
The Dribbling of Indianness Through the Literary Nibs of Sarojini Naidu & Jayanta Mahapatra

Abstract:

Since the term 'Indian English Writing' itself spills over with lucid proclamation about moving around the word 'Indian', the access to find out the extracts of such India or Indianness is very much normal in the domain of Indian literary expressions. It's been long since the reader fraternity along with literary critics is decoding the essence of Indianness out of the literary expressions of Pre as well as Post-Independence Indian English Writers. The present research article is a gentle endeavor to meditate over the presentation of actual India and associated norms, codes, rituals and so on in the light of some selected works of Sarojini Naidu and Jayant Mahapatra which will elucidate the dual perspective towards the treatment of Indian habits and culture. The present work will bring out the similitude as well as differences as far as the portrayal of Indian life is concerned by the writers of colonial period such as Sarojini Naidu and those who wrote after the British captivity such as Jayant Mahapatra. The indistinguishable thing between the literary expressions of Sarojini Naidu and Jayant Mahapatra is that, they both acquainted with Indian thoughts and sensibilities. The essence of Indianness is inevitable present in poems of these said writers. However Jayant Mahapatra in particular along with many other Post-Colonial Indian English Writers has contributed immensely in bringing out the Indian lexical facets which reflects his Indian flavors, shifts, hybridized formation etc. At the same time Mahapatra's treatment encompasses the genuine picture that has captured the social-economic evils such as 'Sati' practice in earlier days, hunger, superstitions, physical and mental molestation of women and plaintive strains of Indian subject even after the freedom. Sarojini on the other side has highlighted the lighter experiences and humble lives which obviously conceals darker facets of real India.

Key Words: Indianness, pre/post –Independence, habits, culture, real India, social evils.

It is a bit complex task to define 'the Indianness' in the light of a particular writer and his/her works by merely referring the language, region and religion etc. The most core thing here to reflect on is the consciousness towards the Indian culture and habits. As Gokak rightly pointed out, "Indianness of Indian Writing consists in writer's intense awareness of his entire culture" (Mohan 24). This includes the attentiveness to the glorious past of the nation, its cultural practices and norms, habits of habitants, attitude towards life and also the present socio-economic and socio-political reality. It is found that when we inscribe the word 'Indianness', it usually

demonstrates the culture and associated codes deviating from the absolute reality of the society. As pointed out by Archana Kumar, “if an Indian Writer chooses an Indian theme or makes use of an Indian setting, it in itself will not result in good writing. If the poet uses a local color purely as an eternal device, it is not enough. He is not influenced merely by one culture. Rather he carries the burden of diversity of cultural strands; Indianness in his works may also take several forms” (Kumar). The major elements in this fusion are pursuit of unending ranges, a spirit of absorption and nimbleness of mental faculty (Naik).

There may have several outlooks for defining the Indianness in literary works but it can be assume that Indianess doesn't restrict itself to a specific habits or codes of culture rather it ranges from micro to macro, culture to cultures, habit to habits, past to present and most importantly it encompasses the consciousness towards fines and flows too of the society. On this note, let us acquaint two of eminent literary voices, Sarojini Naidu and Jayanta Mahapatra from Pre and Post-Independence Indian English period respectively.

Sarojini Naidu

Conventionally, the critics have been at the opinion that Sarojini's perception of surrounding includes the every micro detail of Indian lives and habits, from people to plains, fairs to flowers, streets to sensibility, customs to curiosity and so on, making her the agent of reflecting the mirror image of Indian people. Her writing dribbles the humble representation of Indian habits and culture. That is the reason her writing comes beneath the ensign of 'folk songs'. Her infinitesimal observation about local happenings, rituals, habits and all sort of up and down imparts the gentle picture of Indian lives. Many researchers and critics are at the opinion that Sarojini Naidu pushed forward the undone work of former literary voices like Toru Dutt who usually inscribed the legendary figures and grand themes from Ved-Puranas whereas Sarojini's eyes glued to the local scenes especially from rural settings; and hence she extracted the genuine Indian essence (Reddy and Sandhya). When one claims about the portrayal of 'genuine Indian picture', other may expect the picture in its totality. That is to say, all its fines and flows and not mere fairy-tale amusement about various shades of life. Is this legitimizes in contexts of Saroji's works? Well some as mentioned above claims that her writing brings up the Indianness with all its frankness while on the contrary this picture-perfect presentation seems inoperative due to its limited range. Let us dive into some of widely accomplished works of Sarojini Naidu;

Bangle-Seller

‘Bangle-Seller’ is taken from her collection called ‘The Bird of Time’ that got published in 1912. The poem sets in typical and common sight of rural India as a small bangle vendor calling the customers by shouting loudly at a temple fair. The fair compacted with the people, moving here and there, loud noises etc gives the local vibes. The bangle-seller with all his masticated lines tries to make women come and buy bangles. He beautifully illustrates the significance of bangles which comprise of various colors,

*Some are meet for maiden’s wrist,
Silver and blue as the mountain mist,
Some are flushed that buds that dream. (The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & Spring)*

The various colors denote the different stages of women’s lives. Interestingly the last stanza connotes somewhat lightening connotations,

*Some are purpled and gold flecked grey...
And serves her household in fruitful pride,
And worship the Gods at her husband’s side. (Naidu, The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & Spring)*

Symbolically the color ‘gray’ is been denoting the compromises, depression, suppression and often death in literature. But here the poetess doesn’t let the reader to get into any sort of pessimism and associates it with the symbol of obedience and faithful services. On the other side there is no denying of the fact the time when this collection got out was not the mere time of British supremacy and dominance but sorry state of woman in male-dominated society where women got alienated because of their sex. The marriage institution was not pleasant to eyes as dowry system and domestic violence were the naked reality of the time.

Palanquin Bearers

‘Palanquin Bearers’ is the another poem that carries the joyous portrayal of bride who post her marriage carried to groom’s house by bearers. The poem is written in simple language accompanies the ordinary site of Indian society. The bride is in somewhat ambivalent emotions as one side she laments over her departing from parental family but on the other side she seems exited to start newfangled chapter. She at this moment doesn’t seem burden as Sarojni exclaims,

Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,

She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;

She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,

She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream. (Naidu, Palanquin Bearer)

Her other poems such as 'Wandering Singer', 'Corn-Grinders', 'Cradle Song' and other have written in the same mood and tone that circumscribes the common rituals, habits and everyday scenery of Indian streets.

Jayanta Mahapatra

Jayanta mahapatra is prominent name in the period of Post-Independence Indian English Poems. The obvious disparities between the formal and current writers were apparent in the treatment of themes, selection of subjects, the perception and outlook and so on marking the shift transition. One may see and feel the romantic touch in the writing of earlier poets since they had Romantic English writer to inspire them. They look up to them in adapting the linguistic faculty along with the mood and tone. The post-Liberty era Indian English poets flipped the coin to look on the other side which was full of ambiguities literary and metaphorically as well. The modern English writers such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats etc were pouncing upon the degradation of modern civilization by bringing out the shallowness of contemporary politics and dogmatic craving for power and control. The Indian English literary expressions also found the ground to undulate the perspectives and started extracting the evils within society.

Hunger

Jayanta Mahapatra is the prime example of above mentioned revolutionary changes as one may see the depth of frustration towards prevailing social, political and economic milieu. His writing exposed the bare reality of the society where poverty, exploitation of poor, the subjugation of women and the repercussions in form of human trafficking, child labor, and prostitution and so on got on the surface. 'Hunger' demonstrates the sorry state of Indian society where people have dashed to the ground before the poverty and starvation. The poem begins with somewhat frank yet distorting confession,

"It was hard to believe the flesh was heavy on my back..." (Mahapatra). This articulation may seem the case of obesity as the poet laments over the weight which is heavy on his back. But further the poem proceeds with disturbing tone, "The fisherman said: will you have her..." (Mahapatra).

The heaviness of flesh followed by an offer, an offer to indulge in sexual course with fisherman's daughter. The poet couldn't believe how desperate his desires were in indulging in physical intimacy. The fisherman's offer in between fueled the fire further. "his old nets had only dragged up from the seas", I saw his white bone thrash his eyes". (Mahapatra). The fisherman was dragging the net forward carelessly as if he was more into the affirmative response that he was expecting from the narrator. The old man's propose is devious, but treating it as evil would be missing the point of the poem; for, the economic compulsions are already a part of the context, intended to work as an ironic supplement to the young man's overt sexual drives. Critics have commented on the use of women as figures of patriarchal fantasies and make victimization in Mahapatra's poetry. The girl has absolutely no comment over the matter; her growing age has only

made her eligible for male lust. Providing sex to give the family monetary support was not her idea in the first place

The old man's propose is devious but adhering to 'governed' principles and dos won't lend them money to fill their bellies as the economic exclusion (starvation for food here) is way heavier than anything. The 'hunger' finally meets the 'hunger' in the last stanza. The narrator entered in the tattered hut only to get the real meaning of the hunger. A fifteen years old girl deprived of voice and even victim of malnutrition was lying in front of the narrator. Her quietness is appealing as she is been drenched in malicious task out of the compulsion.

According to the report by [UNAIDS](#) there were 657,829 prostitutes in the country as of 2016. There are some strong recommended data claiming the fact that India has turned out to be the global core of sex tourism, calling up the people from some wealthy countries (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_in_India#cite_note-sex_industry-10). There were around two million women indulged in sex work in India in 1997. In 2007, the [Ministry of Women and Child Development](#) stated that over 3 million females were there in sex work in India, with 35.47 % of them inflowing the business before the age of 18 years (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_in_India#cite_note-37). The number of prostitutes rose by 50% between 1997 and 2004).

The poets like Mahapatra including other from post-colonial period were keener to the society from the objective lenses. Before the freedom period, most of poets were busy in humming the various facets of the nature including the pleasant human habits. However there were some exception in the Indian English Fictions like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao who articulated the strains of agony and trauma faced by the common people on the streets. But most of poems were full of explosive materials of optimism and easy-going lives.

Take an example of '**Her Hands**' that depicts traumatic and sorry state of a little girl who is being raped. The poem is an appealing cry over the child abuse, rape, moral depravity etc. '**The Whorehouse in a Calcutta Street**' is another one dedicated to the social concern where again the poverty takes on the chastity. The consciousness towards all the fines and flaws are what makes there poem more thought-provoking with pessimistic tone.

Conclusion

The disparities do not in mere context of the subject matter but even the linguistic facet as well. The Indianness can be fathom in context of the lexical richness too. As mentioned earlier the poets like Sarojini Naidu and most of her contemporary are found somewhat imitating the tones of british romantics and consequently loosing the crux of indianess. If one look up to Jayanta Mahapatra and his contemporaries, they aspire instead of getting inspired by the foreign literary expressions. The channelization of phrases like *dung-washed*, *burning-ground*, *ball of cooked rice*, *chariot-festival* etc are the prime instances of conscious translation to what we call 'Indianize the situation'.

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