
GLIMPSES OF INDIAN CULTURE IN MODERN INDIAN ENGLISH POETRY

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Abstract: Indian Writing in English is one of the fields of research in world today because it is the outcome of British Empire. Indian English poetry is the first of mode of expression. So the poetry is the original means of Indian culture. Indian culture is one of the oldest in the world. It is changed in the course of time due to invasion of Aryans Mughals and European culture but still remains as Indian. So this Indianess is seen in the modern Indian English poetry. Poetry is the first and easiest way of expression of the modern Indian English Poets. These modern Indian English poets are the first generation poets of the experimental phase of Indian writing in English. As we have seen that there are three phases of Indian writing in English. Last phase is the real expression of Indian culture. The present paper is an honest attempt to show the Indian culture reflected in the modern Indian English poetry. The poet like Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das, R.Parthsarthy, A.K.Ramanujan and Dilip Chitre are the real representative of the modern age and they are also the representative of the first generation writers of India. Their writing is the original documents on Indian culture. The creative writings of these poets reflect the ethos of Indian culture. This force recurrently seen in the most of the selected poems of this poets. It is praiseworthy to note this force in cultural point of view. Though, it has different aspect of the researcher going to highlight the Indian culture particularly.

Keywords: Indian Culture, Modern English Poetry, Modern poets, Indian ethos, Indian philosophy, Indianess, and anthropological implication.

Introduction: Indian Writing in English is the direct impact of British Empire. English language is a gift of it, today, the numbers of writers articulating their voice through this language. Indian Writing in English is generally divided into three phases; the imitative, the assimilative, and the experimental. The first and second is the part of colonial period, but the last phase is the original creative period. Because in this period the original culture of Indian continent is reflected. First of all the form of poetry was imitated, later on the drama and novel. Drama could not flourish to the Indian soil due to many reasons. But poetry and novel have emerged as a powerful expression of Indian English writers. Poetry in imitative, assimilative and experimental period remains as a dominant mode of articulation. The experimental period is an era of the combination of Indian culture with English culture, because, it is after independence, where Indian identity is a dominant force. Naturally, these identities bring their culture, their terminology, and their ethos. In Indian Writing in English the writers are the real representative of Indian culture. It is mostly observed in drama and novels, but poetry also has glimpses of it. The selected poems are from the modern poets like, Kamala Das, Nissim Ezekiel, Jayantha Mahapatra, A.K.Ramanujan, Dilip Chitre etc, they are the main figures in Indian English Writings. Indian English poetry is the outcome of India's cultural aspects such as mythology, social structure, attitude, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islamic world and many other aspects of Indian ethos. There is variety of cultural terminologies, which dominantly

force the men of letters. It is said that Indian English poetry is some time poetry but all the time Indian. Indianess is the major feature of Indian English poetry. Various aspects of Indian culture are recurrently seen in the selected poems of the modern poets. The present paper is an honest attempt to explore the various aspects of Indian culture reflected in the English poetry composed by the modern poets. As far as writing is concerned, it is also a cultural phenomenon. Poetry is an easy mode of expression for the creative writers. It is better to see culture in general and Indian in particular. Indian culture is unique in the world heritage. This type of features cannot find anywhere in the world. Whatever is unfit in the world that is perfect in India for e.g. the joint family and the marriage system, in the other world is only contract on the basis of religion but in India cultural and is a bond of love. This is the unique phenomenon in the Indian culture. The family structure and marriage system is praiseworthy in the world. This social system has bad aspects that are gender discrimination, man-woman relationship, caste, religion, regional and languages are the forces, which are also the darker sides of Indian culture. They are powerful in the modern Indian English poetry.

The present research has relevance to subjects like anthropology, etymology, sociology and cultural studies. It is better to understand the definition of culture in general. The great scholar of anthropology, Edward Tyler's definition accepted as one of the best. His famous definition of culture is probably the most quoted of all in the textbooks, "culture is complex

whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habit acquired by men as the member of society”p-22

This is applicable to the Indian situation where our culture is complex and complicated one to understand. According to Tylar the world culture includes the beliefs, traditions, customs, art, morals, law and any other capabilities of man and habit acquired by men as a member of the society. It is applicable to the Indian English poetry because it highlights the same kind of things. Dr. Shirish Chindhade in his book entitled as *Indian English Poems* states, “poetry is another name for culture”p-19. So it is quite clear that there is relevance to study of poetry, it means the study of culture. Theorist like Petter Barry satetes, “poetry itself as a cultural practice” p-40 even it is better to see what is the Indian culture further? K. M. Panikar (1967) staunch nationalist keeping in view the historicity of synthesis and assimilation writes, “I define culture as the complex ideas, conceptions developed qualities and organized relationships and courtesies that exist generally in society” he describes it as a community of thought, a similarity of conducts, and behavior, a common general approach to a fundamental problems which arise from the shared traditions and ideals. Indian culture has been modified continuously by outside contacts, but remains essentially Indian based doctrines and ideas developed indigenously. This forms and sustains of Indian culture are found in art, literature, and architecture. India has had traditions of religions and social tolerance. This tolerance has contributed to the richness of and variety of social and cultural life in India.”(p-27) In this definition we can see that the emphasis is given on tolerance which is the part of our great tradition. Even he sees culture is complex, conceptions, and developed ideas. While studying the culture the literature is also part of culture and poetry is one of the modes of it. These are the some of the aspects of Indian culture which we can see in the modern English poetry. The selected poets belonged to the modern era and they have seen the transformation in the Indian society.

As we know, that Nissim Ezekiel is known as a modern poet of India though his religious background is different from the other poets. He is known for his style of satire. He is the representative of all the modern poets and writers because of his versatile use of words to show the picture of Indian culture. In his famous poem like ‘Night of Scorpion’ he describes the Indian superstitions in the following way.

“May the sins of your previous birth
Be burned away tonight they said.
May your suffering decrease?

The misfortunes of your next birth, they said”.p-5

Ezekiel being the non believer in the orthodox ideas indirectly criticizes the ways of salvation. In the above lines the traditional culture of the rural family is described by the poet. It is mostly believed by the Indians of previous birth and rebirth. The concept of sin is very crucial in the Indian culture. Majority of Hindus believe that present life is a gift of previous deeds. It may be wrong according to the non believer of Karma theory. It is considered that today’s suffering is nothing but previous life’s wrong deeds. And the man has to live his life according to the God’s wish. Whatever we suffer today, is a wish of the God. Even they expect for the rebirth.

Further Ezekiel highlights the rites of incantations. The poet is observer here who sees it in third person. In this poem, his father plays very important role who opposes these rituals. His father is rationalist, staunch non believer and skeptic.

“I watched the flame feeding on my mother

I watched the holy man performs his rites

To tame the poison with incantation”p-6

It is the culture of Indian people who believe in God for protection and for it they perform the rites of burning fire and doing the incantation on the occasion of the accident and mishaps. Even at the natural calamities as well as for doing better things or beginning of certain work. Present paper does not claim that these above lines, from the Poets like Nissim Ezekiel, hundred percent describes the Indian culture as earlier we have seen in the definition it is one of the aspects of Indian culture.

Indians are mostly interested in temple activities and temples are the part and parcel of Indian culture. So the reference of temple and God is recurrent in modern Indian poetry. It is said that there are number of temples in country like India. Some time we may not find the school but every village has its own God and his temple. There are certain cities in India which are famous for the temple. The poet like Ramanujan is fascinated by the temples. He in his Poem ‘River’ refers it in the following way:

“In Madurai,

City of temples and poets

Who sang of cities and temples”p-17

The poet like Ramanujan is tempted to see the temple and his native place is Madurai famous for the temples. These temples are the main activity places in Indian. Where number of rites and rituals are performed from early morning to late evening? These activities are also a routine life of Indian people. They think that getting salvation is the goal of their life. Further Ramanujan describes the place of river in Hindu people who consider river as their mother. Who takes care of everybody, even they worship the river. It is a great tradition of Hindus in India. In the

same poem he is talking about cows whose names are Gopi and Brinda these names are the metaphors of the lord Krishna, Whom the Hindus worship as the God or protector from the evil. It is a great tradition in our culture that we name the animals. Though this poem is a picture of flooded river it also highlights Indian culture indirectly and it is duty of the researchers to find out the hidden meaning. River, pregnant woman and the cows are the feminine figures where all are worshiped. It is our culture to worship a woman as goddess one hand and to burn her due to the dowry system on the other. This poem has feministic touch but the researcher looks at in cultural point of view.

Kamala Das in her 'Introduction' expresses the feministic approach of Indian culture where woman has less value. When she was on the verge of maturity, she was taught some of the cultural values, how to be a woman of virtues. But her nature is rebellious; she opposes the tradition and accepts the modern ways of life. In the following way she describes the tradition and how she neglects it.

"I wore a skirt and my
Brothers trousers, cut my hair short and ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
Be quarreler with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried categorizers. Don't sit
On walls or peep our lace -draped windows
Be Amy or be Kamala. Or, better
Still, be Madhavikutty" p-27

Wearing trousers of brothers is the breaking the old culture of the family as well as community. Even her family members trying to teach her the culture of society, she is being nurtured as a conventional woman. How should be an Indian woman is taught to her in the family. Here the word 'they' stand for the old culture, in which she is less considered or neglected. This negligence could be the result of her rebellious nature. Das is known for her confessional way of expression without any barrier. In our culture woman is existed but not considered for her existence. Indirectly it is a cultural clash or generation gap. So the above discussion some extent clarifies that Kamala Das is also poet of cultural force. Through her poem she wants to attack on the cultural values which make her and all the women of country culturally slaves. One should take initiative to change this tradition.

It is our culture to worship animals, trees and wonders of nature etc. They are also part and parcel of our daily life. While talking about modern poets we can't neglect Dilip Chitre who is also known as Bombay poet, whose roots are deeply rooted in the tradition and culture of country. In his noteworthy poem 'The Felling of The Banyan Tree', he highlights

the cultural values of his family. In the following way Dilip Chitre tries to show the cultural values;

"My father told the tenants to leave
Who lived in the house surrounding our house on the
hill?

One by one the structures were demolished
Only our own house remained and the trees
Trees are sacred, my grandmother used to say
Felling them is a crime but he massacred them all"

It is in our Indian culture trees are worshiped as God and considered as holy and sacred. To cut the trees like *Audumber*, *Neem* and *Sheoga* is considered a social sin and crime. It is taught by the older generation to the younger. This type of philosophy is transmitted to the next generation because trees are the creation of the divine god. It is our tradition to worship the tree like Banyan on the occasion *Vatpournima*. Mostly the married women take round around the tree tying a thread, for the safety of her husband and hope for the seven births of the same. It may be orthodox but our people believe in it and try to behave accordingly. As we have seen the living ways of human being is called culture of his community. It includes the beliefs, ideas, food, clothes, fashion, language, rites, rituals, customs and tradition. These are the various aspects of Indian culture reflected in the literature, because literature is mirror of society.

Even, the new age poet like Sujata Bhatt, who born in Ahmedabad and brought up in Pune. In her *Brunizem* and the *Monkey shadow* she realistically presents the Indian culture. Anand Mahanand in his paper entitled as "The Multicultural worlds of Sujata Bhatt" states that 'Bhatt's life has been shaped by the cross cultural experiences and these aspects are reflected in her work. The place from which Sujata Bhatt hails has long history of composite culture. Bhatt fondly recollects different facets of it in her poetry. Myth, folklore, traditional beliefs, social and political consciousness jostle with each other in her poetry. In her poem "The Daily Offering", she recalls her grandmother, who was religious, would insist that her grandchild offer flower for the prayer.

Further he says, 'though this poet shows the different perception between the old and new generations, her poetry represents different forms of beliefs and religious tradition-Hindus, Buddhist' p-184-185. She tries to follow the *Bhagvad Gita* where it says,

"Become like turtle.
When it is time to work use your eyes to see
And your ears to hear.
When your work is finished withdraw your senses
And then turn within" (p-21)

At this moment she draws her attention to the teaching of Lord Buddha. Again she says in the same poem.

“Sometimes,

We understand this world through dukha
Sanskrit word, pali word
Dukha meaning sorrow
Dukha means suffering, misery
Dukha meaning pain” (p-97)

It is the characteristic feature of the Indian culture that is mostly dominated by the religious thoughts. This is the recurrently seen in the modern English poetry. It is a part of Indian people that they are not ready to change their attitude of thought. The change we see only in fashion, costume and ways of western culture but original set of Indian old cultural remains as it is. There is no scope for the change in the attitude of thousands of Indian masses, who are mostly dominated by this so called culture with its drawbacks

Conclusion: So the above discussion is enough to show the glimpse of Indian culture in the modern Indian English poetry, which is the voice of many Indian writers, who are exploring their experiences. Creative writing has many sides, angles so much of it has been explored. But the Indian modern poetry has not seen in the cultural point of view. Because writing is a part of culture and culture is reflected in literature. Literature and culture are the two different disciplines but go hand in hand at certain levels. There is correlation between in it. This study may be brought under the interdisciplinary research which is

the need of time. Nowadays many culturalists and comparists come forward to analyze the culture and literature. Culture shapes the creative writings and writing includes culture. So it is necessary to study every work of art in a cultural point of view. Otherwise it will remain incomplete in itself. Keeping this in mind the researcher has been trying to bring literature especially the modern Indian English poets under the shadow of cultural point of view. There is distinction between culture and civilization. Civilization is closely related to the technological progress. All the civilized may not be cultured, but cultured community may be well civilized. Civilization is the term used during and after industrialization. But the culture is used from the Stone Age. Painting on the stones, picture in the caves, carving and scriptures are the some of the example of culture. Meaning of it not yet found clearly like that all the other aspects are studied but the cultural aspect is remained. For this purpose the present research is attempting to show the cultural aspect of Indian English poetry, which is full with cultural elements like myths, legends, tales, costumes, traditions, rites, rituals, religious faiths, beliefs, social structure, and its system. They are tremendously found in the modern Indian English poetry

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