CONTEMPORARY LIVING INDIAN ENGLISH POETS:
S. C. DWIVEDI, D. C. CHAMBIAL, SURESH NATH AND
R. C. SHUKLA – A CRITICAL STUDY

ABSTRACT

Indian English poetry has gone a long way in the procurement of a thriving prospect covering a period of more than one hundred fifty years. Earlier it was termed British – Indian poetry or Anglo – Indian poetry. In the study the only phase of Indian English poetry, which has a direct bearing on the history of modern India, has been referred.

India English poetry truly originates with Henry Lious Vivian Derozio followed by Toru Dutt, Sri Aurbindo, Sarojini Naidu, Michael Madhusudan, Rabindra Nath Tagore and others. The new Indian English poetry began with the attainment of freedom in 1947. This era is proud to be more fruitful one. A casual glance uncovers a score of names that have become well established in the literary sphere. The prominent stars of poetic constellation are – Dilip Chitre, Keki Daruwala, Kamla Das, Gauri Deshpande, Euniee De Souza, Adil Jussawala, Arun Kolatka, Shiv K Kumar, Jayant Mahaptra, Arvind Mehrotra, Gieve Patel, Nissim Ezekiel, A. K. Ramanujan, P. Lal, V. Malik, Prithish Nandy, Shankar Mokashi Punekar and others. These poets have interpenetrated and conglomerated Indian and English sounds. They attempted to accommodate the English language to Indian cultural overtones that give various lexical contexts to the same words.
Indianness is the fundamental feature of modern poetry. It is inborn
Indianness or the feeling of being Indian in the real sense that has
magnetized the contemporary Indian English poets.

New Indian English poetry has dealt with a number of themes—
nature, man, love and the heritage consisting of myth, legend, history
and fine arts. Metaphysical longing, devotion, mystical contemplation
and spiritual illumination are some of other themes. New Indian
English poets have dealt with both the physical and spiritual aspects
of life reconciling the two opposites. They are trying to write poems
in the tradition of Indian culture which is composite and
cosmopolitan.

The emphasis of the contemporary poets is on self-search and
introspection consequently. There is an originality and experiment in
word-craft, intensity and strength of feelings, clarity in thoughts and
lucidity of styles. The treatment is characterised by simplicity and
clarity and all complexity, intricacy have been painstakingly avoided.
There is much experimentation in efforts to achieve modernity.

To the new poets poetry is not just formalised, ornamented rhetorical
self-expression; it results from a fusion of thought and feeling into
precise images which give expression to the contemporary mind as
experienced and reflected by the poets. A great poem embarks on a
sort of journey or voyage through symbols and allusions to
encompass the impression of life. Poetry expresses new vistas of
consciousness.
New Indian English poets are widely read literary persons. They are mostly from universities and colleges. Their experience of world and teaching is felt in their poems. The four poets in the study – S. C. Dwivedi, D. C. Chambial, Suresh Nath and R. C. Shukla belong to this new clan of poets.

S. C. Dwivedi, the first poet of this study is also a translator and critic honoured with Rahul Sankrityanan and George Abraham Griesson Award and an Honorary D.Litt. for his distinguished achievements in literature. Scholarly command on various literatures and languages has imparted his poetic criticism a brilliance of thought and expression. Rich in Vedic allusions and images his poems are replete with universal truth and appeal. He, being a poet professor, is sowing the literary seeds among his students.

*Epiphanies and Other Poems* is a collection of sixty two poems published in 1996. It is a landmark in Indian English poetry. He has touched various aspects of Indian life with passionate appeal to humanity. A zeal to reform the society is felt in his poems. He believes in equality, liberty and fraternity without making any distinction of caste, creed, colour, region or country. The poet writes against the prejudices of birth and genealogy. The poet abhors the idea of casteism, since all human beings are children of God, there should be no distinction on the basis of Girijan and Harijan, White and Black. In the poem “To Do or Not to Do” he says:

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Schedule castes and tribes
Harijan and Girijan.
Whites and Blacks.
Sink all these plurality in Him¹.
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Being a religious minded poet S. C. Dwivedi believes in God and His ways. Spiritual longing is expressed in his search for inner-self and his place in the realm of almighty God. In his poems there are the reflections of Upnishada, Brahmastra, Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta and others like Adi Shankacharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya, Ramanand and Vallabhacharya. Having firm faith in Supreme Being the poet asserts that God resides in each particle of the universe. He is the supreme master of the whole creation. S. C. Dwivedi’s poems are universal in their appeal. They reveal emotions and feelings characterized by abundant optimism. He is the poet of joy and hope. He envisions a better and happier future for mankind. Everything rests on the will of God. He says in the poem “Observe This Universe”.

Observe this universe.
Whose Lord is God.
See it again and again.
Penetrate deeply into each object.
See all beings in your soul.
Searching God should be your Goal.

S. C. Dwivedi has great impact of the Shrimad Bhagwad Geeta. He believes in the saying of Lord Krishana – ‘Karmanye wadhikaraste mafleshu kadachane’ – The very first poem shows this belief apparently.

Sink the whole plurality of the world
In the depth of divine unity.
The sense of mine and thine is all false.
Casteism, regionalism, nepotism all false.
Treat the world as your family
Cover yourself with God.
Carry on your work without caring for results.
The poet, being a true devotee, believes that God exists in each and everything of universe. He is all-pervasive and all-encompassing. No leaf is shaken without His will. He believes that everything depends on His desire. In the poem “The Earth Moves”, he describes the omnipresence of God.

And each blade and bower.
In each hut and tower.
In each man and woman.
In each animal and insect.
There sits some power.
This world moves because of Him.  

S. C. Dwivedi has a noble conception of poet’s vocation. To him poetry is not mere an intellectual exercise or diversion; it is something solemn, sacred, sublime and majestic. Poetry is the expression of noble mind enriched by knowledge and disciplined by art therefore, poetry ennobles the mind of the reader.

He is shocked at the downfall of moral standards – corruption, hypocrisy, opportunism as practised by modern man. His famous poem “Topiwala” is a political and social satire. He talks about the importance of Topi in Indian society and rich dividends it pays. It is adorned by political leaders; it becomes a guise to hide the evils like corruption, tyranny, manipulations and other such acts to retain benefits for generation.

His poem “21st Century is Burning” exposes socio-political decadence prevailing in modern India. The whole poem, as title hints unveils the evils widespread in Indian society. The poem resembles with W. B. yeats “The Second Coming”. The flame of corruption,
tyranny, hypocrisy has engulfed the villages, kasbas, Kashmir, Kargil, Varanasi, Bombay, Delhi etc. Not only India but other countries as Afganistan, Iraq, London and New York are also burning. The ministers are glad, unsocial elements are flourishing. The common man is hooked by troubles after troubles.

21st century is burning
Its flames have burnt Kashmir, Kargil, Afganistan and Iraq.
The flames engulf, Varanasi, Bombay, Delhi, London and Newyork.¹⁵

S. C. Dwivedi is a conscious poet committed to his craft. He is known for economy of expression, lucidity of style, evocativeness of imagery. His free verse is remarkably powerful. He emerges as the master of diction not only of English but of Sanskrit, Bhojpuri and Hindi also. He has become one of the most consummate artists in Indian English poetry.

D. C. Chambial, second poet of the study is highly productive writer of English, Hindi and Pahari. An author of six collections of poems, he is a poet and short story writer as well as a great academician, literary critic and initiator of mapping Himachal Pradesh on the literary scene. Widely acclaimed and awarded internationally for his creative genius, D. C. Chambial has a passion for poetics. His poetry is replete with love for common man. It presents a spectrum of longings, struggles, suffocations, lamentations and yearings. D. C. Chambial is basically a poet of suffering humanity. The poet is profoundly concerned with human life under the impact of mechanization and
scientific advancement. In his mad pursuit of technology man has become a slave of machines. The poet is shocked at the loss of human feelings. Man has become a robot. He feels that rise of materialism, economic prosperity and mamonism are the chief causes of man’s tragedy. In the poem “The Promising Age”, he says:

What other role awaits
insignificant cog
in this robot culture
where soul defies
the principle of metempsychosis
and enters into
wires, screws, transistors,
magnates and diaphragms
to help, interpret and amuse.⁶

D. C. Chambial’s greatness as a poet lies in his ability to articulate human experiences and emotions. Longing and yearings, loss of values, faith and religion, individualism, regionalism are prominent themes of his poetry.

There is no value of emotions, passions and thoughts. Only machines are preceding the individuals. Computer is taking the place of man. Therefore unemployment is spreading in the society; the poet ponders over it and says gravely:

Where has gone
logic of inventive thought?
Fissures of cerebrum dive deep
into the waves
of computer and genetic code
in a venture
to unriddle the skein.⁷
The poet laments at the irrevocable loss of values and religious faith. Man has closed himself within individual status culminating into acute isolation. Family bonds are becoming less and less abiding. Bearing a child is becoming a business, a discreet solution to the want of money and of child. He says in the poem “The Promising Age”:

A business –minded mother
decides to be pregnant
for those who donot want
to lose their shape.  

D. C. Chambial may be termed individualist. His poems speak of his conviction of individualism. He believes that society is for individuals not individuals for society. If society does not work for the welfare of people, its existence is futile. Contradiction is a sign of individual freedom therefore the contradictory ideas are prevailing in the society. But people have become very astute and unsympathetic. The poet writes in the favour of individuals and says in the poem “The Promising Age”:

In this antagonistic society
contradictions
tend to become acute
with unsympathetic attitude. 

The humanity is losing its significance because of mechanization. The poet believes in the theory of ‘Laissez faire’. The man is voluntarily captive, only machines guide individuals. He says:
What, then, do we expect
in this jungle
of automation?
Vats-man is captive,
machine instructs,
calculates and infers
achievements
of Homosapiens.\textsuperscript{10}

D. C. Chambial’s poems have a dense spectrum of social consciousness. The decadent society is at the center stage of his poetic theme. In the poem “A Captive”, the poet feels man entangled in the net of inarched system. He wants to be free. He wants to break the ‘chakravyuha’.

How desperately
I’ve tried and tried
to break the chakravyuha
of cobwed
around my transparent self
by fencing with shields and sabers
of words and figures
borrowed from fanciful fantasies.\textsuperscript{11}

In the poem “A Prayer”, D. C. Chambial prays to God to strengthen him to fight against the worldly wrongs. The world is gloomy, untrue and indolent.

Give me strength
to fight the toil of the day,
to find the kernel out of hay.
Give me light to discern
\textit{satyam, shivam, sundram}
in this life full of gloom…
Lead me, Lord!
on the righteous path
full of fragrant flowers.\textsuperscript{12}
D. C. Chambial, in spite of coming from Himachal Pradesh, cannot be termed as a regional poet. His poetry reflects the life in general scenario, though sporadic shades of his region are perceptible here and there in his poetry. In the poem “My Song”, he salutes his land and people with love and adoration.

My people! My Lord!
Salute you all. Love you all.
Know you to be good and kind,
Sympathetic and helping,
Light of heart and full of laughter.

D. C. Chambial is endowed with great poetic talent. He expresses his feelings of pain and suffering in social milieu. Simplicity of his poetic diction and poignancy of his ideas and thoughts are two prominent features of his poetry. His language is free from rhetorical embellishments. Characteristically his poems, though mainly framed in free verse form, have an appeal and cadence of their own. Images are remarkably noticed for their variety and aptness. Animal imagery, sound imagery, colour imagery, sense imagery convey the theme of loss and decadence. D. C. Chambial’s poetry is also decked with symbols and metaphors. He picks up allusions from varied sources – Greek myths, Biblical lore, Indian mythology and even from fairy tales and correlates them to present day life.

Suresh Nath is the third poet of the study. His poetry is full of simple joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. In spite of being well-versed in the imagery of established poets he has remarkable originality of thought and expression. Written in autobiographical strain, his poetry unfolds a highly sensitive soul that yearns for a touch of true love and
concern. The deep pangs of agony find universal connotation through vibrant notes of his poetry. His prominent themes are – man-woman relationship, social realism and political vacuum. He has given full scope to his thoughts and expression. He has analysed the life and its complications very minutely. The pain of untimely death of his beloved wife by prolonged disease at the threshold of middle age is reflected in several of his most beautiful poems. He has witnessed the horrid spectacle of death in all its details for quite a long time and the subsequent suffering – physical, emotional and mental.

Man-woman relationship as portrayed in Suresh Nath’s poetry unlike his contemporaries, is intensely autobiographical. Wife is his love he celebrates in his poetry who left him in lurch. The poet bears the anguish of loss lonely. The poem “Why Did You Betray Me” speaks of his agony:

I am a living corpse
Nowhere to go and nowhere to park.
The angel of Death has knocked
Escape, I cannot, he has blocked.

The poet had hoped for a long happy life. He never thought of separation. But his dream shattered he found himself in a whirlpool entangled in the meshes of world.

I hoped for an evergreen Spring-time
A honeyed – wooing all the time
A bubbling life, a loving wife,
A fiddling fife,
In the honey-sweet of forests wild.
The home is not here, soon I found,
Myself in a mirage, a stranger’s land all-round.
Suresh Nath is primarily a poet of conjugal love. He sings of the relationship between husband and wife. He treats both body and soul with great reverence. He celebrates aspects of love – physical and spiritual he has enjoyed with Rani, his beloved wife. The poem “Her Innocence” reveals a perfect sensuous innocence of love.

I could feel the showers of
Fair kisses, the warmth of her
Close embrace, the sweet smell
of her fair body.  

The poet has also delved deep into the problems of contemporary society. He combines vision and reality, idealism and practical wisdom, emotion and rationalism and morality in his approach. For him reality has two aspects – materialism and spiritualism. Both of them have been accepted by the poet as supplement to each other. For example the poem “Environment” tells that poverty is the greatest abuse of the world.

We have become a largest
Reservoir of poverty, ignorance,
Disease and illiteracy.

The poet tells the reality of life in the poem “Like The Moon”. He asks what life is because he is in doubt whether he is going to live or quit it. There is no significance of love, emotion, feeling and affection. Money controls all the relationships. Children don’t love their father if he is poor. The poet feels that there is complete disorder. Values are lost.
What a life?
Shall I live it or quit it?
We’ve no love, no emotion,
We’ve no feeling, no affection
Even children exact penalty
For poor father’s compassion…
Shamelessly they blackmail their passions
Into forced submission
To suit their selfish missions.18

The poem “Prostitution” shows the reality of the professional bawds. They are bound to such professions. They have suffered the pangs of hunger-deprivation, poverty, exploitation etc. The history of prostitution is very ancient. This is the oldest profession. Now ministers take bribes, officers loot the country. They talk of morals but these tarts are more upright and impartial and transparent. They abuse only their own body. They carry the burden of society, dirt and sin on their heads. The exploiters are free to roam and boast. A very heart-touching reality of this profession is revealed by the poet.

The oldest profession
Of this mundane world…
The legends of Maneka,
Urvashi and Amrapalika,
Nagarbadhus of Vaishali
Rajnartakis, Devadasis
Still decorate the shelves
Of ancient literature…
The ministers take bribes,
Their officers are far a head, …
They carry the burden
Of your dirt and sin
On their heads.19
Suresh Nath has personally experienced the terrible pangs of sorrow and its attendant suffering so he could adequately convey such poignancy though symbols, myths and images. His command over language and the immediacy of his wit play combined along with imagery which at once capture his readers, and place him at the forefront of contemporary poets.

R. C. Shukla, a bilingual poet, appeared on the horizon of Indian English poetry with his first collection of poems entitled *A Belated Appearance* published in 2000 and established himself as a poet of remarkable creative potentials. He has endeavoured to distinguish himself with his rich new imagery and experimental forms of delineation. His poems are scrupulous expression of what he himself has seen around him. R. C. Shukla’s poetry is extremely reflective. He has laid emphasis on the degeneration of females, the obsession of men and agony. He has revealed loneliness, dejection, and frustration. His poetry is the outcry of his heart. Man-woman relationship is the most prominent theme of his poetry. R. C. Shukla has observed the universal relationship from varied angles. Indeed man-woman relationship is the primary unit of individual and social life hence, it has been one of the central themes of poet’s world and occupies a dominant place in his poems.

Love is seen as an enigma, hallucination or delusion. There are number of poems which portray the ambiguity of love in his collections.

Love, a man’s obsession for his woman,  
Is an illusion blinking from heaven  
About which  
The romantic dreamer knows little.20
Few of his poems depict the frailty of women, their role in extra-marital relationship and commercialization of their charm. Moral corruption of the contemporary society worries him. He writes in the poem “Commerce”.

There are women
Not interested in husbands
They love only nights
And enter into contracts
That naturally expire.²¹

In the poem “Sex is Not Cohabitation Alone” the poet focuses on sex that has become the central issue of man-woman relationship. It is not cohabitation, rather it is rare thing for those who know the art. It is proclivity, a symptom and the prologue but not exclusively the deed. The concluding lines of the poem demonstrate the artificially of sex as purchased in this computer age.

Sex is a proclivity, and a symptom
An expression of mood, of intent
It is a prologue to the epic of love
Not exclusively the deed
Which is pure need.²²

There are highly sensuous descriptions of human body and love-making in the bed in his poems but he is nowhere vulgar or obscene. His treatment of sex, love and charm of female body is characterized by extreme artistic frankness. R. C. Shukla describes the acute
genuineness of sex in man-woman relationship. As he says in the poem “You Poured Honey into My Days”.

You said
The pot of honey isn’t with you
You stole some for me.
But would not replay the act
Between the owner of the pot and you.
There’s pact.23

R. C. Shukla attaches overriding importance to love in all living beings. Not only human beings but animals also have instinctive feelings of love. The peacocks dance when sexual instinct arise in them. The leaves of trees also touch each other amorously. In the poem “Sex is Not Cohabitation alone”, he says :

The pigeons touch each other’s beak
And the two penguins bathe in waters
Afterwards dance and chirp
This is sex.24

Death and despair is another prominent theme in R. C. Shukla’s poetry. He may be termed as poet-philosopher. He has investigated the nature of life, soul, God, death and despair. Death is inevitable truth of life. The poem “Death Everyday Knocks at Your Door” makes us feel stark realism.

Death everyday knocks at your door
But goes to somebody else
This is why
You are at ease to see
Your regularly beating pulse.25
He is a poet who philosophies life and its nuances from various facets. His poetry becomes philosophical when he touches the reality of human predicament. The poet’s didactic vision emanates in the volumes *Darkness at Dawn, A Belated Appearance* and *Depth and Despair*. As he says in the poem “Life At so Many Stations is the Examination our Will”.

Those who are born  
To celebrate the festival of life  
Happy and hilarious they may be  
But can not be called wise  
By competition  
They have never won a prize.26

R. C. Shukla has employed traditional and original poetic forms. He has experimented with popular forms like lyric and elegy. The five line stanzas with uneven feet and rhythm appear beautiful. The image is the most suggestive force in the poetry. In R. C. Shukla’s poetry imagery functions as an active force in depicting the emotion and very thought of the poet. Symbols and comparisons also play vital role. Simplicity, straightforwardness and organic compactness with a rare sensuous touch and idiomatic tone are the qualities which differentiates him from other contemporary poets.

The four poets in the study are not only poets, they are college and university professors. They are enriched by long teaching experience. They are not inborn poets but their long experience of teaching English literature chiefly poetry, has contributed to make them poets. They are endowed with creative fervor and experience. Their contribution to Indian English poetry is of immense significance.
Their writings touch the contemporary aspects of Indian society and day to day incidents of life. Their themes are inter-related. Their poems set in Indian background mirror contemporary India.

Besides being poets these four scholars have one great point in common. They have been teaching English literature particularly poetry as professors in colleges and universities. They choose English as medium to express themselves. They have great influence of Milton, Wordsworth, Eliot and Tagore upon their poetic vision. Their impact is clearly visible in their works and teaching. The objective of these four scholars is to introduce the student the literary taste and to train them how to appreciate literature.

To sum up, these four poets – S. C. Dwivedi, D. C. Chambial, Suresh Nath and R. C. Shukla represent new voices of Indian English poetry. They belong to the new poetic clan of Indian English literature who are absolutely Indian in feel and spirit.

References

4. *Ibid*, p-3
7. *Ibid*.
9. Ibid, p. 5
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid, p. 35.
25. ________, Depth and Despair, Calcutta : Writers Workshop, p. 25.

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