

ODISHAN ENGLISH POETS AND INDO-ENGLISH POETRY

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Indian English Poetry is like an unfathomable sea in terms of its depth and verity, context and connotation, style and technique and in the mode and manner of composition. Similarly, the poets in the sub-continent writing either in English or translating regional poems into English. Indian English poetry as a genre in its own right has got global acceptance. It requires research to delve into the depth and details of such a genre. Therefore, the present paper is an attempt to present a cursory glance over the general development of Indian English Poetry and the specific contribution made by the Odishan English poets towards the enrichment of such a genre.

The subject matters of Indian English poetry are usually sustained by the Indian racial traditions as found in Vedas, Upanishads, the two great epics, the stream of Saiva and Vaishnava devotional poetry, the Ganga and the Godavary, the treasure-house of Indian myth and legend and the like. For instance, the poems of R.N. Tagore are deeply influenced by the Bengali Vaishnava singers and Indian devotional poetry in general. Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912) comprises of poems of devotion in the great Indian tradition. "The imagery, the conceits, the basic experience, the longing, the trial, the promise, the realization – all have the quaintly Indian flavour and taste. Its familiarity was its recommendation to India; its apparent novelty was its recommendation abroad" (Iyenger 111). While Tagore's *Gitanjali* records a love for Divine, his *The Gardener* presents love poetry with a human rather than a divine slant, though in a poet like Tagore the border line between the two is not distinct. Similarly, the poems of Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) records subject matters chosen out of Indian situations and traditions. Commenting on her first volume of poems, *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *the Glasgow Herald* observes that "the pictures given in the poems are of East but there is something fundamentally human in them that seems to prove that the best song knows nothing of East or West" (Iyenger 215). Naidu's second volume of poems, *The Bird of Time* (1912) is significant in its language, form and content. *The Yorkshire Post* comments, "Mrs. Naidu has not only enriched our language but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, the mysticism and the glamour of the East" (217).

A note of change is discerned in Indian English Poetry after the Second World War. Though Indian thoughts, locales and situations are present in the poems yet Indian English Poetry is influenced by the social and psychological thinkers like Marx, Freud, the fiction of Proust Joyce-Woolf, the poetry of Pound-Yeats-Eliot, the drama of Brechet-Beckett-Pinter and the challengers of the age of nuclear energy, moon landing and space travel. There is a realistic approach in the compositions of Indian English poets. There are also the romantics and the sensualists and at the same time the laureates of this Spirit. The poetry of this Spirit is as old as the Vedas and as modern as the latest guided missile. The major contemporary Indian poets who

have enriched the treasure-house of Indian English poetry and Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujan, Jayanta Mahapatra, Kamala Das and so on.

The Odishan English poets have a major contribution to the realm of Indo-Anglian poetry. They write either in English or translate Odia poems into English and their achievements can be taken for discussion.

Jayanta Mahapatra(b.1928) has an international acclaim as one of the major Indian English poets. He is the first Indian to receive the Central Sahitya Akademi Award(1981) for his poetry volume, *Relationship*. His poems have appeared in most of the reputed journals of the world. He received the prestigious Jacob Glastein Award (Chicago) in 1975. Mahapatra has authored sixteen books of poems. His volume of poetry include *Svayamvara* and Other poems(1971), *Close the Sky Ten by Ten*(1971), *Waiting*(1976), *A father's Hours* (1976), *A Rain of Rites*(1976), *The False Start*(1981), *Relationship* (1980), *Life Signs*(1983), *Dispossessed Nests*(1986), *Selected Poems*(1987), *Burden of Waves and Fruit*(1988), *The Temple* (1989), *Bare Face, Shadow Space and Random Descent*(2005).

Mahapatra's early poems were born out of love. They celebrate not only passion but consistently evoke a melancholic atmosphere rent with absences, fears foreboding and suffering. But slowly and steadily, the poet released himself from his lonesome citadel of love and learnt involving himself with other men, living or dead with many other succulent chambers of living. Fear of ageing, fear of death and love for life and memory love for the golden past and inquisitiveness to live amid the contraries of life and a complete absorption in and identification with culture and tradition of Odisha move simultaneously in his poetry. Death is a beginning for the poet and life is a "telegraph key tapping away in the dark"(Iyenger 115).

Mahapatra's fame and critical acclaim can not be termed as accidental. It is because he emerges out of a literary tradition that has deep roots in Indian soil. Odisha forms a powerful background of his flourishing art. While receiving the Central Sahitya Akademy Award, Mahapatra expresses his deep sense of indebtedness to the landscape of Odisha:

To Odisha, to this land in which my roots lie and lies my past and in which lies my beginning and my end, where the wind keens over the River Daya and where the waves of the Bay of Bengal fail to reach out today to the twilight soul of Konark. I acknowledge my debt and relationship.(65)

Mahapatra's belongingness to Odisha and his sensitive expression laying importance to Odishan Culture and tradition constitute a very vital aspect of his poetry. The Odishan landscape constitutes a very important part of his poetry in particular and the Indo-Anglian poetry in general. This is a major contribution to Indian English poetry. *His A Rain of Rites, Waiting, The False Start* and *Relationship* reveal a first – rate poetic sensibility.

Jayanta Mahapatra is a close observer of men and manners, things and situations:

The cripples of Puri who are taken for granted, the white-clad widows: Truth seems twisted sometimes, yet pitiless, 'Hunger' is brutal in its precision of despair, neither pseudo-romanticism nor routine realism. In several of 44 lyrics in *Waiting*, Jayanta seems half-unconsciously to recapitulate Vedic times and themes for he

too is Man watching Nature within and without. The Ancient spiritual guest talks at the physicist-poet's heart-strings.(713)

Mahapatra's "Relationship" reflects his deep sense of belongingness to Odisha, its tradition and way of life. It is a long lyrical poem and its lyrical magnitude evokes a hypnotic charm and beauty. "Relationship is a sustained long poem, an expansion of the private lyric voice into a chain of meditations embracing a region, a tradition, a whole way of life. The theme of its half-hypnotic articulation alike compel respectful admiration. Jayanta enters into the wonderful testaments in stone in Odisha's temples and exchange heart-beats as it were with the forgotten artists and their unfolding works of sculpture and architecture. Distantly paralleled by Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Ur", Jayanta top seems to be teased by the unattainable phenomenon of men and gods, Time and Eternity. The poet also depicts the specific features of the Odisha landscape accompanied by its myths and rituals and folk-lore. The poet's involvement with all these aspects of Odisha is reflected. He broods over the lost glory of Odishan tradition and culture and tries to revitalize them. He writes

"Once again one must sit back and bury the face
In this earth of forbidding myth"(1)

He also writes

"I went to finish my prayer that began
Like at him rustling in a mango tree,
a prayer to draw my body out of a thousand years
and reflect the earth's lost implitudes
the bridal footprints of peacocks dancing in the rain"(19)

Besides the traditional setting and the landscape of his poetry Mahapatra has developed a refined poetic technique by using images and symbols. He also applies unconventional but striking smiles and metaphors which evoke an atmosphere quite suitable to the thematic dimensions of his poetry. The imagery used in the poem entitled "Village" can be taken as an instance

"Carefully I cross
The palm-trunk bridge over the irrigation canal
and the grave green waters flow on limping".

Mahapatra is adept in using symbols. He takes natural objects and phenomena as symbols. For example, stone, rain, night, flower, river, sea, light, and the like are very significant symbols in his poetry. For him stone always signifies tradition, performance and death; rain stands for creation, rejuvenation, regeneration, passion and memory; night symbolizes darkness, loneliness, gloom and death; flower is symbolic of faith, belief and purity; river is for un-ending time, continuity and perpetuity of tradition. "These symbols occur frequently in Mahapatra's poems to explore the human psyche and build a bridge between the experience and expression, between the inner self of the poet and the outer world"(Das 96).

Mahapatra's translation from Odia into English bear the stamp of his originality. For instance, he has translated such Odia poems as Soubhagya Kumar Mishra's "Sin", Devdas Chhotray's "Grievance", "The Long-Haired Girl"; Guru Prasad Mohanty's "The Doves of My Eyes"; Rajendra Kishore Panda's "Living Is Also An Act Of Violence" and Sachidananda Routray's "Sea" and "Goddess Durga".

Bibhu Padhi(b.1951) is one of the well-known Odishan English poets. He started writing seriously around 1975. His collections of poems were *Going to the Temple* (1988) and *Lines*

from a Legend (1993). His other poems include “A Wound Elsewhere”, “Painting the House”, “Games the Heart Must Play” (a trilogy of love poems) and *Living With Lorenzo* (a series of poems on D.H. Lawrence).

Rabindra Kumar Swain (b.1960) is an Indo-Anglian poet of Odisha. He has published three books of poetry: *Once Back Home* (1996), *A Tapestry of Poets* (1999) and *Severed Cord* (2002).

Sitakanta Mahapatra (b.1937) is the most widely translated Odia poet. One of the foremost voices of Indian poetry, his poetry has been translated into Indian languages and foreign languages including English. His anthologies include seven collections of tribal poetry translated and edited by him into English and five collections of his own poetry in English translation.

Ramakant Rath (b.1934) is one of the modern poets in Odia literature. Deeply influenced by the poets like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Rath experimented greatly with form and style. The quest for the mystical, the riddles of life and death, the inner solitude of individual selves, and subservience to material needs and carnal desires are among the favourite themes of the poet. His poetry is full of melancholy and laments the inevitability of death and the resultant feeling of futility. A number of his poems have been translated into English.

There are many other Odisha English poets like Niranjana Mohanty, Sankarsan Parida, Deba Patnaik, Shanta Acharya, Sailendra Narayan Tripathy, Simachal Patnaik, Bipin Patsani, Prabhanjan Kumar Mishra, Sarbeswar Samal, Chinmoy Jena, Biswakesh Tripathy, Narayan Mohapatra who need to be widely discussed.

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