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EARLY STRAIN OF INDO-ENGLISH POETRY -
A POTENT GUIDE FOR FUTURE POETS
(WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SAROJINI NAIDU)

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Abstract

The three valuable traits of independent identity, upward aspiration and love for the Divine make Indian literature a treasure-trove for the entire humanity. During the colonial encounter, when English came to the Indian intelligentsia the triune splendor also seeped in into the Indo-Anglian literature, especially into the initial poetry. Sarojini Naidu's poetry is a good example of this genre, which lights the path for future poets.

Key words: Indo-Anglian literature/ Poetry, Spiritual Poetry, Incantatory verse, Sarojini Naidu, Sri Aurobindo, Upbeat tone, Independent Identity, English Language.

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**EARLY STRAIN OF INDO-ENGLISH POETRY -
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Ours is a generation that has witnessed the formation of SAARC and an eloquent effort of the upcoming nations for an economic and socio-political independence. Also, nearly two-thirds of Indian population is young and aspiring to scale the global of standards in every field including humanities.

This upbeat tone makes the literature of this region very vibrant and powerful although it is natural that the issues of socio-economic conditions and political concerns of developing countries get reflected in the post-colonial writings. Our sub-continent has various regional languages like Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Nepali, etc. with their respective cultural heritages and literatures.

One of the dominant strains in the Indian literatures right from the Vedic literature is that of spirituality and devotion. This rich corpus of literature is also mystical and enchanting in itself which is again a very positive trait in the intellectual output of the sub-continent.

These three valuable traits of independent identity, upward aspiration and love for the Divine make Indian literature a treasure-trove for the entire humanity. During the colonial encounter, when English came to the Indian intelligentsia the triune splendor also seeped in into the Indo-Anglian literature, especially into the initial poetry.

The first quarter of Nineteenth century was a period of incubation for Indo-Anglian poetry and Henry Louis Derozio was its moving spirit. Aptly called the 'national bard' of modern India, Derozio (1809-1831) mostly wrote under the spell of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore. Passionate for social reform,

he was a great lover of India:

“My country, in thy days of glory past,
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?”

After Derozio, the torch of Indo-Anglian poetry was kept burning by Kasiprasad Ghose, whose The Shair of Minstrel appeared in 1830. In the second quarter of 19th century, the publication of some good poetical pieces by writers like Gooroo Churn Dutt, Raj Narain Dutt, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Soshee Chunder Dutt assumed prominence. Later on, the Dutt family had distinguished itself for its literary activities in the state of Bengal. The daughter of Govin Chunder Dutt, Toru Dutt published A Sheaf gleaned in French Fields (1876) and Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan (1882) which are of lasting literary worth.

Nobo Kissen Ghose, who wrote under the Pseudonym of Ram Sharma, is credited to be the first Indo-Anglian poet to have written of the mystical and spiritual experiences of the Hindu order. The well-known luminaries of Indian English Literature include Swami Vivekananda, Swami Rama Tirtha, Sri Aurobindo, Purohit Swami, Paramhans Yogananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu who have recorded their spiritual experiences and philosophies in very eloquent and memorable poetry.

Critics pursuing the authentic have much appreciated Sarojini Naidu's use of 'Hindu-ness' and a construction of poetic India. Her India is an inclusive India which fashions a place for the poet herself who had crossed various barriers. Hence she shows the influence of Ghazals and Urdu literature as well as Hindi songs, myths, legends and practices. She sings about Hyderabad cityscape as well as the countryside. She sings of South as well as the North, like, "A Rajput love-song" or "A love-song from the North". Her vision included Islamic world as well- "The Purdah-Nashim", "The Imam Bada", "The old women" and "A song from Shiraz", etc.

The bird-like quality of her song has rightly earned for her the title, 'Bharat Kokila' or "The Nightingale of India". Her four volumes of poetry include:

- (i) The Golden Threshold (1905)
- (ii) The Bird of Time (1912)
- (iii) The Broken Wing (1917) and
- (iv) The Feather of the Dawn (1961)

There is a fine finish of form and an artistic polish of matter. Her themes are girlish, versatile, but her lyricism is of the first order. Let us pick up a couple of poems for a close study.

The Soul's Prayer

The soul in its thirst for experience and in its desire to be bold prays for an all-encompassing experience of life, death; joy, pain; gift-grief, etc., from its lord.

"Spare me no bliss, no pang of strife,
Withstand no gift or grief I crave"

The wise father grants the wish of his inquisitive child. Passionate-rapture and despair; joy and fame are all bestowed upon the 'unconquered soul'. The lord says that the soul shall glow with love and sparkle like flame once pain would cleanse it. But then the varied experiences of life are inexhaustible and tiring. So the benevolent lord comes a step down and suggests for the redemption of the soul that it better learns about the simple secret of His peace.

His immortality, His completeness and knowledge are the cause of His absolute peace. So this is the one experience or state of being knowing which nothing remains to be known for the soul.

The last two lines of the poem summarize this truth; God contains everything or every experience of life in Him, just as the white light contains all the seven VIBGYOR colours in it. In the former case, it is the life which shows these experiences as separate just as the prism splits up light in the latter case.

"Life is a prism of My light,
And Death the shadow of My face"

God is life eternal. Death is but His Shadow- an apparent phenomenon. There is, actually, no death in the spiritual realm. Should the little soul comprehend the one single aspect, i.e., secret of God's peace, He would quickly teach it the 'inmost laws of life and deaths' as it wished. Written in dialogue form, this poem follows abab rhythm in each stanza. A clear mystical streak can be seen in the poem which also abounds with Upanishadic erudition.

The Flute-player of Brindaban

She would follow Krishna's magical flute-call to paradise and perdition alike and Sarojini Naidu's own note on this poem is:

"Krishna, the Divine Flute-player of Brindavan, who plays the tune of the Infinite that lures every Hindu heart away from mortal cares and attachments"

H. G. Dalway Turnbull's comments on another poem of Sarojini Guerdon also apply to this poem- he says "Simple but effective little poem, characterized by directness and economy of words"

There is beautiful blend of the Romantic tones with the mystical. Krishna, the cowherd, casually playing his flute near the *Kadamba* tree is the beloved portrayed initially in the poem. The next two stanzas take philosophical and religious tones, held together by the music of His flute. The protagonist was totally engrossed in worldly life with its several lures and small lives till then.

But the celestial melody has at once seized her heart, forcing her to leave such idle dreaming and attachments. As ecstasy conquers all fear, she now is ready to follow the flute-call, no matter where it takes her. May it be the enchanting heaven of India with its golden-flowering groves and perennial streams or may it be the perilous hell of Yama which is engulfed in darkness and deafening silence. Nothing can ever stop her now. She would go after the flute-call, mesmerized as she is, even into the unknown time and space. Neither can heights nor depths can hinder her pursuit. Such is the intensity of her heart's desire to drink the nectar of Krishna's flute.

The tune of the Infinite as she recognizes the flute-call, thus casts a spell over her. It is no ordinary music for her. Once the heart tastes the Divine bliss, here through magical flute, it ceases to be a captive in the illusory pleasures of

the world. And love for the divine fills the heart with immense courage and fascination. Thus it inspires to cast away all her mortal cares and simply follow her soul's inmost quest and join Krishna, answering His flute-call. Here emotion supersedes intellect which was the primary driving force in 'Soul's prayer'.

A similar tendency is palpable in the poem *Guerdon*. The rapture of divine Love is her pride just as spring is to the forest and wing to the hawk. The rapture of truth is most sought experience like the gems to the diver's hand and the face of his bride to eyes of the groom. Sarojini Naidu's poems are thus replete with "jeweled phrases". The introduction of Indian themes provided a new vitality to her poetry.

The publication of the first collection of her poems, "The Golden Threshold" (1905) by Ms. William Heinemann made her famous in the whole of English-speaking world. The succeeding volumes, "the Bind of Time" (1912) and "The Broken Wing" (1917), considerably consolidated her position as a poet.

Sarojini's marvelous mastery over verse forms enabled her to compose such flawless lyrics as "To a Buddha seated on a lotus" and "The flute-player of Brindaban". In all four volumes we witness her unerringsense of beauty and melody; presents a feast of delight to the reader. As a true lyricist, she always spoke in a 'private voice' and never bothered to express the burning problems of her day. Some of her later poems, as studied here, are marked both by a devotional note and a Vedantic awareness of God's omnipresence.

Conclusion:

Sri Aurobindo holds the view that the future poetry will achieve a 'mantric' or incantatory streak and such poetry will be first manifested in English and perhaps in Indian writing in English.

English is now a global language with great potential to grow and absorb new ideas and words. Indian literature, especially the scriptural, is a treasure-trove of incantatory verse. It is but natural that this strain seeps into and gets absorbed by the ever-growing language of the world, English.

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