

EARLY ANGLO-INDIAN WRITERS

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Introduction

In India, English journalism served as the fore-runner of Indo-Anglian literature. English journalism as started in India with the founding of Hicky's Bengal Gazette by James Augustus Hicky in 1780; but indigenous journalism started to progress only in 1833 when liberty was given to the press. Indian journalism in English created a conducive situation for writings by Indians. Here we find the first germination of Indo-Anglian literature in the country.

It should not be forgotten that Indo-Anglian literature started to develop in India, when the eminent fiction writers in England and Russia had already accomplished outstanding work in their country. Early Indo-Anglian fiction appeared when Jane Austin and Sir. Walter Scott had become classics and Dickens had written most of his novels in England.

Even before the introduction of English as the medium of education in 1935, many Indian stalwarts like Raja Rammohan Roy, Henry Louis Vivian Derizio, Kashiprasad Gosh and many others acquired good command over English and enriched Anglo-Indian literature by their creative writing. Moreover one of the notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction, for though India was probably the fountain-head of story-telling, the novel was an importation from the west⁴.

The contribution made by the important pioneers to Indo-Anglian writing including the contribution made by Indo-Anglian writers to fiction and novel writing, upto the period of Tagore are precisely dealt with.

Cavelly Venkata Boriah (1766 – 1803)

Cavelly Venkata Boriah was one of the greatest pioneers of Indo-Anglian writings. He was a master in many languages including Sanskrit, Persian, Hindustani and English. He worked as an Assistant to Col. Colin Mackenzie, the first Surveyor General of India. Boriah's "Account of the Jains" was published in "Asiatic Researches or Transactions of the Society", instituted in Bengal for inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the art, Sciences and Literature of Asia. This essay of twenty-eight pages was not an original creative work, but it was a beautiful transaction of several accounts the author received about the history of the Jains, from a Jain priest. However it is regarded as the first considered attempt by an Indian to write in English.

Raja Rammohan Roy

The renaissance in modern Indian literature begins with Raja Rammohan Roy. He was born in Bengal in 1774 and he died at Bristol on 27th September 1833. He mastered the English language, and wrote and spoke powerful and beautiful English, years before Mecaulay wrote his minute. He could be named as the first of the Indian masters in English prose.

Raja Rammohan Roy's essay, on 'A Defence of Hindu Theism'-(1817), may be regarded as the first original publication of significance in the history of Indian English literature. His famous essay 'Letter on English Education', may very well be called "the manifesto of the Indian Renaissance".

By writing a concise autobiographical sketch, he became a pioneer to the modern Indian autobiographers like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and others. His collected writings, 'The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy' (6 volumes, 1945-51) edited by Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman stands as an important milestone in the history of Anglo-Indian writing. His first of the two 'Petitions Against the Press Regulations', written in 1823 was described by Miss Colet as 'The Areopagitica of Indian History'. M.K. Naik Says: "Rammohan Roy's style is reminiscent of Burke's eloquence, though it does not possess the English master's colour and splendour. Nevertheless, clear thinking, soundness of judgement, comprehensiveness of views, forceful and logical argumentation and moderation and dignity in refuting the criticism of his adversaries are the outstanding features of Rammohan Roy's prose style, which indubitably makes him the first of a long line of Indian masters of English prose".

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was one of pioneers of Indo-Anglian writings. He was born in Calcutta on 18th April 1809 and his father, Francis Derozio was Indo-Portuguese and his mother, Sophia Johnson was English.

When Derozio was on the teaching staff in the Hindu College, Calcutta, a debating club called "The Academic Association" and a magazine called "The Parthenon" were started on his initiative to discuss various vital subjects and burning problems of the day. But the orthodox Hindus of Calcutta accused him of misguiding the youth against the national interest, so the college authorities dismissed Derozio from service in 1831. But to carry out his mission of free thinking and literary pursuit he started a daily, 'The East Indian', but unfortunately he died at the early age of twenty two on December 23, 1831.

Derozio's literary career was very short and during this short span, he published two volumes of poetry: Poems (1827) and "The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Meterical Tale and Other Poems" (1828). Derozio's early death was a great loss to Indo-Anglian writing. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes: "Derozio's lead a simple and noble life, even as he had lived, so he died, brave and beautiful even in his death".

Kashiprosad Ghose (1809-73)

Kashiprosad Ghose was probably the first Indian who published a regular volume in English. He was a product of the famous Hindu College and he served as an editor of an English weekly, 'The Hindu Intelligence'.

His famous work 'The Shair and Other Poems' reveals the influence of Scott's 'The Lady of the Last Minstrel'. Even though his poetry has little intrinsic poetic quality, yet it found favour with many contemporary Englishmen. D.L. Richardson a popular member of the staff of Hindu College, Calcutta included some of his poems in 'The Bengal Annals', an anthology of prose and verse, published in 1833.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73)

Michael Madhusudan Dutt was one of the founders of Indo-Anglian writing. M.M.Dutt, the only son of Rajnarain Dutt and Jahnvi, was born on January 25, 1824 in his ancestral village Sagardanri, in Bangladesh²². He started his literary career as an Indian English poet. He was a Bengali poet of great creative talent but whose burning ambition in life was to earn recognition as a writer of English verse.

He was a student of the prestigious Hindu College, Calcutta. As a student in the Hindu College, he proved his brilliance equally in English and Mathematics. His English poems of the Hindu College period were composed between 1841 and 1842 when the poet was only seventeen. The impact of Wordsworth is noticeable in some of his sonnets in respect of both theme and style. He has left behind two volumes of poetry 'Visions of the Past' (1848) and 'The Captive Ladie' (1849). The English romantic poet Byron and classical poet like Homer, Ovid, Dante etc were his main source of inspiration. He was a mere versifier, but he is very important because he was the first to make a sincere effort to use Indian imagery, sentiments and tried to tell an Indian story. However he failed to harmonise Indian and foreign elements.

K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar says "Like Derozio, Madhusudan's too was a chequered life; he too died, though not very young, yet before his creative powers could complete the full of fulfilment".

Early Indo-Anglian Novelists

The earliest Indian English fiction have tales rather than novels proper, but their use of fantasy shows their connection with the ancient Indian tradition, in spite of the fact the subject of the fiction was contemporary.

Kylash Chunder Dutt

Kylash Chunder Dutt was one of the pioneer Indo-Anglian novelists. Kylash Chunder Dutt's 'A Journey of 48 Hours of the year 1945', was published in 'The Calcutta Literery Gazette' on 6th June 1835. In this literary fantasy the author described the story of an imaginary and unsuccessful revolt against the British rule, a hundred year later.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt

Shoshee Chunder Dutt's fiction 'Republic of Orissa: Annals from the pages of Twentieth Century' was published in 'The Saturday Evening Hurkaru' on May 22nd, 1845. Set in the background of second decade of the twentieth century, it narrates an imaginary British defeat and the establishment of a democratic republic in Orissa. No doubt Shoshee Chunder's pioneering endeavour inspired many others to write novels in English.

Toru Dutt (1856-77)

Toru Dutt was a multi-faceted personality and a born genius. M.K.Naik writes "It was with Toru Dutt that Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authority".

In her masterpiece, 'The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan', she glorified the cultural heritage of India. Her poems 'Near Hastings', "The Lotus" and 'Our Causarine Tree' are some of her best works which reveal her minute observation, interest and involvement in nature³¹.

Toru Dutt was not only one of the greatest Indian English poets, but also a novelist. Her unfinished English novel, 'Bianca', or 'The Young Spanish Maiden' appeared in the Bengal Magazine (January – April, 1878) and her French novel, 'Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers' had been issued in Paris in 1879 and it was hailed as "an extraordinary feat, without precedent" and compared to the *Vethek* of Bockford.

She was blossoming as a great promising Indo-Anglian writer, but unfortunately she died of consumption at the age of twenty one. M.K. Naik says "Toru Dutt's tragedy is that she died when her talent was maturing with her discovery of her roots".

Romesh Chunder Dutt: (1848-1909)

Romesh Chunder Dutt is also one of the earliest Indo-Anglian novelist. He was a cousin of Toru Dutt and was an Indian Civil Servant, who retired voluntarily at the age of forty nine in order to do devote his full time and energy for creative writing. He wrote both in English and Bengali, effectively.

He wrote his novels originally in Bengali, and out of these two have been translated into English. His novel, 'The Slave Girl' carries the readers to the Mughal times and reveals the glimpses of life in 17th century Agra. His other novel, 'The Lake of Palms' portrays the 19th century Bengali life. The historical surveys made in these novels reveals his patriotism and scholarship in history. Som Deva, writes, 'The realistic human emotions were still not within the grasp of his writer. However, he blazes a trail which is followed by others'.

Conclusion

Indo-Anglian poets have played a major part, compared to the Indo-Anglian novelists to enrich the Indo-Anglian writing. Along with the Indo-Anglian poets mentioned in Indo-Anglian writers like, Greece Chunder, and B.M.Malabari have also enriched the Indo-Anglian Literature by their creative writings.

Comparatively only very few Indo-Anglian novels were written during this period. It can be said that Indo-Anglian novels were only in the making not yet made, during this period only in the succeeding period, the first Indian English novel proper was written.

"Tagore's generation" will be dealt with.

Reference

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