



Postcolonial note in Indian English Poetry with Special Reference to Ezekiel, Kamala Das and Ramanujan

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Postcolonial literature in India means the literature which began to emerge at the end of British rule of India. It is in poetry that the post independence period witnessed the most crucial developments. In the fifties arose a school of poets who tried to turn their backs on the romantic tradition and write a verse more in tune with the age, its general temper and its literary ethos. Nissim Ezekiel is one of the most important Indo-English poets of the post-independence era and his "Night of the scorpion" is one of his best known poems. Women poets form a sizeable school in modern Indian English literature and in most outstanding work is by Kamala Das, a bilingual writer, who has earned a respectable place both in English and Malayalam. Kamala Das's poetry is primarily autobiographical and her theme is love.

The most outstanding poet of the sixties is A.K.Ramanujan. India and his Indian experience is the subject matter of his writings. His poetry draws its sustenance from his intense awareness of his racial burden, his Hindu heritage. Ramanujan's persona finds his entire anatomy bred in an ancestor's bone.

The Poets who dearly show the postcolonial aspect in their writings are Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan and Kamala Das.

Postcolonial writers try to portray a true picture of India. There was a struggle for self identity. Postcolonial writers reject the norms and traditions set by the colonial masters.

Key words: *Personal – character, exterior, identity ; Scrutinize – check, examine ; Canonical – authoritative, accepted.*

Introduction : The term postcolonial can be defined in two ways. Post-colonial with a hyphen means literature that was produced in the period marking the end of British rule. Postcolonial literature critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship and rejects the aesthetic norms and values set by the colonial masters. The postcolonial writers reject the claims to universalism made on behalf of canonical western literature and seek to show its limitations of outlook. They foreground questions of cultural difference and diversity and examine their treatment in relevant literary works. (Barry, Peter, *Beginning Theory, (2nd Edition), Viva Books Pvt. Ltd., page no.-199*).

With the attainment of Independence on 15th August 1947 the literary world of India showed a remarkable change. It is possible to argue that the rightful assumption of a recognized national identity after 1947

has proved a great gain for the Indian English writer. It has given him greater self confidence, widened his vision and sharpened his faculty of self-scrutiny (Naik, M.K., *A History of Indian English Literature. (2004)*).

Postcolonial literature is sometimes called "New English Literature". It is a body of literary writings that reacts to the discourse of colonization. Postcolonial literature often deals with the issues of formerly subjugated to colonial rule. Colonialism usually works through the use of brutal force employed by one country to exploit another community and obtain economic wealth. Colonialism most commonly was the abuse of native people. The postcolonial perspective emerged as a challenge to this tradition and legacy; it attempts to illegitimate the idea of establishing power through conquest. The postcolonial writers rejected the norms set by colonizers and presented their ideas in a way they

liked. We can find the element of post-colonialism in their writings even before Independence.

Postcolonialism deals with cultural identity in colonized societies, the dilemmas of developing a national identity after colonial rule, the ways in which writers articulate and celebrate that identity. This was a struggle for self-identity, the native identity. The postcolonial writers tried to show the deeper significance of India by describing the native life, values, systems, experiences, rituals and customs of India. They not only used the colonizer's tongue as their own but even altered it for their own suitability. They even added their own words and phrases to suit their purpose.

Postcolonial literature was in fact a reaction to the traditions and norms set by the colonial masters. Postcolonial writers by their writings challenged the colonial constructions, structures and norms.

One far-sighted decision taken at Independence was that India should remain a member of the British Commonwealth. The writer in Independent India, whether in English or in the regional languages, has provided ample evidence of increased creative vigour and capacity for experimentation. As far as Indian English literature is concerned, novels like *The Serpent and the Rope* and *The Guide* (both of which appeared after Independence) and the poetry of Ezekiel, Ramanujan and Kamala Das and the prose of Nirad Chaudhuri are conclusive proof of this freshness and virility.

There is a crucial development in Indian English poetry after Independence. Nissim Ezekiel emerged as the leader of modern English poetry in India. With him postcolonial poetry started which reflects the lives and identities of educated Indians. Nissim Ezekiel in his poem "Night of the Scorpion" portrays a true picture of an Indian village. The postcolonial elements in this poem are clearly visible. Nissim Ezekiel in this poem shows a deep understanding of Indian rural life and the psyche of the village folk. Not only the topography is Indian but the sensibility is Indian too. In "Night of the Scorpion" Ezekiel creates a very convincing atmosphere of rainy season in an Indian village. "Here, the tale, which lies in the sting, is told by an observer, who is neither flippantly ironical nor antiseptically detached; on the contrary, he invests the poem with deep significance by trying to understand the Indian ethos and its views of evil and suffering, though he makes no claim to sharing it" (*A History of Indian English Literature*. (2004). *Sahitya Akademi, Ravindra Bhawan, 35, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi, first*

published-1982, page no.-194)

In this poem Ezekiel also shows how deeply the Indian mentality is permeated with the basic doctrines of Hinduism, the theory of Karma and of reincarnation.

"May the sins of your previous birth
be burned away tonight, they said.
May your suffering decrease
the misfortunes of your next birth,
they said. May the sum of evil
balanced in this unreal world
against the sum of good
become diminished by your pain."

(Ezekiel, Nissim, Night of the Scorpion)

It is, however, towards the end of the poem that Ezekiel shows his true poetic abilities. His mother, with true motherly instinct is thankful to God that the scorpion had spared her children.

"My mother only said,
Thank God the scorpion picked on me
and spared my children." (*Night of the Scorpion*)

Ezekiel shows a true understanding of a typical Indian mother's heart which the colonial masters failed to find.

In the poem "In India", Nissim Ezekiel portrays a very true picture of contemporary India.

"This, she said to herself,
As she sat at table
With the English boss,
Is it. This is the promise:
The long evenings
In the large apartment
With cold beer and Western music,
Lucid talk of art and literature,
And of all "the changes India needs",
At the second meeting
In the large apartment"

(Ezekiel, Nissim, In India)

Kamala Das is also a very remarkable postcolonial writer. She is revolutionary in her ideas and in her writings. Kamala Das is one of those who rejected the traditional use of English language and handled it in her own simple way, expressing the various shades of

Indian life. In the poem "An Introduction" she says,

".....The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,"

(Das, Kamala, *An Introduction*)

Kamala Das' s poetry reveals her boldness and her attitude towards life.

She frankly says,

"..... I am sinner,
I am saint. I am the beloved and the
Betrayed....." (*An Introduction*)

In the poem "An Introduction" we find the Indian view of a bride, a wife, a woman. The rules she should follow. These rules can only be found in India where she is asked to dress in saris.

"..... Dress in saris, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroider, be cook,"

Kamala Das's poetry is primarily autobiographical, and her theme is love. About the subject matter of her poetry she states, "A poet's raw material is not stone or clay; it is her personality. I couldn't escape from my predicament even for a moment." (*An Anthology of Indian English Poetry, Orient Longman Limited, Page no. 77*).

The most outstanding poet of the sixties is A. K. Ramanujan. Though he wrote all his poetry in America, India and all his Indian experiences remain the subject-matter of his poetry. His poetry draws its sustenance from his intense awareness of his social burden, his Hindu heritage. Ramanujan tries to juxtapose ironically the ancient Hindu ethos with the situation of the modern Hindu as in "Some Indian Uses of History on a Rainy Day" and contrasts the Hindu and Western world-views as in "Christmas". (*A History of Indian English Literature. (2004). Sahitya Akademy, Ravindra Bhawan, 35, Ferozeshah Road, New Delhi, Page no. 200.*) In "Carpe Diem", he presents an Epicurian way of life that comes close to Charvakya's philosophy of enjoying each moment of life.

"Pluck the moment,
said Epicurus." (*Ramanujan, A.K., Carpe Diem*)

In the poem "In The Zoo", he writes,

"And these,

these are scavenger birds,
fit emblems
for a city like Calcutta or Madura,
crammed to the top of its gates
with whelping people and yapping dogs."

(*Ramanujan, A.K., In The Zoo*)

Ramanujan's poems are sketches with inherent comments on people and situations. A. K. Ramanujan constantly renewed himself in his work and kept up with the times. He evoked the warmth of traditional Indian family life.

It is important in the development of a national literature that writers free themselves from the linguistic standards of their colonizers and create a literature based on their own local speech. Postcolonial writers altered English language to express their views and opinions. They made India their theme of writing and tried to show India in a different light in which she was never seen before. They showed how the colonial masters were wrong and incomplete in their view of India. The postcolonial writers challenged the colonial constructions, texts, structures by showing how biased, wrong and incomplete they are in their perspective. These writers tried to redefine the native life. They described the native life and its values and systems as they are. They gave a true picture of India.

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