for family as well as for family ties. Human relationships occupy a central position in his texts. This is also another trait of his Indianness. There are a number of housewives in his novels. They, very humbly, tolerate tyranny at the hands of their husbands. Even if they rebel against their husbands, their rebellion is temporary in nature as we see this in the case of the character of Savitri in *The Dark Room* and in the character of Rosie in *The Guide*. These women characters prefer to blame their fates more than their counterparts. William Walsh points out-

The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationships are treated—that of son and parents, siblings in *The Bachelor of Arts*, of husband and wife and father and daughter in *The English Teacher*, of father and son in *The Financial Expert* and of grandmother and grandson in *Waiting for the Mahatma*. (2)

As far as the style of his narratives is concerned, he writes in simple, easy and Indianized language which can easily be understood by his readers. He avoids using first person narratives and uses many Tamil proverbs and verses in his texts as in *Vendor of Sweets*, Jagan (Narayan's character) says, "And what would one do with many mansions" which means that if a person is not happy at heart, then even a million palaces cannot make him happy. Having published many novels, essays and short stories, Narayan is credited with bringing Indian writing to the whole world. The simplicity of his themes, style, characters and subject matter is well received by the readers all over the world.

Thus, among the literatures of the world, Indian literature is a dynamic branch and it has great inheritance from the holy Vedas and scriptures and has continued to spread its light in every nook and corner of the wor

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