ABSTRACT

W.B.YEATS AND INDIA*: A STUDY IN RECEPTION OF LITERARY INFLUENCE

This dissertation studies the influence of Indian culture and literature on the poetry of the Irish poet William Butler Yeats and the influence of his poetry on Twentieth Century Indian literature both in English and some Indian languages, and also the response of Indian critics and readers to Yeats's works. The dissertation takes into account literary influence, its reception and the response of a culture to literature from another culture. It is divided into five parts: the introduction, three chapters and the conclusion.

It is well known that W.B.Yeats was influenced by Indian philosophy. Many Indian critics have studied the Indian influence on Yeats's works in great detail. Western critics have given relatively less attention to this aspect. The dissertation examines some less studied aspects of Yeats's response to India and some important aspects of Yeats's influence on Indian poetry and the response of Indians to the poetry of Yeats. Irish culture and nationalism which are very important elements in Yeats's poetry and which bear a close similarity with Indian culture and nationalism play an important role in the Indian response to Yeats's poetry. These aspects are also explored and analysed. This dissertation argues that Yeats's response to India and the Indian response to Yeats can not be understood fully without a close study of the cultural affinity between India and Ireland. Most influence studies and theories of
literary influence do not take into account adequately the importance of culture. This dissertation attempts to relate culture with literary influence and readers' response to a foreign literature. An attempt to apply some recent theories of influence and literary reception is also made.

The introduction opens with a brief biographical note beginning from the publication of Yeats's first poems in imitation of Shelley, Blake and Spenser published in Dublin University Review in 1885 to the last poems which are marked by a striking maturity and written just before his death in 1939. A brief section on the major aspects of Yeats's eclecticism discusses his involvement in the occult and magic, the Theosophical Society, his interest in spirits and fairies, Irish folklore and mythology, the Caballah, the Hermetic Society and the Golden Dawn. A section on his status as a romantic - modernist shows how his modernism is related to and is partly drawn from his interest in India. The introduction traces some of the problems related to the study of Yeats, the relationship of Yeats and India and the response of Indians to the poetry of Yeats. Problems in attempts to study literary influence without taking into account the cultural aspect are discussed.

The first chapter deals with the Indian influence on Yeats's poetry. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section summarises Ireland's consistent interest in and response to India and some of the cultural similarities between India and
Ireland which facilitate the mutual response of the two countries to the culture and literature of each other. The second section analyses Yeats's encounter with India through three great Indians namely Mohini Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore and Shri Purohit Swami. The third section traces Indian echoes in the works of Yeats, particularly his poetry, the play *The Herne's Egg* and *A Vision* and relates some of them to the Irish tradition in order to show how the seemingly Indian element has shades of the Irish tradition and this affinity between the two traditions is responsible for Yeats's response to India. The influence of the Indian mystic poet Kabir and of Zen Buddhism on Yeats are also pointed out. The chapter concludes with some observations about Yeats's response to India which highlight the fact that the Indian influence on Yeats was just one of the many influences and the Indian elements in his poetry merge with elements drawn from other traditions, particularly the Irish tradition in an artistic and creative manner.

The second chapter "India's Response to Yeats" deals with the influence of Yeats on some Indian poets and the Indian response to Yeats's poetry. The first section discusses the response of a modernist Gujarati poet, Niranjan Bhagat who is taken as a representative of modern Gujarati poets. The second section deals with the tremendous influence of Yeats on the popular Hindi poet Harivanshrai Bachchan and his response to Yeats scattered throughout his Hindi prose writings. The third section is about
Aurobindo’s response which is found in his prose writings and some similarities between the poetry of the two poets and their ideas about poetry are studied. Yeats’s influence on the poet-critic Shankar Mokashi-Punekar is traced from his collection of English poems titled *The Captive*. The fourth section discusses the Bengali response. Tagore’s response in his prose writing and the similarities between the poetry of the two poets are considered. Some attention is given to the subtle influence of Yeats on poets like Buddhadeb Bose and Jibanananda Das. The next section gives an account of response by Indian critics. A number of Ph.D. dissertations and books by Indian scholars on Yeats’s works are considered here. The works of Balachandra Rajan, Naresh Guha, R.C.Shah, Shankar Mokashi-Punekar, Ravindran Sankaran, Harivanshrai Bachchan, Vinod Sena and others are discussed in detail. A brief discussion of articles on Yeats by Indians published in journals is given at the end of this chapter.

The third chapter evaluates the Indian influence on Yeats, Yeats’s influence on India and the Indian response to Yeats’s poetry. Theories of literary influence and reader response by Harold Bloom, Stanley Fish, Louise Rosenblatt, Claudio Guillen and others are considered and an attempt is made to apply these theories to Yeats and India. In order to explain why many Indians see too much Indianness in Yeats, a brief account of some of the cultural affinities and points of contact between the Indian and
the Irish traditions is included. The importance of culture in literature and that of literature in culture is emphasized. Analysing the example of an Indian student's response to Yeats's poem 'The Ballad of Fr. Gilligan', an attempt has been made to show how an Indian reader brings his knowledge of Indian culture to his interpretation of Yeats's poem with its Irish material and in this process he 'misreads' the poem but this contact between the Indian culture in the mind of the student and Irish culture reflected in the poem helps us to understand the process of literary influence and the response of readers to poetry. The aspects of symbolism, themes, language and nationalism are discussed. The Arabic element in Yeats is dealt with in the next section. A discussion of the most well received poems of Yeats in India reveals that these poems contain some Indianness which comes to the poems from their Irish character. Finally an attempt is made to present a view of literary influence which takes into account the cultural affinities and a process whereby a poet assimilates the cultural and other elements of the precursor poet or literary tradition.

The fifth part of the dissertation, "Conclusion" offers certain observations pertaining to Yeats's response to India, India's response to Yeats's works and the process of literary reception and influence.

Appendix - I contains three poems by Indian poets written to Yeats which include a poem in Gujarati by Harishchandra Bhatt,
a poem in Hindi by Harivanshrai Bachchan (both translated into English by this researcher) and a poem in English by Shankar Mokashi-Punekar.

Appendix - II lists Ph.D. dissertations and books by Indians on Yeats and details of more than fifty articles by Indians on Yeats published in scholarly journals.

Appendix - III gives the list of Yeats's published works including works edited by him in a chronological order from the year 1885 to 1986.

This dissertation attempts to establish that literary influences are exerted or received not only depending on the proximity of a writer to the influencing text or writer but also on complicated cultural transactions which form the context for such influences.
Translations from Harivanshrai Bachchan and Niranjan Bhagat are by the researcher.