

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

Indian writing in English, also known as Indo-Anglian Literature, refers to any literary piece of creative writing in English by an Indian whose mother tongue is one of the many native languages of India. Long before independence, in early 19th century, there had been a number of well-educated eminent Indian scholars who expressed their inner and outer world, very precisely, in English language, and a large number are still using English for creative exploration. It is this body of writings which is known as Indo-Anglian Literature.

The credit for introducing English in India goes primarily to Thomas Babington Macaulay, a great British historian and law maker, who westernised Indian Education and made English the official language of the government offices and courts. He laid emphasis on promoting European Literature and science among Indians through English. And therefore he, being the President of the Committee of Public Instruction, allotted all funds for education to the promotion of English education. He criticised the Indian languages and literatures of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian as inferior to English language which was valued as repository of a superior body of knowledge and thought: “....a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”

In his famous Minutes on Education of 1835, he advocated the cause of English: “In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class....It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East....of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is the most useful to our native subjects.” He argued in favour of English as being the key to modern knowledge and more useful than Arabic or Sanskrit.

Initially, Macaulay’s policy was much misunderstood as an attack of occidentalism on orientalism; as his plan of building a body of English-knowing-youth for the smooth running of British Administration. However, there were many enlightened reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy who supported Macaulay by demanding ‘the imparting of the best and the most modern European education through English’ and by opening, himself, a number of English-medium schools in Calcutta. Macaulay was also helped in his task by Christian missionaries who founded schools and colleges, and published dictionaries and grammars. Far-sighted educated Indians and enlightened reformers welcomed English language as a ticket to government jobs and advancement. K. K. Dutt in his work ‘Dawn of Renascent India, 1964’ asserted “The enlightened Indians in the early nineteenth century had come to realise the need of linking their countrymen with the progressive cultural forces of the outside world.” In this way, both Macaulay’s efforts and people’s enthusiasm opened the path of English as a medium of instruction in Indian Education system.

Though in the beginning, natives were hesitant and suspicious about its success, they later realised its positive impact:

- (A) It brought renaissance in India just as Greek and Latin’s did in England.
- (B) The study of Western science inducted logical and rational outlook.
- (C) Natives were purged of narrow and conservative mindset.
- (D) English literature helped in the growth of creative literature in regional languages.

## **Early Nineteenth Century Indo-Anglian Writers**

The pioneers of the Indo-Anglian literature wrote in English language with precision, lucidity and mastery over versification but their works were in imitation of English models like Scott, Byron etc and also were motivated with utilitarian purpose for social reforms but their historical importance is great for they starting writing considerably even before Macaulay. This was the phase of Imitation (1830-80).

### **Prose:**

- (A) Ram Mohan Roy – (Precepts of Jesus, The Guide to Peace and Happiness)
- (B) Keshub Chandra Sen- (Articles for ‘Indian Mirror’ (a weekly journal of Calcutta))
- (C) Dwarka Nath Tagore

### **Poetry:**

- (A) Henry Derozio (Poems, 1823)
- (B) Kashiprasad Ghose (The Shair and the Other Poems, 1830)

### **Novels:**

- (A) Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (Rajmohan’s Wife, 1864)
- (B) S. K. Ghose (One Thousand and One Nights)
- (C) Toru Dutt (Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden)
- (D) Ramesh Chandra Dutt (The Slave Girl of Agra, The Lake of Palms)

### **Drama:**

- (A) K. M. Banarjee (The Persecuted, 1832) not much was noticeable until Tagore and Shri Aurobindo Ghose

## **Indo-Anglian Literature in Nineteenth Century**

Nineteenth Century Indo-Anglian Literature is mostly devoted to the writing of poetry. The seeds sown by early writers started flourishing in this phase of Indianisation of literature in English Language. The poets made a conscious effort to use Indian imagery, sentiments, India myths and legends but their works showed the mixture of Indian and foreign elements, but Toru Dutt was an exception. She treated Indian themes in English against a purely Indian background. The technical perfection, craftsmanship as well as the lyrical intensity in the poems of these poets was unparalleled.

### **Major Poets –**

- (A) Michael Madusudan Dutt (Visions of the Past 1848, The Captive Ladie 1849)
- (B) Shoshee Chander Dutt (A Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems)
- (C) Greece Chunder (Cherry Blossoms)
- (D) B. M. Malabari (The Indian Muse in English Garb)
- (E) Toru Dutt (Trans. A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields, Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan)
- (F) Manmohan Ghosh (Love Songs and Elegies 1898, Songs of Love and Death 1926)

## **Twentieth Century Pre-Independence Era : The phase of Pure Indianisation**

**Poetry :** The poets of this phase, successfully interpreted the spirit of East to the West and created an authentic Indian atmosphere. They immortalized the typical & genuine Indian scenes, Indian devotional traditions, spirituality and mystical personality with metrical dexterity, impeccable craftsmanship, sensuous images and sweet-smooth rhythms. They demonstrated that Indian sentiments, thought and imagery can be very well expressed in English as in any other Indian language.

### **Major poets—**

- (A) Sarojini Naidu (The Golden Threshold, The Bird of Time, The Broken Wing)
- (B) Rabindranath Tagore (Gitanjali)
- (C) Aurobindo Ghose (Urvashi, Love and Death, Savitri)

**Novel :** Though novel came in front rather late than poetry, it achieved more excellence and popularity both in quantity and quality in early 20th century in no time surprisingly. The zeal and patriotism, struggle for freedom, poverty, social evils, tradition, modernity, Indian rural life, pains of partition provided themes for such foremost and distinguishable Indian writers of creative prose (fiction) like-

- (A) Mulk Raj Anand (Untouchable, Coolie)
- (B) K. S. Venkattaramani (Murugan: The Tiller, Kandam: The Patriot)
- (C) Raja Rao (Kanthapura, The Serpent and the Rope)
- (D) R. K. Narayan (The Guide, The English Teacher, The Dark Room)
- (E) Bhawani Bhattacharya (So Many Hungers, Music for Mohini)
- (F) Manohar Malgonkar (A Bend in the Ganges, The Princes)
- (G) Khuswant Singh (Train to Pakistan, Delhi : A Novel)
- (H) Kamla Markandaya (Nectar in a Sieve, A Handful of Rice, Possession)

These novelists presented cultural and national identity of India in true colours.

**Drama :** Indian drama in English could not flourish as a major current of creative expression due to certain problems the dramatists had to face. They lacked dramatic qualities and felt difficulty in making dialogues between Indians in English convincing as the mother tongue for them was different native languages other than English. Good actable and successful plays on the stage were peculiarly absent in Indo-Anglian literature till 20th century. However there were few writers who made significant contribution to Indian drama in English notable for its poetic excellence, thematic variety, symbolic note and technical virtuosity such as:

- (A) Tagore (Chitra, Post Office, The King of the Dark Chamber)
- (B) Aurobindo Ghosh (Persues, The Deliverer, Rodogune)
- (C) G. C. Desani (Holi)
- (D) Harindranath Chattopadhyaya (The Proclamation, Five Plays, Fyzee)

## Indo-Anglian Literature in Post-Independence Era

**Poetry:** It was a phase of experimentation and individuality. The quest for originality, modernity, experimentation, new techniques and aesthetics derived from Auden and Dylan Thomas, 'image hunting', word hunting changed the scenario of modern poetry in English. Poets shifted their focus from British romanticism to contemporary social reality, the disillusionment of the promised golden age, corruption, hypocrisy, sense of alienation, racism, class-distinction, stress and depression.

It is highly commendable to read their works. Praising the achievements of modern poets, Amalendu Bose writes: "As a historical phenomenon, it is engrossingly interesting that since 1947, a great deal of poetry has been written by Indians in English; that in both quality and quantity, this poetry compares very well with the English poetry that Indians wrote from the days of Derozio till 1947."

### **Major Poets –**

- (A) Nissim Ezekiel (Night of the Scorpion, The Hill, The Professor)
- (B) Kamla Das (An Introduction, The Sunshine Cat)
- (C) Jayanta Mahapatra (Dawn at Puri, Father Returning Home)
- (D) K. N. Daruwala (Routine, Crossing of Rivers, Keeper of the Dead)
- (E) Arun Balkrishna (Jejuri)
- (F) A. K. Ramanujan (Self-Portrait, A River)
- (G) R. Parthasarthy (Homecoming, Exile)

Besides them, Agha Shabid, Manohar Shetty, Bibha Padhi, Arundhati Sudhramonium, Hoshang Merchant etc are some other emerging poets. The list is very long.

**Novel :** The merit and esteemed position which novel gained in early 20th century, continues to gain substantial recommendation in Post Independence era also. Previously, novels were written on socio-political concerns and reality of India, but now there was a thematic and technical shift in Indian English fiction as a result of an impact of the post-war period which witnessed the agonized existence of modern man, psychological disorders, loss of moral values, feeling of loneliness, rootlessness etc. Now the centre of the novels in new era is shifted from society to individual. The range of themes, forms and sub-genres in Indian English fiction is very vast and continually increasing.

### **Major Novelists –**

- (A) Anita Desai (Cry the Peacock, Voices in the City)
- (B) Arun Joshi (The Foreigner, The Apprentice, The Last Labyrinth)
- (C) Vikram Seth (A Suitable Boy, The Golden Gate, An Equal Music)
- (D) Shashi Deshpande (The Long Silence, Dark Holds no Terror, The Binding Vine)
- (E) Amitav Ghosh (The Shadow Lines, The Glass Palace, Sea of Poppies)
- (F) Kiran Desai (The Inheritance of Loss, Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard)
- (G) Arvind Adiga (The White Tiger, Selection Day, Amnesty)
- (H) Arundhati Roy (The God of Small Things, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness)
- (I) Chetan Bhagat (Five Point Someone, 2 States, Half Girlfriend)

**Drama :** The tradition of poetic plays established by Tagor-Aurobindo in pre-independence era, was given a new direction by post-independence dramatists through remarkable innovations and experiments in techniques and themes. Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad, Manjula Padmanabhan, Mahesh Dattani etc have evolved a theatrical tradition by reinvestigating history, legend, myth, religion and folk lore with context to contemporary socio-political issues. These playwrights have taken Indo-Anglian drama on the world-map by making dialogues natural, catchy and close to Indian idioms. They have dramatized universal aspects of human life in India.

**Major Dramatists –**

- (A) Vijay Tendulkar (Silence: The Court is in Session, The Vultures)
- (B) Nissim Ezekiel (Nalini, The Marriage Poem)
- (C) Girish karnad (Fire and the Rain, Bali: The sacrifice, Tughlaq)
- (D) Mahesh Dattani (Dance like a Man, Tara, Final Solutions)
- (E) Manjula Padmanabhan (Harvest, Escape, The Island of Girls, Kleptomania)

No doubt, with above writers, Indo-Anglian literature is continuously flourishing and reaching the summits of success. It has now acclaimed international fame and recognition for its rich quality both in theme and technique. Its thematic concerns and technical virtuosity are commendable. It is representing India in foreign lands as an emissary of art and culture. Its future is definitely bright.

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