CHAPTER - 1

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF INDO-ENGLISH POETRY

That Indo-English literature has come to stay and
exists in its own right is beyond question. It is therefore
necessary to look into its history of formation and
efflorescence in order to establish original contributions
of the living Indo-Anglian writers and map out the
possibilities.

Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, in his The Indian Contribution
to English Literature observes:

I prefer the term "Indo-Anglian" to
"Anglo-Indian" or "Indo-English". The late
Principal P.Seshadri included, not only Sir Edwin
Arnold and Tregoe Webb, but also Tagore and Sarojini
Naidu, in his brief survey of "Anglo-Indian poetry";
and Mr. George Sampson, in his Concise Cambridge History
of English Literature, gives a section to "Anglo-Indian
Literature" and refers in it, among others, to Tagore,
Man Mohun Ghose and Sri Aurobindo. But I thought it
desirable to distinguish between Englishmen who write
on Indian themes and Indians who use English as the
medium of artistic expression; and I saw no harm in
applying the already current terms "Anglo-Indian" and
"Indo-Anglian" to these two categories of writers.
I do not know who first coined the term "Indo-Anglian";
at any rate, in 1883 a book was published in Calcutta entitled Indo-Anglian Literature containing "Specimen compositions from native students". More recently, especially during the past two decades, "Indo-Anglian" has acquired considerable currency. Further the term can be conveniently used both as an adjective and as a noun, whereas to write "Indo-English writer" every time is awkward and to talk of "Indo-Englishman" or "Anglo-Indian is absurd or misleading." He further clarifies the term, stating in another of his book, Indian Writing in English (first edition 1962; second edition 1972):

"Indo-Anglian" strikes many as a not altogether happy expression. It is sometimes said that I concocted this expression, and I have accordingly been chasteised for it ..... It was later freely used (among others, by myself also) in the twentieth and thirties in reviews and articles. I merely gave general currency to the name when, in 1945, I adopted it as the title of my first book (already referred to) written for the P.B.N. All-India Centre. In another book, Literature and Authorship in India published at about the same time in London, "Indo-Anglian" was printed by mistake as "Indo-Anglican". It was war time and the book had been printed off without the proofs being passed by me ..... Still I know many are allergic to the expression "Indo-Anglian", and some would prefer "Indo-English". The advantage with "Indo-Anglian" is that it can be used both as adjective and

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as substantive, but "Indo-Englishman" would be unthinkable. "Indo-Anglian" is reasonably handy and descriptive, and serves our purpose well enough.²

Further Prof. V.P. Gokel in his book, *English In India: Its Present and Future* distinguishes Indo-Anglian and Indo-English literature thus:

The term "Indo-Anglian" has been coined as a kind of cousin to "Anglo-Indian". It has done duty in this capacity for sometime and there is no reason to disturb it. There is a growing need for another related term and I wish to make use of the term "Indo-English" for this purpose.

There is a need today to distinguish between two kinds of Indian writing in English, - books which have been originally written in English and others which are translations into English of books published in one of the classical or modern Indian languages. This latter was not a very significant category some years ago and it was subsumed without any feeling of incongruency under the title "Indo-Anglian".

'Indo-Anglian' literature comprises the work of Indian writers in English. English is used here either as the literary lingua franca of India or as a world language. Indo-Anglian literature has

had an illustrious history and it includes many forms, from the epic to the personal essay.¹

Dr. P.C. Notoky, however, does not seem inclined to accept the above discrimination proposed by Prof. Gokak as he observes:

Indo-English Poetry is a unique phenomenon. The case of a writer of a dependent country, adopting the language of his foreign master for creative purposes, is rather a rare one. Should we then, on the analogy of Indians writing in English, call Conrad's writing Anglo-French? Or Bobokov's Anglo-Russian or Beilke's or Koestler's French writing Franco-German? No such writing exists. In order to eliminate any unnecessary discrimination, therefore, Indo-English poetry should be treated, without prejudice, in the same manner as poetry in any other Indian language is treated.²

And the same idea has the support of the late C.R. Reddy in his foreword to Dr. J.K. Srinivasa Iyengar's P.K. book on Indo-Anglian literature:

'Indo-Anglian' literature is not essentially different in kind from Indian literature. It is a part of it, a modern facet of that glory which, ³

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commencing from the Vedas, has continued to spread its mellow light, now with greater and now with lesser brilliance under the inexorable vicissitudes of time and history, ever increasingly up to the present time of Tagore, Iqbal and Aurobindo Ghose and bids fair to expand with our and humanity's expanding future.

Lotika Basu in trying to isolate the impulse behind Indian poetry in English quotes Tagore:

The shock which roused Bengal mainly came through literature and a great part of its energy followed the same channel of literature for its expression.

The brief historical perspective provided by Prof. V.R. Bhushan in his book, The Pecock Late on the Indo-English Poetry helps one to trace the gradual evolution of this genre of writing. Prof. Bhushan observes:

...... the advent into India of English educationists like David Bate, Sir Hyde Cast, Henry De Ruzio and David Lester Richardson, and their


attempts to impart English education to our young men; the efforts of Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Keshub Chunder Sen towards wider diffusion of English instruction, the famous 'minute' of Lord Macaulay — then Law Member of the Governor General's Council and President of the Committee of Public Instruction — urging the necessity of making the 'natives of the country good English Scholars'; Lord Bentinck's Resolution (1835) that 'the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European Literature and Science among the natives of India, and that all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone', the appearance of quite a large body of independent, though superficial, poems on Indian subjects by Britishers like Sir William Jones, Monier Williams, Sir Edwin Arnold, Sir Alfred Lyall, Henry De Rosio, D.L. Richardson, John Leyden, Bishop Heber, Meredith Parker, Lawrence Hope (Mrs. Violet Nicholson), Trego Webb, William Waterfield, H.O. Reane, Rudyard Kipling, Oswald Gouldrey and others — who were all residents of India for long or short periods; — these constitute the significant background of Indo-English poetry. In addition, a state of stagnation in our provincial literature and the consequent desire of our poets to seek 'fresh fields and pastures new', a craving to imitate the English language and literature, and a general yearning after the attraction of novelty — these also spurred the advent of Indian writers of verse in English. 7

Dr. P.C. Kotoky emphasizes the growing tendency towards a synthesis of various elements both in Indian and English cultures:

Indo-English poetry is an outcome of the enlightened adjustment of the newly educated Indian to the cultural and administrative changes brought about by the foreign rulers.  

Prof. Bhushan comments on the sense of relevance felt by the Indian writers in adopting English as medium of communication and self-expression:

Three centuries of contact with the British and more than a century of the teaching of English in India have inevitably resulted in making some of our educated men and women feel quite at home in the language and literature of England. And if some of these feel confident that they can make use of English for expressing their creative thought, it should be regarded as perfectly natural consequence, and not as an erratic escapade or as a sign of slave mentality.

The historical aspect of this sense of relevance is very cogently and convincingly expressed by Dr. K.R. Srinivasan Iyengar in his observation:

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The awakened aristocracy and the newly emerged middle class in Asia were responsible for what is known as the Indian Renaissance. The new movement in the field of literature was also ushered in by them. The social, sociological, historical, psychological and semantic approaches to literature were concepts new to Indian critical thought - new in their clarity, vividness and applicability, if not essentially.  

It must be noted that the symbiosis of two cultures under the aegis of political upheaval in India could have achieved the edge it did only in the medium of English and therefore it is legitimate to say that the Indo-English Poetry is the natural offshoot of the historical and social contingencies rather than an artificially created cross-breed of an awkward kind and so Dr. Gokak's feeling that 'he should rather have referred to it as Shakuntala in skirts'... 

'I am tempted to say, in fact, that Indo-Anglian literature is a hothouse plant rather than one that has sprung from the soil and sprouted and burgeoned in the open air.'


12. Ibid., p.164.
Probably Dr. Gokak made this observation as a continuation of what Dr. Iyengar had said in his interesting brochure on The Study of Indian Writing in English:

'Gordon Bottomley is said to have described typical Indo-Anglian Poetry as "Matthew Arnold in a Sari."' Of course, the implication of Dr. Gokak's observation is clear: Indo-English poetry is not a natural growth. But Dr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar is at great pains in enforcing the point that the Indo-Anglian Poetry is a matter of natural growth!

It is legitimate to view Indo-Anglian literature as a curious native eruption an expression of the practical no less than creative genius of the Indian people. Indians have written and are writing - in English for communicating with one another and with the outside world, for achieving self-expression too artistically, using English, if necessary, or necessarily, in an Indian way. While trying to assess the value of Indo-Anglian poetry in the course of my book, The Indian Contribution to English Literature, I happened to remark:

The best Indo-Anglian poets have given us something which neither English poetry nor any of our regional literatures can give; in other words, they have affected a true marriage of Indian
processes of poetic experience with English
formulae of verse expression. 13

He further states:

To be Indian in thought and feeling and
desire and experience, yet also to court the
goughs and submit to the discipline of English
expression, in a novel experiment in creative
mutation. 14

The laissez - faire philosophy and the spirit of
liberalism of the West began to make their impact on the
Indian mind and particularly the intelligentsia and what
began as a fashion ended as a passion. Dr. Srinivasa Iyenger
attributes this fascination for the language to the new
intellectualism and resurgent ardour among the Indians as
symbolised in Raja Ram Mohan Roy. 15

Giving an idea about the early fascination for English
R.C. Dutt puts it this way:

The first alumni of the College (Hindu
College) ..... left the path opened out by the

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13. Dr. Srinivasa Iyenger K.R.: Indian Writing in English
15. Dr. Srinivasa Iyenger K.R.: Indian Contribution to English
Literature, Bombay, Karnataka Publishing House, 1945, p.3.
eminent reformer (Baja Ram Mohan Roy), and for a time indulged in the dream of distinguishing themselves in English verse. Fired by the example of such men as Derozio and D.L.Richardson, and impelled by their ardent appreciation of Western literature to which they had found a golden key, they employed their talents in contributing to English literature. Kashi Prasad Ghosh led the van, and his book of poems in English (The Shir and Other Poems, 1830) attracted much attention as the first attempt of young Bengal in English poetry. The talented Madhu Sudan Dutta followed the example ..... (with) his Captive India published in Madras in 1849.16

Revising Kashi Prasad Ghosh's first book of poems in English, D.L.Richardson observes in the Literary Gazette, Calcutta for November 1, 1834:

Let some of these narrow-minded persons who are in the habit of looking down on the natives of India with arrogant and vulgar contempt read this little poem and ask themselves could they write better verses not in a foreign tongue but their own.17


It is quite understandable that the first fervour of Western imitation should have led to the minimising of the native culture as Dr. J.C. Ghosh has observed:

The College became a centre of great intellectual activity, in fact the nursery of the modern spirit in India. It inspired generations of young Indians with love for Western arts and sciences and made them realise that only through the help of Europe could they hope to pull their country out of the decadence into which it had sunk. It is true that the new learning acted like strong wine on the young Indian intellectuals of the day, and they went to the extreme by trying to westernise themselves completely, crying down everything Indian and exaggerating the value of everything European.18

Identifying the nature of the sensibility and the style of the poets of this renaissance phase of the Indo-English Poetry, Dr. Gokak observes very significantly:

Indo-English poetry was born under a Romantic star. It turned to lip in the manner of Byron and Scott in the verse of Derozio, M.H. Dutt and others. It begins with verse romances and lyrics written in the Romantic vein.

The deeper tone and accents of Romanticism were caught by poets who came later, during the third quarter of the 19th century. Govin Dutt, the father of Toru Dutt, was the first to introduce the introspective vein in poems like *Romance and Wordsworth*. ..... Shelley, for example, found his earliest and best disciple in Tagore, during the last quarter of the 19th century. At the same time, the impact of Victorian Poetry was being felt on the Indo-Anglian scene. *The Dutt Family Album* was published in 1870. Anw Sharma published his *Willow Drops* in 1873-74 ..... But there were also ballads or 'layas' in the manner of Macaulay on legendary or historical themes. This became the favourite word, later, with Toru Dutt and R.C. Dutt. The glorification of heroic deeds and the domestic virtues ..... appealed to the imagination of these poets.19

At this juncture it would be critically helpful to note the part played by P.T. Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury* not only in inspiring the Indian poets to write in English but also in providing a stimulus to the poets in the Indian languages. This point is noted by Dr. N.K. Meik.

The part played by the popularity of P.T. Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury* in this

process needs to be emphasized. This selection influenced not only early Indo-English poets but also the new poets in the Indian languages. 20

The early Indo-English poets are notable more for their enthusiastic rendering into English of typically Indian themes, either mythical or legendary or historical or the themes of quotidian experiences. In this respect, Ashimvarad Ghosh and Dutt family Album group register their historical importance, if not for original, creative output. But the hidden Indianness can be seen slowly asserting itself in the poems of Toru Dutt as pointed out by Prof. V. R. Bhuchan:

Though these early writers have not contributed anything of substantial value either to Indo-English poetry or to the literature of the Rajya, they yet have their place as the pioneers in a new branch which has put forth many leaves and blossoms since their time. Their work illustrates 'the successful study of a great literature and a difficult language', and is in the nature of a well and truly laid foundation for the beautiful edifice of Indo-English poetry. 21

Tora Dutt received education in England and France. A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields, by Aru and Tora Dutt was published in 1876. Her Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan appeared posthumously in 1882. She chose themes from Hindu legends and epics and wrote on Savitri, Lakshman, Druva, Prahlad and Sita. "She is the first Indo-English singer of importance to interpret the heart of India, and to create the genuine Indian atmosphere in her poems." 22

A bird's eye-view of the historical scene soon to show how the Indo-English poetry was shaping and transforming itself. Dr. Godak makes this point very clear:

R.C. Dutt's Love of Ancient India and his renderings of the Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata were published in 1894 and 1898-99. Mammoohan Ghose's Love Songs and Elegies was published in 1898 and Sri Aurobindo's Songs to Pyrrhoe in 1895. Sarojini Naidu's The Golden Threshold was published in 1905 ....... ....... Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekanand were also active during this period. Other poets active during this period werepersistent, J.M. Tagore, A.M. Funte, Prajendranath Seal and D.L. Roy ....... Mammoohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu, who spent their impressionable years in England when the "Decadent" poets dominated the scene, reveal the influence of this trend in

22. Ibid.
their early poems ..... But the introduction of Indian themes gave a new vitality to her [Sarojini Naidu] poetry ..... Sri Aurobindo very soon outgrew the manner of his Songs to Myrtilla and blazed a new trail in poetry which many were to follow. The last quarter of the nineteenth century is on the whole, the golden period of Indo-Anglian poetry.

The first quarter of the 20th century produced a number of poets who continued to write in the Romantic and Victorian manner of the Indo-Anglian poets. Maherjee, A.P.Koharde, N.V. Thadani, Himmat Jung, Harindra Nath Chatterjee and Ananda Acharya exploited Indian or Oriental thought and legend and wrote in the typical Indian manner.23

One can discern how the earlier and the superficial phases of the Indo-English poetry were slowly vanishing, revealing the growth of the new awareness of the historical situation and a longing for reforms of the Indian society and the re-capturing of its pristine glory. Dr.Cokak directs attention to this fact in his observation:

No doubt it took over the idea of a poetical romance on legendary or historical material. But what the poets did was to explore

Indian or Oriental themes ..... The Romantic feeling for Nature in its Indian setting is seen in a Hindu student's Early India (1867-74) and in J.N. Tagore's An Indian Wreath in his Flights of Fancy 1881. The championing of the Indian window starts with Derozio and Kashiprasad. Derozio also sets the tone for a love of India and lamentation over her fallen state and this theme is taken up in a number of poems and sonnets by the Album poets and their successors. ..... Swami Vivekanand introduced metaphysical longing and depth into Indo-Anglian poetry in poems like The Cup and Kali. Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, who belonged to this generation, represent the topmost achievement in Indian poetry the one in Bengali and the other in Indo-Anglian.24

Dr. Kotoky emphasizes the same thing more pointedly when he says:

Like Yeats and some other Irish writers imparting a typical Irish flavour to English poetry, Indo-English poets, too, have bestowed upon it an Oriental quality. This poetry has brought to the notice of international readership certain aspects of the cultural heritage of India.25

24. Ibid., p.xxiii.

The incipient Indianness observed in Toru Dutt achieves its authenticity and deeper spiritual presence in the poems of Swami Vivekanand and Swami Ananda Acharya. And Dr. Gokak drives home this point very cogently:

Indo-Anglian poetry, like the rest of modern Indian poetry, is Indian first and everything else afterwards. It has voiced the aspirations, the joys and sorrows of the Indian people. It has been sensitive to the changes in the national climate and striven increasingly to express the soul of India, the personality which distinguishes her from other nations. At the same time, its constant endeavour is to delineate the essential humanity and universality which make the whole world her kith and kin.

The social, political and economic scenes after Independence in 1947 are fast changing and it is in this new context of changing values that the modern Indo-English poet is forced to live and write. The earlier aura of romanticism has faded and it is, of course, out of tune with the situation in India to-day. A mere adherence to the new philosophy of realism would deprive the Indian sensibility of its spiritual factor but to stick to the spiritualistic stance would mean lack of awareness of the present reality.

which is none too attractive. Dr. Naik analyses this situation very lucidly by observing:

The Indian poet in English stands on the threshold of tremendous possibilities today. The challenge of realizing and expressing creatively his identity and his commitment to the culture which he is a product should spur him to newer and richer artistic effort. In trying to answer this challenge the Indian poet in English must silence the echo and cultivate the voice. It may be 'a sparrow's voice' (to borrow an expressive phrase from Raja Rao) at present, but nevertheless it is an authentic voice which, as it develops and matures, may in the fulness of years, be heard 'breaking the silence of the seas', across the wide English-speaking world. 27

As noted earlier, the reformist impulse and search for authenticity, noted since the first quarter of the 20th century, makes Harindranath Chattopadhyaya a significant poet. A study of Harindranath gives an insight into the nationalism which made poets sing, taking a definite and yet authentic form.